When HSUS rescuers first laid eyes on the dog now known as Chunk, he was standing on a layer of feces and trash, in the front room of a bug-infested house in rural Mississippi (above, left). The floor was so deep in filth, it squished when responders walked on it.

Throughout a long, rainy day, teams removed 181 animals from the property belonging to a hoarder masquerading as a rescue group. Many of them were malnourished and plagued by worms and skin infections.

After a long trip north on the HSUS rig, Chunk was taken in and treated by the Washington Animal Rescue League. These days, he looks like a different dog (above, right) – “more basset-y in the snout,” says adopter Dan Metcalf, noting that when he and his wife first got Chunk, his face was swollen and misshapen from skin disease and medications.

The dog’s affable nature has helped bring out the best in his new playmate, Daisy, a rescued boxer. “They balance each other out really well,” Metcalf says. “She was isolated; she was tied up in a backyard …. He’s very much a go-getter and friendly, and she’s kind of shy and jumpy, but they both sort of bring each other to the center.”

Happy endings are common following rescues by The HSUS.

Once chained at dogfighting operations, pit bulls like Abby will never have to fight again. Fostered by a Casa Del Toro Pit Bull Education & Rescue volunteer named Holly, Abby befriended Holly’s grandfather during his hospice stay. “Grandpa would have them mark on the calendar when Abby would come back for the next visit,” reports the group’s director, Laurie Adams. Now living permanently with Holly, the dog is enjoying her newfound purpose in life: as a family pet.

The good fight (opposite, clockwise from top left): Jean is one of many pit bulls The HSUS’s Chris Schindler has transported to safety. The efforts are “all worth it when you get those dogs loaded on the truck and out of there,” he says. Read more on animal fighting: p. 30.

A desperate scene: Spurred by the sight of starving animals, West Virginia state director Summer Wyatt fights for better laws. Her allies include Wayne County’s Gary Michels, who won a Humane Law Enforcement Award for prosecuting cruelty. Read more on equine protection: p. 20.

Inside a hoarding case: An HSUS collaboration with North Star Rescue and A&E’s Hoarders resulted in a poignant portrayal of the plight of 2,000 rats and their overwhelmed owner. Read more on HSUS outreach: p. 42.

Puppy factory: Opening the door to Gayla’s Poodle Palace engulfed White County, Tenn., sheriff Oddie Shoupe with a suffocating stench. “And that’s when I called for The Humane Society of the United States because I knew we had more than I could handle.” Read more on puppy mills: p. 34.