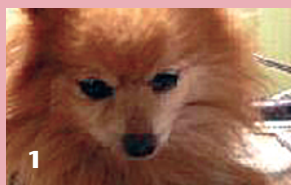




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SHE WAS BORN IN A PUPPY MILL



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by Brenda Shoss

She waddles over, a puffy “hair-do” perched upon stubby legs. The four-pound pup nestles against my chest and gives me the goofy sideways glance. I’m a goner. I’ll call her Mandy.

I first laid eyes upon this irresistible Lhasa Apso at Flawdogs Adoption, a rescue dedicated to “little puppy mill leftovers” about 45 minutes southwest of St. Louis in Morse Mill, Missouri.

There are no kennels or cages at Flawdogs. A tree-lined bridge leads to a canine Shangri-La where Silky Terriers, Corgis, Chihuahuas and Yorkies frolic amid pools and sunbathing decks in outdoor runs across eight yards. Inside, Shih Tzus, Poodles, Bichon Frises, and Dachshunds tumble over toys and each other. It’s Camp Cute, with an army of wide-eyed fluffballs auditioning to steal your heart.

But Mandy’s doubtful peer recalls another setting. During her first week home, direct eye contact threatens her. Reaching hands remind her of harsh hands that once threw her from cage to cage. She pauses before open doors, remembering other dogs smashed in gates when they tried to flee. She freezes on a leash. My gentle tug reminds her of a yank by the head or neck.

Love and a loose leash soon erase Mandy’s memories of birth inside a Missouri puppy mill. Yet though Flawdogs had tested and vaccinated her for ailments commonly spread inside breeding mills, Mandy grows anorexic and lethargic. She is treated for coccidia and giardia parasites. Her back legs cave in as she walks. An x-ray reveals the head of femur bone is missing in her left leg. The same bone in her right leg is porous, ragged and dying.

Still, Mandy is one lucky dog. Flawdogs founder Sally Ives, former director of Open Door Animal Sanctuary in House Springs,



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MO, talks about wire hair terriers salvaged from a puppy mill in northern Missouri. One dog’s entire nasal channel was exposed where his face had been torn away in a fight. A Dachshund came with third degree heating pad burns over 60% of her tiny body.

“It’s a miracle that dog lived,” Ives says. “Those are the heartwarming cases — the ones who are supposed to die, but insist on living instead.”

Puppy mills are profit-driven enterprises that typically fail to provide adequate veterinary care, diet, exercise or shelter. Large sites house up to 1,000 dogs in rusted chicken wire cages heaped three or four tiers high. Urine and feces seep into lower cages. Dogs at the top swelter in the summer and freeze in the winter. Smaller facilities board 50 or more dogs in squalid kennel runs.

The mass breeder’s bottom line is low overhead and high return. So bulk food purchases are often comprised of sweepings from the food manufacturer’s floor. Dogs are so nutrition deprived, their teeth rot as young as one or two years of age. Sometimes their jaws dissolve. Others lose their front teeth from gnawing on the metal bars that contain them.

There are approximately 5,000 mill-style outfits nationwide. Cruelty investigators have uncovered parasite-infested dogs with oozing eyes, ear infections, and fur so matted it forms a cocoon over sores. Mange can transform a puppy’s skin into a blanket of red scabs. Dogs in congested quarters easily spread worms, upper respiratory infections, coccidia, giardia, and deadly parvovirus and distemper.

Dogs are found with gangrenous skin where collars became embedded in flesh. Others are balding, blind, emaciated. Some long-term mill dogs have been debarked by shoving a steel rod down their throats to mutilate vocal cords.



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Breeding factories function primarily in Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania. Missouri leads the way, with an estimated \$40 million per year in puppy mill profits.

Ives' relationship with mill managers, mostly women, is unique. On 24-hour call, she awaits their invitation to collect the rejects slated for euthanasia. "They see themselves as professional breeders. I must appear positive and flattering. The few times I've leaked a look of horror, I've never been invited back. My commitment is to any dog I can get out."

Federally licensed Class A breeders form contractual agreements with brokers, or Class B dealers, who purchase mill pups for resale to some 3,500 U.S. pet outlets. Brokers seek flawless 8-week-old puppies to pile into crates for shipment by truck or plane. According to the Companion Animal Protection Society, a half-million puppies pass from mill to broker to pet shop in the U.S. and Canada every year.

A dog who misses a broker's weekly pickup from the mill may be deemed "too old" by the next collection day and consequently killed. If a broker reaches his sales quota in a region, he has nowhere else to market puppies. In most cases, these leftovers are healthy young animals.

A broker's criterion is based on what the public will pay for. "We've saved a lot of Bichon and Maltese pups who have biscuit-colored ears. They won't accept biscuit on a white dog, or any color considered inconsistent, even an odd-colored eye," Ives explains.

Ives rescues any animal a mill will release: Too small. Too large. Undescended testicles. Umbilical hernias. A sparse coat. A short tail. "How do you pick which ones to save and which ones to pass a death sentence on?" she asks. "They ride quietly in our crowded van. We hold as many in our laps as we can to start the socialization."

Mandy was a disposable mill dog. Her twisted back legs were likely injured in a cage jam-packed with puppies. Dogs suffer abscessed feet, hyperflexion, loss of limbs or bones, and deformed or broken legs from trauma inside overcrowded wire enclosures.

Mills usually cull puppies with leg defects. Ives acquires many Italian Greyhounds dismissed for luxating patellas. In fact, their wobbly kneecaps arise from insufficient muscle growth. After days of open space and nutritious food, they "run around like lunatics," she says.

The "flaw" in older dogs is their inability to produce a viable litter of six or more pups. Mills breed females from six months of age to every heat cycle thereafter. When too worn to turn a profit, dogs as young as two to five years are shot or clubbed in the head. Other throwaways are sold to research laboratories or simply discarded.

Brandylyn, a 17-year-old "chocolate" poodle, was five pounds and pregnant when Ives retrieved her from a mill. Three baths later, Brandylyn emerged as a white dog. "She had been sold, auctioned, and traded so many times, they lost track of her color," Ives says. "Her babies were stillborn."

One overbred Yorkshire Terrier arrived with 12 mammary tumors. Ives compares their insides to "cole slaw, filled with adhesions, cysts, and scar tissue. Some are boiling with pyometra (infection in female organs) that can fatally rupture."

While breeders and brokers retain consulting veterinarians, they rarely call upon them. "Their idea of medical intervention is to stick a sick dog in a garage, basement, or barn," Ives claims.

Shoddy breeding methods predispose dogs to chronic infirmities such as hip dysplasia, dislocating kneecaps, seizures, eye lesions, liver and heart disease, and autoimmune disorders. In California, a state financed study revealed almost half of pet store pups were sick or harboring diseases.

The Animal, Plant and Health Inspection Service (APHIS) arm of the USDA regulates animal industries. This financially strapped agency employs a



PHOTOS:

1. & 4. **FLAWDOGS:** Little Braveheart, 6/05. Bruises covered most of his body and he'd given up hope at the mill. Today, he's ready for a second chance in loving home.

2. **FLAWDOGS:** Tick arrived too underweight to maintain his own body temperature. Today he's someone's spastic, beloved pup.

3. **FLAWDOGS:** Tuffy, a Miniature Pinscher, was born with his legs on backwards.

5. **MANDY,** 4/30/06

relative handful of inspectors to monitor thousands of Class A licensees (breeders), Class B licensees (brokers), Class C licensees (exhibitors), handlers, and biomedical researchers.

Present law categorizes high volume breeders who sell directly to the public as "pet stores," and exempts them from U.S. Animal Welfare Act guidelines. Thus, a breeder who sells animals via a middleman broker, the internet or newspaper ads functions with minimal oversight. Kittens, puppies and other companion animals easily cross state borders with no information about the surroundings in which they were raised. This loophole undermines a key intent of the AWA and deceives consumers, who are conned into spending huge fees on animals with health complications.

When I ask Ives about her role in a system clogged with lax laws, she pauses and then quietly clarifies her mission: "I am their caretaker. I get to touch their lives for a little while and send them bouncing into people's arms. I am upstairs right now, looking over my little dogs in their playhouses, just hanging out the windows. This is grand. I am way too happy."

Somehow, Ives finds homes for even the most traumatized animals. One family drove 300 miles for Trina, a blind dog with detached retinas. Mufasa's family adores him, despite undernourishment that left him hairless over most of his body. Tick, an underweight Dachshund who couldn't sustain his body temperature, is photographed weeks later amid a swirl of shredded paper towels. Once they can wreak puppy havoc, Ives knows they are okay.

In closing I mention to Ives that although I currently have two cats and two dogs, I really want to rescue a beagle. "If I can talk my husband into more animals... Do you get beagles?"

"Funny you should ask," she drawls. Ives knows I'm already hooked, but offers this advice: "You need to break your husband in gradually."

Honey, how do you feel about beagle pups?

ACTION:

Boycott pet stores that buy and sell companion animals. Fall in love with your own puppy mill rescue. Out-of-state adoptions welcome!

Flawdogs Adoption • ph: 636-274-2511; email: gnsives@aol.com

web: www.petfinder.com/shelters/flawdogs.html

<http://community.webshots.com/user/flawdogs>

P.O. Box 99 • Morse Mill, MO 63066

Ask your Congresspersons to advocate legislation that strengthens laws for commercial breeders by amending the Animal Welfare Act to:

- Require USDA licenses for breeders selling dogs or cats directly to public;
- Allow public access to source records for animals imported into the U.S.;
- Lengthen suspension of facilities with AWA violations to 60 days;
- Empower the USDA to apply for injunctions.