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## Survivors of the Mill-New hope for Cocker Spaniels saved from puppy mill

It's hard not to fall in love with an adorable cocker spaniel puppy in the window at your local pet store. They are cute, cuddly and known for their great disposition with kids. However, the story behind those puppies isn't as warm and fuzzy. Pet store dogs are bred in commercial breeding operations known as puppy mills and the parents left behind are subject to a lifetime of brutality behind bars.

As organizations around the country work to spread awareness about puppy mills, there are other rescues that are in the trenches, rescuing dogs from puppy mills. They work with undercover contacts, go to auctions and work their network of connections to step up for the survivors of the mills to give them a chance. One of these rescues, the National Mill Dog Rescue in Colorado, has saved 5,500 dogs since opening its doors in 2007. At the end of November, the organization rescued four cocker spaniels facing death after their owner, an unlicensed breeder, died.

"It's heartbreaking to think what these animals went through as they bred litter after litter of puppies," says Cari Meyers, founder of The Puppy Mill Project, which is based in Chicago. She was volunteering at the rescue when the dogs arrived. "They had never been groomed or cared for and were just a big matted mess. It was so bad; one of the dogs couldn't walk. When they finally were shaved down and bathed, one dog had over 11 pounds of dreadlocked fur shaved off."

A call had come in through a connection of the Mill Dog Rescue in Missouri that the woman who breed these dogs had died and most of the dogs had been rescued. However, there were four dogs left over and her brother was going to kill the dogs if they weren't retrieved quickly. Soon, they were being transported to Colorado where the work has begun.

"There was this brown cocker spaniel on his bed in the cage and he was just shaking so badly," says Meyers. "The mom in me kicked in and I covered him with a blanket and wrapped my right arm around him. I cupped my left arm and gave him a place to rest his head and I started patting him and shushing him. After about 10 minutes, he put his head down and fell asleep and started to snore. It's probably the first time this poor dog got to sleep in his cage without fearing what would happen next."

The group included a little blond female spaniel that had just weaned her puppies two weeks ago – just in time for Christmas. Her puppies had been sold through the Internet. She was blind from cataracts and for some reason the most ready to receive attention from the volunteers. The NMDR was founded by Theresa Strader and she is helped by a dedicated force of volunteers who work on a shoestring budget of "spit and scotch tape" according to Meyers.

"Meeting Theresa was life changing because this is where it all came together for me. My heart just hurt afterwards," adds Meyers. "As heartbroken as I am to think of what these dogs have survived, the good news is these dogs now have hope for a future. There is a team of committed volunteers helping out to clean them up, socialize them and work to find them the right family so they can finally live a happy dog's life."

As national awareness grows, more pet stores that thrived on selling dogs from puppy mills have closed down. The National Mill Dog Rescue reports that more puppy mills are closing and they've been part of rescue operations in many cases. As the holiday approaches and online shopping gets into high gear, Meyers worries about the puppies sold on the Internet. While states have started to enact tougher laws for breeders and stores, the Internet is still the Wild West when it comes to the sale of pets.

Learn more about the National Mill Dog Rescue [online](#), on [Facebook](#) or on their [blog](#). You may [donate online](#) to help the organization. Learn about the Puppy Mill Project [online](#) or follow them on [Facebook](#).

*This is part two of a three part series. In part one, we told the story about a group of terrified German Shepherds and Belgian Malinois that were rescued. Tomorrow is the story of the transformation of a Silky Terrier.*

*Do you volunteer or work for a shelter or rescue that has programs you'd like to promote? Do you work in a pet-related business that has an interesting story to tell? If so, contact me at [kathypetexam@gmail.com](mailto:kathypetexam@gmail.com). Enjoy this article? Receive email alerts when new articles become available. Just click on the **subscribe** button above. You may also follow me on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) or read my [blog](#).*

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