

Survivors of the mills—German Shepherds get second chance at a dog’s life

Nestled in Peyton, Colorado near Colorado Springs is a kennel that has become a safe haven for survivors of America’s puppy mills. Since opening it’s doors in early 2007, the National Mill Dog Rescue has pulled over 5,000 dogs from puppy mills and started the rehabilitation process that will eventually lead to a home for many of the dogs.

The dogs you see posted on their *Facebook* page after adoption are a far cry from the dogs that arrive at the rescue straight from the mills. Founder Theresa Strader and her team of dedicated volunteers work miracles on some of the most abused and frightened dogs. From November 30 through December 2, two members of Chicago’s The Puppy Mill Project were on hand to help with the latest rescues – a group of 15 German Shepherds and Belgian Malinois that were rescued from a puppy mill in Missouri, Cocker Spaniels who had been part of an unregistered breeding operation and a Silky Terrier.

“I have this disturbing image forever in my mind of the vacant stares and the sheer terror in the eyes of these German Shepherds,” says Meyers. “This is such a revered dog here in America. This is the breed that has saved so many lives working as rescue dogs and with the police and the military as bomb and drug sniffing dogs. They are service dogs and therapy dogs. I can’t begin to imagine what strong, brave dogs like this have been through in the puppy mills to make them so petrified.”

Puppy mills are commercial breeding operations where dogs are stacked in cages, getting no exercise, medical care or human interaction. Meyers says that when this group in particular came off the transport, they were physically and mentally spent, petrified of people and very ill. They had severe diarrhea, worms and were in the worst shape of any dogs that have come into the rescue in a long time.

“There were trying to round up one dog in a kennel and the reaction from this dog toward people was something I could not have imagined in my wildest dreams,” adds Meyers. “This dog was running and slashing around his kennel from fear. He was terrified of people. I don’t know what the breeder did to these dogs but whatever it was that these dogs endured it was horrific for these dogs to be this petrified of people.”

These survivors are the breeding dogs that reproduce the cuddly puppies that are sold in pet stores and on the Internet. While protests, public education and new laws are making a dent in pet store puppy sales, the Internet continues to be the Wild West – with booming sales and no regulation. Because most Americans haven’t seen where the puppies come from, they are a generation removed from brutality of the breeding operations. It’s hard to connect the puppy in the window of the pet store on in the online shopping site with the puppy mills where they were born. These operations have continued to thrive in a country where people are used to get quick turnaround on any product they want – including pets.

“These dogs came from such depressing situations. It’s hard to conceive how some of these dogs have been terrorized for 7 or 8 years,” says Meyers “They were trying to get one dog out of the crate and this majestic dog was so terrified and was fighting human contact. Finally, the dog just resigned himself to human contact and would collapse in the arms of the person trying to help. When you comprehend what these dogs have been through, you really need to change your focus to the life they are no going to be able to have now, finally getting a chance to be a dog, to be loved.”

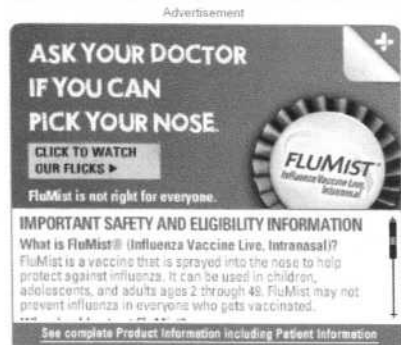
The dogs may fear people, but they will wag their tails in the midst of other dogs and bond with the other dogs in the rescue. The good news is that there is a happy ending in store for these dogs now. The National Mill Dog Rescue and its team of volunteers have a wonderful track record for rehabilitating the dogs and helping them find homes. As of Friday, December 3, the rescue had posted on their *blog* about these dogs in an effort to help them find homes, foster care or refuge in another rescue.

“After seeing these dogs, you realize there are two types of people – those with hearts and souls and those who lack a soul,” says Meyers. “There is just no other way to explain systematic animal cruelty that happens on a daily basis to the dogs in the mills. When people live it breathe it every day, there is something lacking. A person with a soul just couldn’t treat living things that way.”

Strader’s organization, the National Mill Dog Rescue has made many more trips to Missouri and other places this year as more mills have closed down. It’s a start, but there are many more still operating and thriving. 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 one of a three part series. Part two will focus on the story of the Cocker Spaniels and part three will focus on the small breeds like the 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. 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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