

LIFE OUTSIDE THE CAGE

With patience and expert guidance, you can help an adopted puppy mill dog adjust to a new life

by JIM BAKER

Gracie survived years living in a filthy cage as a puppy mill breeding dog, but after she was rescued, her struggles weren't over.

As adopter Linda Jackson soon discovered, she wasn't housetrained, and the two steps leading to a landing in her new home in Lebanon, Pa., left her flummoxed. In the living room, she would stand still, petrified in the wide open space. The sight of toys elicited only a blank stare.

Sometimes, she just sat in a corner by herself, unresponsive to attention. And she had little interest in anyone but her adoptive mom. "She just wants to be with me, all the time," Jackson says.

Thousands of dogs like Gracie have been saved from puppy mills in recent years, thanks to strengthened laws and an increasing number of rescue operations. While some adjust fairly quickly to the life of family companion, others find the tran-

sition more difficult.

Those who know these dogs report a similar pattern of fears and phobias: an

extreme wariness of people, picky eating habits, and a fear of sudden movements, unfamiliar objects, and loud noises.



Adjusting to the comforts of home is easier with a best friend and fellow puppy mill survivor in the neighborhood. Rudy (top and above, left) and Logos are treated to frequent play dates by Donna Zeigfinger and Ioulia Vvedenskaya.

MICHELLE RILEY/THE ISUS

These behaviors are the psychic fallout of being raised in barren surroundings without access to even such basic experiences as the feeling of grass beneath the paws or the joys of gentle petting. Dogs' window of socialization typically closes at around 4 months old, notes certified professional dog trainer Liz Marsden. "Anything that a dog has not been exposed to in a positive way, by that point in their lives, will tend to frighten them," she says. The result is often a dog in a state of hypervigilance—a challenging situation for even the most patient owner.

In her consultations with people who've adopted puppy mill dogs, Marsden cautions against expecting miracles. While most dogs grow less fearful over time, some may always be shy. She recommends finding an experienced trainer who can demonstrate how to read a dog's body language.

Some distressing behaviors are extremely resistant to modification efforts. Pennsylvania-based trainer Chris Shaughnessy sees ongoing obsessive-compulsive disorders in a small number of dogs from puppy mills. "When they're caged in a puppy mill, they become so anxious that they have to do something to burn off that anxiety, so they spin and pace." Some are helped by medication, but others never get over it, she says.

Canine companionship can be the ultimate comfort for dogs like Rudy, a peppy, piebald dachshund who was one of 927 dogs rescued in 2008 from a Parkersburg, W.Va., puppy mill by The HSUS and other animal welfare organizations. Adopted by Donna Zeigfinger and Jeff Kirk of Cabin John, Md., Rudy was skittish, trembled constantly, and resisted house training. The couple also discovered he had some peculiar fears. The first time Zeigfinger took Rudy outside to wash him, he came unglued at the sight of a garden hose. And one day, seeing Kirk remove his belt, Rudy slunk away.

Help came in the form of Logos, a dachshund rescued from a Pennsylvania puppy mill and living across the street with adopter Ioulia Vvedenskaya. The two dogs

Amazing Gracie

A journalist tracks a rescued puppy mill dog, exposing a cruel industry along the way

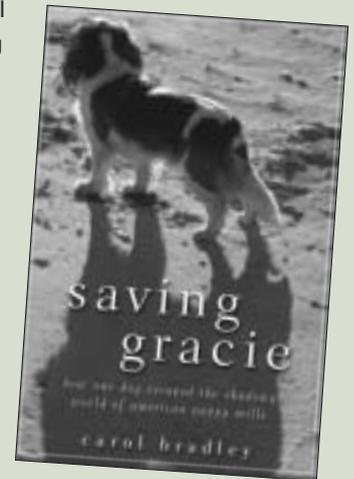
How do you put a face on the immense suffering caused by puppy mills for people who've never heard of these cruel mass breeding operations?

In *Saving Gracie: How One Dog Escaped the Shadowy World of American Puppy Mills*, Carol Bradley delved beyond the overwhelming statistics by telling the story of a Cavalier King Charles spaniel who'd languished in a cage for years before becoming a cherished pet.

Initially known only as "No. 132," the animal who would later be called Gracie was one of 337 puppies and breeding dogs rescued in a 2006 raid of Mike-Mar Kennel in Lower Oxford, Pa., by the Chester County SPCA and local law enforcement. Bradley recounts the raid, the ensuing legal wrangling as the kennel was shut down and its operators were charged with cruelty, and the happy ending for Gracie.

This is the first book for Bradley, a reporter who became aware of dog welfare issues when she covered a major case in Montana in 2002. She went on to study animal law as a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University.

In this edited interview with HSUS writer Jim Baker, Bradley talks about the genesis of her book and what she hopes readers will learn from it.



Q: Why was it important to reconstruct the raid in great detail?

BRADLEY: I wanted the book to read almost like an episode of *Law & Order*, where you start with the beginning of the case and go all the way through. I wanted to show people that puppy mills and puppy mill busts don't just affect the dogs; they land on an entire community. Whole towns are sometimes stuck with 300 dogs. I've always admired animal control officers, the people who really have to get in there and do the hard work. I wanted to show how difficult it was for them because I think we sometimes forget. I was just looking for any possible way to tell the story in a way that would not make people want to throw the book across the room.

Q: What would make them want to do that?

BRADLEY: Too much graphic detail. I waited until the second half of the book to get into other instances of puppy mills. I hope by the end of the book, people have a real sense of how awful these places are, and how *prolific* they are. But I didn't want to hit them over the head with that too early on because I didn't want to lose readers, to be honest.

Q: So tell me how you found Linda and Gracie.

BRADLEY: I wound up finding Linda because I just stumbled upon a letter she had written to the Lebanon, Pa., newspaper. She said, "I adopted one of the Chester dogs," and she's expressing her fury at puppy mills, but this is all very new for her. And then I thought, "How much more interesting would it be to have a book about not just a dog that gets changed, but a person who gets changed because of the dog?"

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Four-legged muses: Carol Bradley with her rescued dogs, Chachi and Jillie.

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Q: What do you hope readers come away with?

BRADLEY: The best thing someone can say to me when they read the book is that they finished it; they read it. And they will often say, "I had no idea." I want them to be astonished and galvanized. To say, "I'm never going to get a dog at a pet store again. I'm going to tell everyone I know never to do that." I often tell people, "Write your state legislators, and tell them they need to pass a law." I wanted to get to people who like a good story and like one where there's a happy ending.

Q: Gracie's story certainly ends on an optimistic note. Are you equally optimistic about the progress being made to regulate these cruel operations?

BRADLEY: I'm glad to see that people are starting to get galvanized. These things never happen quickly enough, and there's a difference between passing a bill and enforcing it, and putting the money behind it. Ideally, in this country we wouldn't have such a patchwork approach. I guess I wouldn't really be satisfied until the federal government passed a law and funded it and took the whole issue of commercial dog breeding out from under the Department of Agriculture, which always has a bias toward producers.

have become best friends, and their owners arrange frequent play dates. Zeigfinger credits Logos with smoothing out Rudy's rough edges. "This dog has transformed him. He's still very shy, but [not] compared to what he was. ... You couldn't touch him," she says.

Logos had some lingering issues of his own; his fear was so great that it took four years for him to untuck his tail from between his legs. So Vvedenskaya adopted another dog, Dozer, to be Logos' companion. Today, he's a friendly, mellow dog. "When I come home, you cannot imagine how high such a short-legged dog can jump into the air. ... It is one of the

most darling things, but also it makes you laugh real hard," she says.

Jackson, too, says she'll never regret adopting Gracie. "I love that dog, and that dog loves me," she says. "She is my once-in-a-lifetime pet. ... Honestly, I don't know if I'll ever find another pet like her." Her advice to others who've adopted puppy mill dogs: Be patient, and try not to get upset by the little things. "I would say to give them a chance, and to give them lots of love and affection. ... I truly believe that these rescued animals know that these people who adopt them are their saviors, and I think they give that love back many times over."

Life Skills for Puppy Mill Survivors

The Delaware Valley Golden Retriever Rescue in Lancaster County, Pa.—an area notorious for puppy mills—helps unsocialized, shy, and fearful dogs transition into new lives with adoptive families. In a special room outfitted with sofas and chairs, staff and trained volunteers show the dogs—many from mass breeding facilities—how to approach people, walk on a leash, accept treats and petting, play with toys, and tolerate the sound of a TV. Adapted from tips shared by the rescue, the following techniques can help puppy mill survivors adjust to life outside the cage.

► **GO SLOWLY.** Don't force your dog to come to you; this will only reinforce the idea that people are unpleasant. Instead, sit calmly on the floor and wait for him to approach. Also, remember that many aspects of everyday life may arouse anxiety: objects in motion such as bikes and strollers, the sounds of a washing machine or hair dryer, car rides. Introduce these new experiences gradually, and use treats to build positive associations and encourage exploration.

► **DON'T MAKE LOUD OR STARTLING NOISES.** Never chase your dog. Instead, call his name and walk the other way. Keep your voice calm and quiet, and ask visitors to do the same.

► **USE FOOD AS A MOTIVATOR.** If your dog shows fear of a dog bowl, try hand feeding. This technique also can entice your dog to come to you and show him that human contact is pleasant. Learn the foods that most appeal to your dog, and use them to strengthen your bond. To help your dog overcome fear of novel objects, use a technique called targeting: teaching the dog to touch things with his nose to earn a reinforcement, like a treat.



► **STAY POSITIVE.** If you catch your dog in the act of misbehaving, use an interrupt sound, such as "ah, ah, ah!" and praise her when she looks at you. If you discover the behavior later, ignore it; dogs don't understand correction when it's delivered after the fact.

► **FOR TIPS** on housetraining and other behavioral issues, visit humanesociety.org/pets.

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