LOCATION: Bradley County, Tennessee

ANIMALS ASSISTED: 101 dogs, including pocket beagles, pocket pugs and pocket Rottweilers

IT WAS MID-JUNE and the temperature inside the barn was about 100 degrees—steaming hot, especially with the humidity. Tia Pope, manager for puppy mill response with the HSUS Animal Rescue Team, counted 70 dogs there in wire cages and airline crates. More were outside in runs overgrown with bushes and weeds.

The place was filthy, foul-smelling. The dogs had fleas and worms, and their overgrown nails were in constant danger of snagging on the wire-bottom cages. In many ways, Pope remembers, it was a typical puppy mill.

But there was something odd about these dogs.

Most were miniature versions of beagles, boxers, pugs, puggles and Rottweilers. Apparently, the owner had been experimenting to create new breeds. “It looked like she’d mixed a pug with a beagle to make it even smaller and maybe even a pug with a Rottweiler,” Pope says. “They were like the Frankensteins of dogs. They had these distinct, awkward faces. Some were so ugly, they were cute.”

The local sheriff discovered the rural puppy mill while responding to a domestic dispute call. Officials had contacted local rescues but quickly discovered they needed help because of the sheer number of dogs. By the time The HSUS was called, nearly 150 dogs had been removed by various rescue groups. Many of the remaining animals were older or had some kind of medical condition.

In a quasi-isolated corner of the barn were dogs with mange. One mini beagle’s hairless, pink body was inflamed and hot to the touch, likely intensified by the barn’s unbearable temperature. Another pug/beagle mix had only two small patches of hair. The team named the two Pinky and the Brain, after the animated television series.

Within a day, the dogs were in cooler digs at The HSUS’s temporary shelter. They received vaccinations and treatment for worms and fleas. They had blankets to lie on and toys to play with. Their nails were clipped, and they were bathed. And the mangy dogs began treatments for their skin mites.

One blind and deaf pocket boxer earned the name Hooray, Pope says, “because whenever she went outside and played in the grass, she’d just jump in the air like, ‘Hooray!’ ”

The dogs were placed with HSUS partners in Tennessee, Washington, D.C., and Massachusetts. Snooty Giggles, a rescue in Tennessee, took most of the special-needs dogs, such as Hooray, Pinky and the Brain. Their accommodations are now a mansion ballroom that has been converted into a dog sanctuary. The rescue’s perfectly manicured yard gives Hooray a great place to jump and run.
IT TOOK CHIP BURNS two weeks—carefully changing the horses’ wraps every day—to finally get the skin-burning chemicals out of their ankles.

On the morning after the horses arrived, the caustic smell had sent him running through the barn to open all the doors. When Burns first removed the quilted wraps HSUS rescuers had applied to their tender ankles during the seizure, they were “green and black and nasty.”

The eight horses had been seized on March 1, 2012, with the help of The HSUS after a months-long investigation. An undercover HSUS video had shown horses thrashing in pain and being beaten in the face and shocked with a cattle prod.

Burns, an HSUS field rescuer, and his family agreed to care for the horses temporarily on their farm. And thus began the tedious process of “stepping them down” from the large weighted stacks attached to their hooves—devices that, like the chemicals, are used to forcibly enhance a Tennessee walking horse’s showy gait in order to win prizes in competitions.

Stacks would be comparable to wearing high heels for years without ever taking them off, says Aubrey Gaines, lead trainer at the Doris Day Equine Center, which is operated in Texas by HSUS affiliate The Fund for Animals. “To step them down you have to change the angle of their feet slowly so they don’t damage their tendons and ligaments.” The process took more than a month, and a video of Mucho Bueno running for the first time without stacks is nothing less than inspiring.

There were emotional scars, too. Paroled in The Night would run to the back of her stall when approached. Right or Wrong would often kick the walls. “Pride of Titleist was the worst,” Burns remembers. “You’d pet him one day and then he’d kick or try to bite you the next.”

Burns cared for the horses for nearly two years while the case dragged on. Over time, their trust in people grew and they even began to play. Mucho Bueno and Taj Mahal were famous for dragging their jolly ball toys across their stalls’ metal bars and trying to push them through to each other. Cheers, Paroled in The Night and I’m Nancy Lopez loved playing with their food buckets.

In 2013, three of the horses were surrendered by their owner and transferred to Doris Day, where they’re groomed daily and gently trained. On warm days, they get baths. “They’ll stand there,” Gaines says, “and lick their lips and try drinking the water as it runs down their face.”

Apollo (formerly Right or Wrong) now intercepts staff and volunteers for attention whenever they walk through his pasture. He also babysits a couple of yearlings and is known for gently teaching them manners. “Pride really likes the ladies,” Gaines notes, “and Luna [formerly Cheers] is a sweetheart who gets along with everybody.”

But most of all, they just get to be horses. They spend about 20 hours daily in the pasture—grazing and rolling around in dusty patches on hot days.

As for the other five horses: Taj Mahal and All American Plan may soon be joining their comrades at Doris Day. I’m Nancy Lopez was returned to her owner, who promised to retire her from the show ring. The fate of Mucho Bueno and Paroled in The Night remains uncertain.