

Puppy Mill Seizures in Montreal Quebec, Canada

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Early in the morning of October 1, 2008, another volunteer and I left for Montreal Quebec, Canada to volunteer as part of a team from United Animal Nations / Emergency Animal Rescue Services (UAN/EARS) in a puppy mill seizure. The Canadian SPCA had requested help from the Humane Society of the U.S (HSUS) and UAN/EARS of which we are members. Back-to-back puppy mill seizures had occurred in the Quebec province and a total of 268 dogs, 9 cats and 1 bunny were taken in by law enforcement and the Canadian SPCA, with assistance from HSUS and UAN/EARS.

It was a beautiful, crisp, autumn day, when we arrived at the SPCA temporary shelter in Montreal Quebec. The HSUS rescue van had just arrived with 159 dogs and puppies and one pregnant cat from the second puppy mill seizure in less than a week. We checked in with the UAN/EARS regional director and got in line to help. One by one, volunteers began removing dogs from the van and handing them to those of us waiting in line.



**Multi-Poo with severe matting,
eye discharge and emaciated**

In a heartbeat, the beauty of the day vanished. The first dog placed in my arms was a small Poodle or Maltese. It was hard to tell what she was from the condition she was in. Severely matted, her overgrown coat was filthy from urine and feces. Her face was covered in dirt and discharge and her body reeked. But even more heartbreaking was, as I held her she did not react to my presence. No wiggles, no tail wag, no licking, nothing. Her life in a puppy mill and the shock of the day's events had caused her to physically and emotional shut down.

This was my first deployment and it was bad. Volunteers were scrambling everywhere handling a hundred different tasks. Cages had already been set up to house the dogs. Like assembly workers, we quickly placed them in their temporary homes and ran out to the van to get the next dog. News reporters were on the scene filming the horror unfolding before their eyes for that evening's newscast or the next edition of the local papers.

My second dog was a young German Shepherd. Wide eyed and scared, he was very thin and dirty. I was directed to the big dog room and into a large crate he went. Again, I ran back to the van for another dog. Over and over we repeated this task until the van was empty. Once the dogs were housed, we had our first meeting. Marcel Marcotte, the EARS Eastern Canada Regional Director, quickly explained the situation and tasks we were entrusted to perform over the next five days.

The dogs were in horrible condition. Matted, covered in urine and feces, they had fleas, lice, mites, ear mites, wounds and more. Their poor neglected bodies were anorexic from years of malnourishment and abuse.

An older Westie girl had a huge black mammary tumor hanging from her abdomen. One old Pyrenees had a large hole in his nose. A tiny Maltese had a malformed nose and her teeth protruded from the sides of her mouth like little tusks. One cute, black hound mix was so emaciated, every rib and bone protruded from his body. He was nothing more than skin and bones.

These broken dogs had never known a kind word or touch from a person and they were so very, very scared. Some cowered in fear at the back of their cage. Others bounced and spun over and over and over. Some growled out of sheer terror, when anyone approached. And a few, like a tri-colored Bassett female, just sat in their cage and looked at us.



Great Pyrenees with large puncture wound on his nose

There were Yorkies, Toy and Mini Poodles, Maltese, Min-Pins, Cocker Spaniels, Jack Russells, Brussels Griffons, Pomeranians, Boxers, Beagles, Westies, two Bassetts, a Pug, a Boston Terrier, an older Shar Pei, Schnauzers, Shih Tzu, Pit Bulls, Great Danes, a Landseer Newfoundland, Bernese Mountain Dogs, German Shepherds, Golden Retrievers, Hound and Spaniel mixes, Mastiffs, Rotties, Great Pyrenees, an Irish Setter, a German Shorthair Pointer, Standard Poodles (which were so matted, we could not identify the breed) and more. In addition, there were a number of 'designer' mixes that the public craves now, such as Malti-Poos and Terrier-Poos.

Female dogs outnumbered male dogs, as they produce the puppies and selling puppies is what a puppy mill is all about. Puppy mill females have litter after litter from the time they come into their first heat cycle at 6-7 months old and almost never leave their filthy, cramped cages. This is where they live, where their puppies are born and where most of them will die.

Big dogs, like the Berners were staked out in the fields at the puppy mill, just tied to a rope. They had no shelter of any kind according to the people who removed them from the puppy mill property. Bales of hay were stacked around many cages to muffle the barking ... but hay was also found in the stools of the dogs, so these dogs were starving and eating hay to try and stay alive.

They also found a pyre on the puppy mill property that had the remains of both large and small animals in it. Those animals never had a chance to leave their hell on earth.

The HSUS team left on Thursday to head off to another disaster. Our UAN/EARS team mission was to care for all of the animals. Marcel Marcotte, was wonderful and skillfully managed and organized our team of 17 volunteers. We had people from NH, MA, CT, NY, Ontario and Quebec. These people were the hardest working team I have ever had the honor to work with.

We worked 12-13 hours a day for the first few days as we settled into our routine. Feeding and watering the dogs, cleaning 250+ cages 3 times a day, washing bowls (1000+ bowls a day) and doing laundry. Every day after each cleaning, we would shut the lights off in the rooms and give the dogs time to try and calm down and relax. The stress these dogs were under, first from living in such horrid conditions at the puppy mill and then being removed and transported to the temporary shelter was overwhelming.

Volunteer veterinarians arrived to examine the dogs, vaccinate them and attend to injuries and medical conditions. External parasites, roundworms, eye, ear and skin infections were prevalent. Groomers came in to shave off the dog's horribly matted, dirty, encrusted coats, trim nails that were growing into the dog's foot pads, clean ears, trim hair off faces and bathe the dogs (these ladies were amazing!).

Thursday night, the first of the many rescue groups had started to arrive. Because the owner of the puppy mill had not liberated (surrendered) the dogs, they could not be adopted out. They could, however, go into a foster home until the legal situation was resolved. One of the first groups to arrive was Westie rescue. I had a lump in my throat and tears, as I watched the woman gently pick up the older Westie, with the huge tumor and cradled her in her arms. The three Westie girls left that night, on their way to a safe haven.

By Friday, we were able to spend more one-on-one time, with the dogs. I spoke softly to each dog I held in my arms, trying to begin the process of socializing them to the sound and touch of a human who would not harm them. I apologized to each one and said I was so very sorry my species had done this to them, and I tried not to cry. But I also told them life would be better now, as it was a new beginning for all of them ... for all of us.

In only a few short days, the dogs had begun to settle in and started to respond to the people caring for them. These dogs of all ages, with little to no positive interactions from humans in their entire lives, now sought out attention. They wanted to be held and touched and spoken to with kind words.



**Min-Pin, Lhasa Mix
Boston Terrier & Pug**



Beagles



**Severely emaciated and matted
Standard Poodle**

If I had not witnessed this first hand, I would have found it hard to believe these dogs could begin the road to recovery in such a short time. We always say dogs love unconditionally and it is true.

Two mischievous Jack Russells boys, would ‘party’ in their crate the moment we cleaned it. Then they would stick their front legs through their crate and poke the volunteers in the backside to get attention. When we would turn around to see who had done it, we had to laugh because they always looked innocent.

A tiny female Min-pin, who had a note on her crate saying ‘I might bite’, never did. Yes, she was afraid, but the volunteers sweet talked her and moved quietly and she responded. The first time I opened her crate door, she slowly came over to me. When I held out my hands to her, she let me pick her up. Saturday night when I was cleaning her crate, she kept pawing at me through the crate. All she wanted was someone to cuddle her and I could not resist her charm. So, I continued on my assignment with my new partner cradled in my left arm, for the rest of my shift.

An older Shar Pei girl, who was very thin and in poor condition, would patiently wait for people to pay attention to her. Every time I passed by her crate, I made it a point to stop, open her crate, tell her what a nice girl she was and give her some patting. She would wag her tail and get all excited because she was learning she was special and someone cared about her.

By Saturday convergent (local) volunteers were arriving at the temporary shelter, so they could start to learn how to care for the dogs. Our group deployment would be ending on Sunday, October 5th, so we had to quickly train new people. These local people really stepped up to the challenge and quickly learned the tasks they would need to perform, once we had returned home.

Sunday was the hardest day as most of our volunteers would be heading home. While we realized we had made a huge positive impact in the lives of all of these animals, emotionally we had connections to each and every dog we cared for. We all cried during our last team meeting. Some team members fostered a dog (or cat) and took them home to start new lives, in a world far removed from the horrors of the puppy mill. Other members took several animals for their local rescue group and would find them forever, loving homes.



Jack Russell ‘boys’



Shar Pei girl with a wonderful volunteer groomer



Small Spaniel mix

It was an honor and a privilege to work with all of the great EARS team members. Thank you for all of your hard work and devotion to the dogs: Marcel, Leslee, Brenda, Carol, Melinda, Tracie, Melanie, Susan, Mary, Shanley, Rick, Kim, MaryBeth, Katie, Ronda and Allison!

The province of Quebec has an estimated 2000 puppy mills. These back to back seizures have generated increased public awareness of the situation. Hopefully public outcry will demand changes to laws and put an end to puppy mills all over the world.

One local newspaper stated "Two down, only 1998 to go" and each one of us knew we would willingly volunteer again to help end the suffering of puppy mill dogs anywhere we are needed. Some people ask us, why we do it, when it is so painful to see the suffering of these animals. How can we not help them? There are millions of dogs and animals still waiting to be rescued. Please get involved and give them a chance to live a life free from pain, a life where they are safe and loved. We all know the saying 'a dog is a man's best friend'. Let us finally prove we are indeed 'dog's best friend'.

How can you help stop this abuse and shut puppy mills down? Resist the urge to buy that 'puppy in the window' at your local mall pet store. Do not buy your puppy from the internet as most of those 'breeders' are puppy mills as well. Instead, take a trip to your local shelter or rescue group and adopt a homeless animal. Be part of the solution, take a stand, be heard and vow to help end the tragedy of puppy mills all over the world.

To learn more about these puppy mill seizures, please visit this site and read "A Bittersweet Goodbye"
<http://unitedanimalnations.blogspot.com/>

Humane Society of the United States
<http://video.hsus.org/>

Humane Society International - Canada
http://www.hsicanada.ca/puppy_mills/puppy_mill_qubec.html

<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/montreal/story/2008/10/02/mtl-pupmymill1002.html>

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Yorkies, Mini Poodle, Malti-Poos



Before and after pictures of a Yorkie

