

**NAMES:** Donovan “Donnie” Sullivan, Homer Koehl and Addison “Addy” Speed

**CASE HISTORY:** Three of the 367 dogs rescued by The HSUS during a massive dogfighting bust spanning Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia in August 2013. While waiting for the courts to release them, the dogs spent months in a temporary shelter run by HSUS staff and dozens of dedicated volunteers.

**DONNIE**

When 12-year-old Donnie was led from the dogfighting yard, the deck still seemed stacked against him. Yes, he’d made it to freedom after years of living on a chain and being forced to fight. And yes, he had a team of volunteers providing top-notch care at the temporary shelter. But he had mast cell tumors, testicular cancer and babesia, a tick-borne parasitic blood infection. And who was going to adopt a sick, old dog with a history of dogfighting?

The HSUS paid for medical treatment, and HSUS volunteer Erin Sullivan and her now-fiancé adopted him. “He would just waddle around so optimistically despite

everything he’d been through,” she says.

To everyone’s surprise, the dogfighter agreed to release Donnie early, though the other dogs remained in court custody. Then a setback: A week before Sullivan took Donnie home, his spleen ruptured. But resilient Donnie recovered, and in March 2014, he went to Sullivan’s home in Orlando, Florida.

Donnie couldn’t have been happier. “He was like, ‘Oh man, this is one big party!’ ” Sullivan says. The first day he chased the CNN news ticker at the bottom of the TV screen. Even the resurgence of babesia couldn’t keep him down. After blood transfusions and medication, he “bounced right

back and was barking and ready to play with his ball.” And when the dogfighter’s defense attorneys and their veterinarians examined his fight scars as part of the court case, he tried licking their faces.

Donnie learned to swim. He ate spaghetti, ice cream and cupcakes with sprinkles. On his six-month adoption anniversary, he lapped up treats from a martini glass. He even became the star of his own Facebook page: Love, Donnie. “He’s one of the happiest dogs I’ve ever known,” Sullivan says, “this little chunk of dog who waddles around and snorts.”

But Donnie’s medical problems finally got the best of him. Inoperable mast cell tumors returned, and he died in April. But as one commenter noted on Donnie’s Facebook page, he didn’t leave this world a victim.

And he didn’t leave without touching the hearts of his humans. “Anything we gave to him,” posted Sullivan, “he gave back to us tenfold in love and happiness.”

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: KIM SPEED; BRENDA DEGROAT; ROB BARTLETT; ERIN SULLIVAN; SYDNEY KOEHL; KIM SPEED; OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT: SYDNEY KOEHL; WHITNEY RODRIGUEZ

From left to right: Addy playing with a friend and (bottom) enjoying the great outdoors; Homer with adopter Sydney Koehl (right) and her roommate Mikki Weber and (bottom) at one of his favorite places—the beach; Donnie waits patiently to play with his ball and (bottom) gets a kiss from adopter Rob Bartlett, fiancé of HSUS volunteer Erin Sullivan.

## HOMER

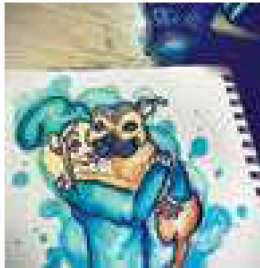
Most everyone at the 367 shelter was worried about Homer. Of all the dogs there, he was one of the most despondent. Volunteers read and sang to him. They tossed him treats and tried taking him for walks. But even five months after his rescue, he still trembled whenever caregivers entered his kennel. Sometimes, he soiled himself.

Homer's crumpled spirit touched the heart of HSUS field rescuer Rowdy Shaw, who's also on the board of Bark Nation, a rescue group focusing on special-needs pit bull cases. "Some dogs just don't do well in a shelter setting," Shaw says, "yet they're not ready for a foster home." Bark Nation board members Kelly and Kerry McLaughlin drove Homer and two other dogs—Taco and Zander—to Bark Nation's facility in Wixom, Michigan. They hoped their home-style setup would inspire healing.

After three months at the new site, Homer began taking treats from Shaw's hand. "The first time, he was shaking," Shaw remembers. "His feet were planted, and he outstretched his front legs and then reached his nose and mouth towards the treat." By six months, Homer was a different dog. He'd learned to climb stairs, play with Taco and Zander and lounge on the bed. "Now he runs right up to you, even to strangers, gets in your lap, takes treats and gives kisses."

Michigan artist Sydney Koehl recently adopted Homer. There's a futon just for him in her bedroom, where she typically works. "It's a really nice way for us to unwind together," she says.

Homer loves chew sticks, squeaky tennis balls and walks along Lake Superior. And he loves carpet, something new to him. "He



Adopter Sydney Koehl's portrait of her with Homer.

stretches out as far as he can," she wrote on Facebook. "He goes in down dog and upward dog ... like he's doing yoga!"

## ADDY

Duke and Kim Speed adopted 1-year-old Addison in February 2014, sight unseen. The year before, they had lost both of their dogs, one to old age and the other to cancer. The couple, who lives in Annapolis, Maryland, connected with Jasmine's House, a Maryland-based group helping to find homes for the 367 dogs. "We had no idea who we were getting, and we didn't care," says Kim Speed. "Our hearts were open."

Addy was perfect, 33 pounds of pure muscle. "When she first saw us, she came right up to us," Speed says. Addy took some time to adjust to her new home, refusing to eat for the first few days. But with treats, patience and love, she soon came around.

These days, Addy goes just about everywhere with Speed, even to real estate listings. Fortunately, says Speed, Annapolis is a very dog-friendly city. "It's one of the only places where you can go to restaurants and they come out with your water and a bowl of water for your dog."

Addy loves camping, hiking, riding in the car and licking ice cubes in the morning while Speed drinks her coffee. "She's a hugger, too," says Speed.

Perhaps tying back to aromatherapy treatments the dogs received at the shelter, Addy loves the scent of Speed's natural hair product. "She smells it and comes in with her tail wagging, like 'Don't forget me!'" Speed holds out her hands for Addy and then rubs the oil on her fur. "She's just such a girlie girl!"

Still, there are reminders of Addy's former life, like nightmares. On those nights when she shakes and cries in the middle of the night, the couple gently wakes her. "She wags her tail, takes a breath and goes back to sleep," Speed says.

Hopefully, the nightmares will one day be gone. "We really spoil her," Speed says. "And I say that with pride."



Michelle Clancy (left) and Whitney Rodriguez

## ANIMAL RESCUE TEAM VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

// BY SARAH KOWALSKI

**IF NOT FOR THE 367**, Michelle Clancy and Whitney Rodriguez might never have met.

The two were among the hundreds of volunteers who cycled in and out of the temporary shelter in Florida where the dogs were rehabilitated.

Clancy and Rodriguez each worked at least a dozen volunteer stints at the shelter for a combined 1,400 hours of volunteer service, becoming fast friends in the process.

They have since deployed together on other dogfighting and puppy mill rescues, and both also volunteer at their local animal shelters (Rodriguez in New Jersey, Clancy in the Chicago suburbs). But both say the 367 have had the biggest impact, and that the most rewarding part was transporting dogs to the rescue groups where they would begin their new lives. It became a tradition for them to snap a selfie (like the photo above) with each dog they drove to his or her new home.

"Every time I think of those doggie faces, my heart just bursts with happiness," Rodriguez says. "They gave me much more than I gave them."

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we feature Animal Rescue Team volunteers whose efforts make our work possible.