

Lifesaving Protocol for At-Risk Dogs



A pilot study of the Austin Animal Center

Introduction

- In September 2015, Austin Animal Center began piloting a standard operating procedure to be used in making life and death decisions for dogs at risk of euthanasia for behavioral reasons.
- The goal was to create a standardized, rigorous process that would afford a number of 'rights' to dogs being considered for euthanasia.
- The challenge: Save more 'death row' dogs while focusing on safety of animals and people.

Austin's No Kill Plan 2011

- Mandated the shelter to save at least 90% of the animals and included guidelines for “euthanasia”
- 24-hour kill list hold
- Call before killing policy
- Limits on euthanasia for behavioral reasons
 - Must exist a “serious aggression issue or pose a health and safety risk regardless of where or under whose care it is housed”
- Commitment to full transparency and data-sharing

Limits of the No Kill Plan

1. Few basic protections for dogs
2. All decisions left to the 'behaviorist'
3. No checks and balances, management involvement or director sign off on euthanasia
4. Did not address the possibility of rehabilitative efforts being made to save the dog's life



Old vs. New Ratings systems

- No more assumed outcomes
- All dogs treated as individuals
- Different levels of managerial involvement related to risk level of each category
- Dogs in BE3 and BE4 cases must be addressed in 48 hours – treated as critical cases just like medical
- All dogs and behaviors treated the same regardless of shelter capacity

Austin Animal Center 2016

- 96.5% save rate
- Prior to July 2015, still euthanizing for space (behavior)
- Policy changes in July 2015
- A need for a new way to make life and death decisions

The Before Euthanasia Checklist

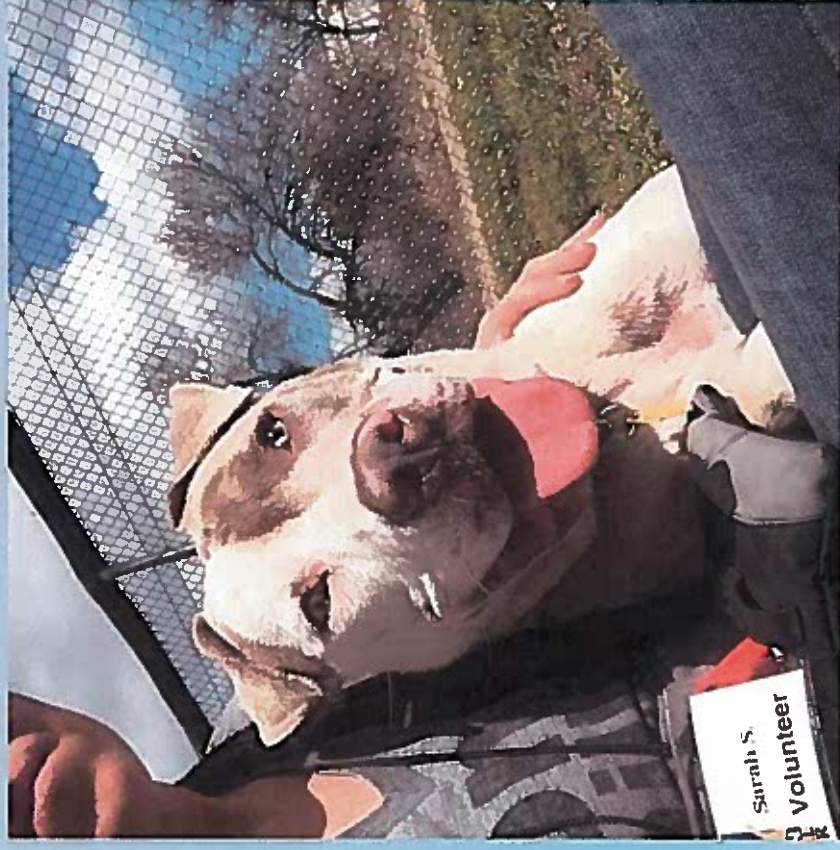
Dogs in Austin are still at risk for the following reasons:

- Bites to humans (severity and circumstances considered)
- Killing or injuring other animals
- has been adjudicated by a court of law to be dangerous or vicious

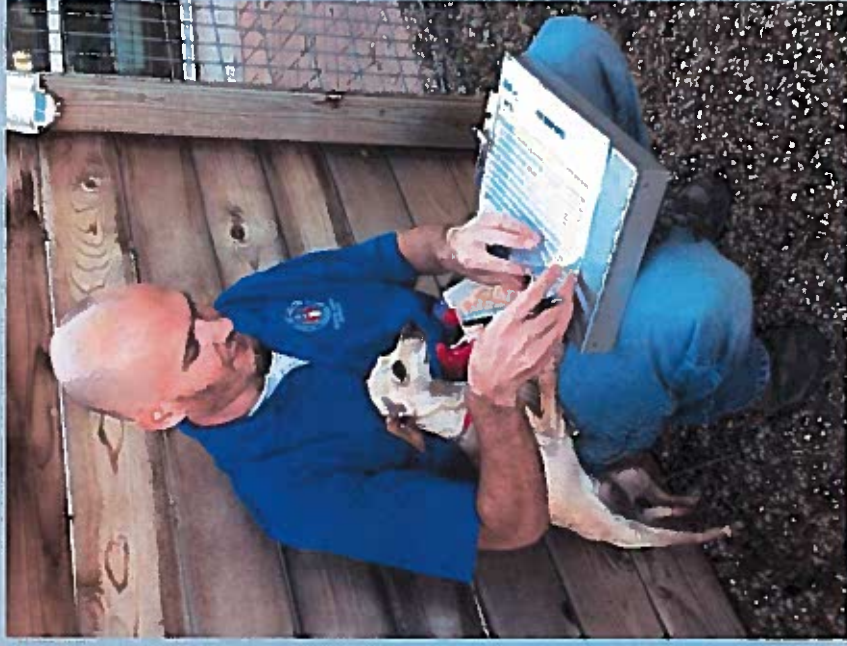
Dogs in Austin are NOT at risk for:

- Failing or doing poorly on behavior evaluation
- Common behavioral problems
- Fear or anxiety

All dogs held a minimum of seven
days prior to being killed



A behavior and enrichment staff member assigned as the case manager



- Confirms the incident notes
- Talks to animal protection officers, police and other officials
- Compares existing notes to interview statements
- Looks for placement
- Acts as 'detective' investigating circumstances of incident



Call before kill

Foster placement considered



AAC makes rescue plea with 24
hours minimum to respond



Behavior and enrichment teams meets to discuss case



Notification sent to 'euthanasia' review team

Sample notification:

We are planning on moving forward with euthanasia for Kush – A702065. Kush has three bites to people on his record. His first bite was as a puppy during play, but the other two were while running at large as an adult. APA declined on him today due to this history. I have contacted the previous owner and notified them that we plan to move forward with euthanasia. They have until 5 pm on June 19 to contact me with intent to reclaim. We will not be pleading him to the public for foster or adoption. If you would like to advocate for this dog, please let me know by 4pm tomorrow. Paperwork is attached for your review.

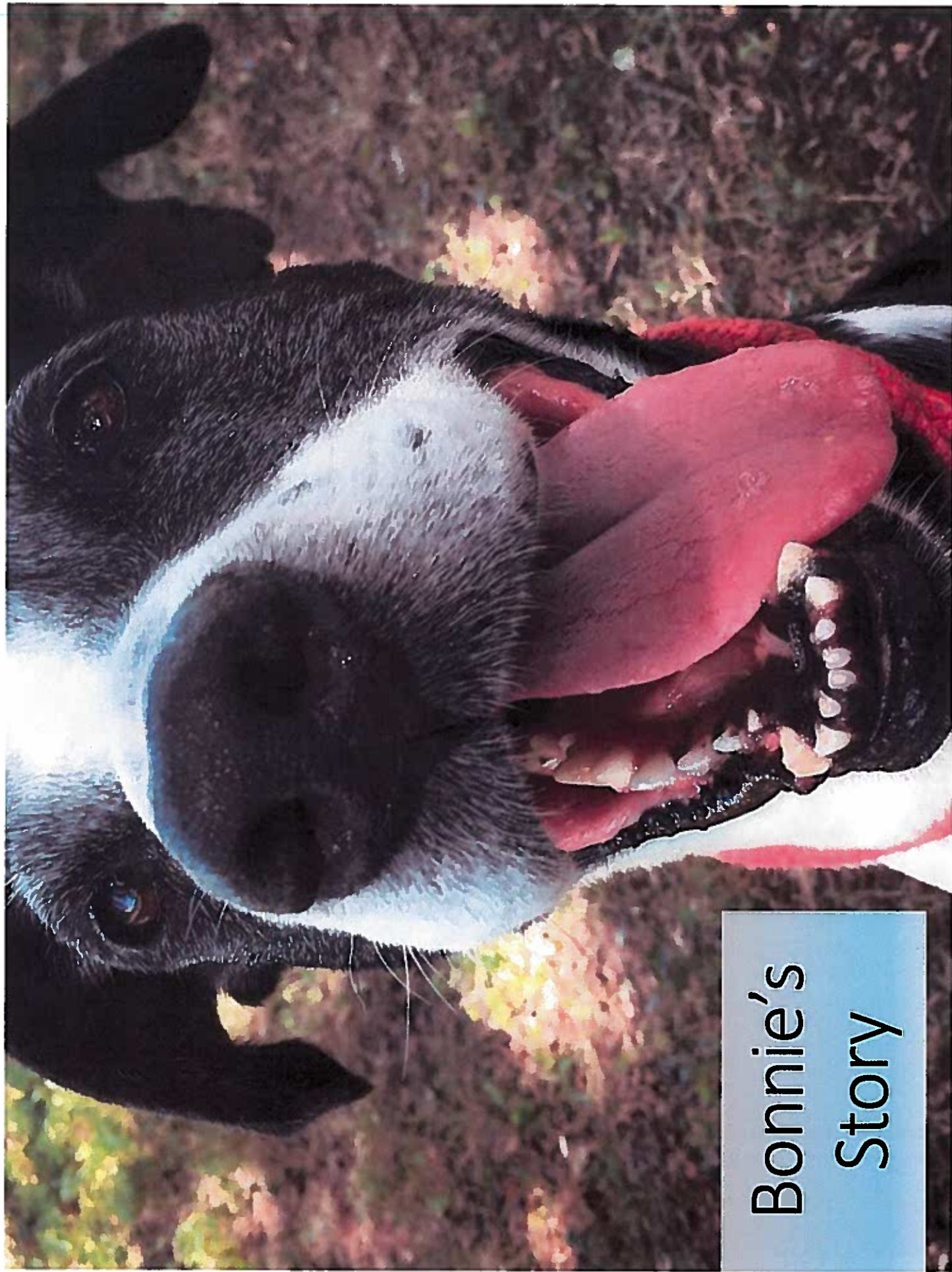
Notification sent to volunteer 'dogs at risk' group with 24 hour notice

Sample notification:

Brock – A606788 – We will be moving forward with euthanasia for this dog. APA has declined on him based on uninterrupted aggression to other dogs after assessing him playgroups. He has 2 bites to people on his record from re-directing onto his handler when other dogs were nearby. Notes are attached. Please let us know by 12 pm tomorrow if you would like to advocate for him.

The role of the volunteer advocate...





Bonnie's Story

Bonnie entered AAC after a storm blew down her fence, she escaped and allegedly attacked another dog.

Bonnie at risk due to offensive aggression: Volunteers advocated and found out there was no previous behavior history. Previous owner stated she was not aggressive towards humans or animals. Behavior/enrichment team agrees to make her available as special adoption.



Bonnie ADOPTED two months after her arrival.

"I went by the shelter a few times within the past two months to look at pups, but never found the one that could fit my lifestyle. After browsing through the kennels one last time we came across Bonnie. Her sad sweet face melted our hearts, not to mention how she was already house trained and her calm temperament was a complete package. We were skeptical at first because of her 'history,' but we knew that as a senior she needed a better life. Without a doubt, I made the best decision not only for her, but for me."

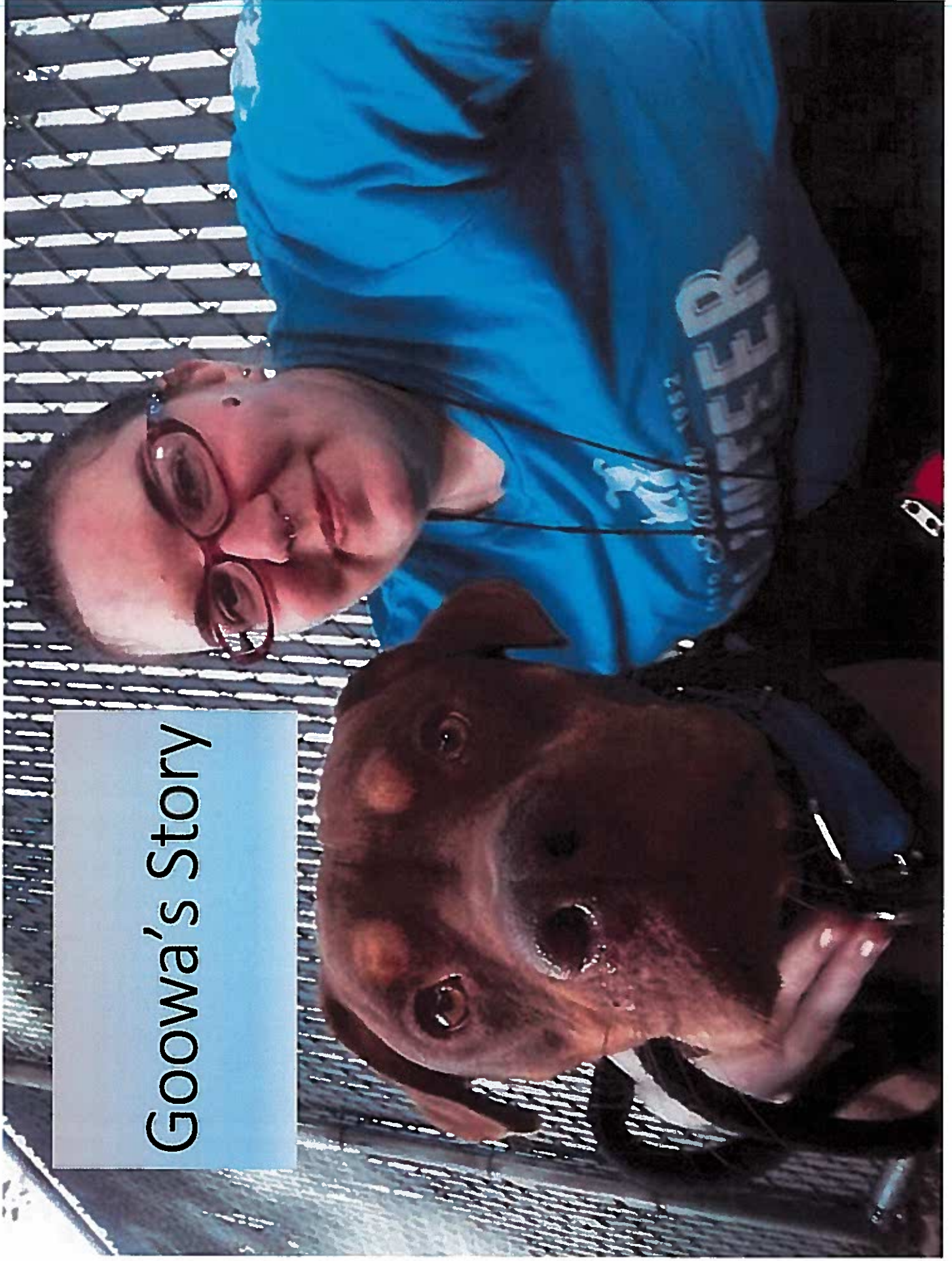




I went into the shelter with the idea of getting a puppy, however I came out with a senior and it may have been the best decision I have made since moving to Austin a little over a year ago.

-Bonnie's mom

Goowa's Story





Goowa was used as an attack dog and held in quarantine for five months awaiting owner's trial.

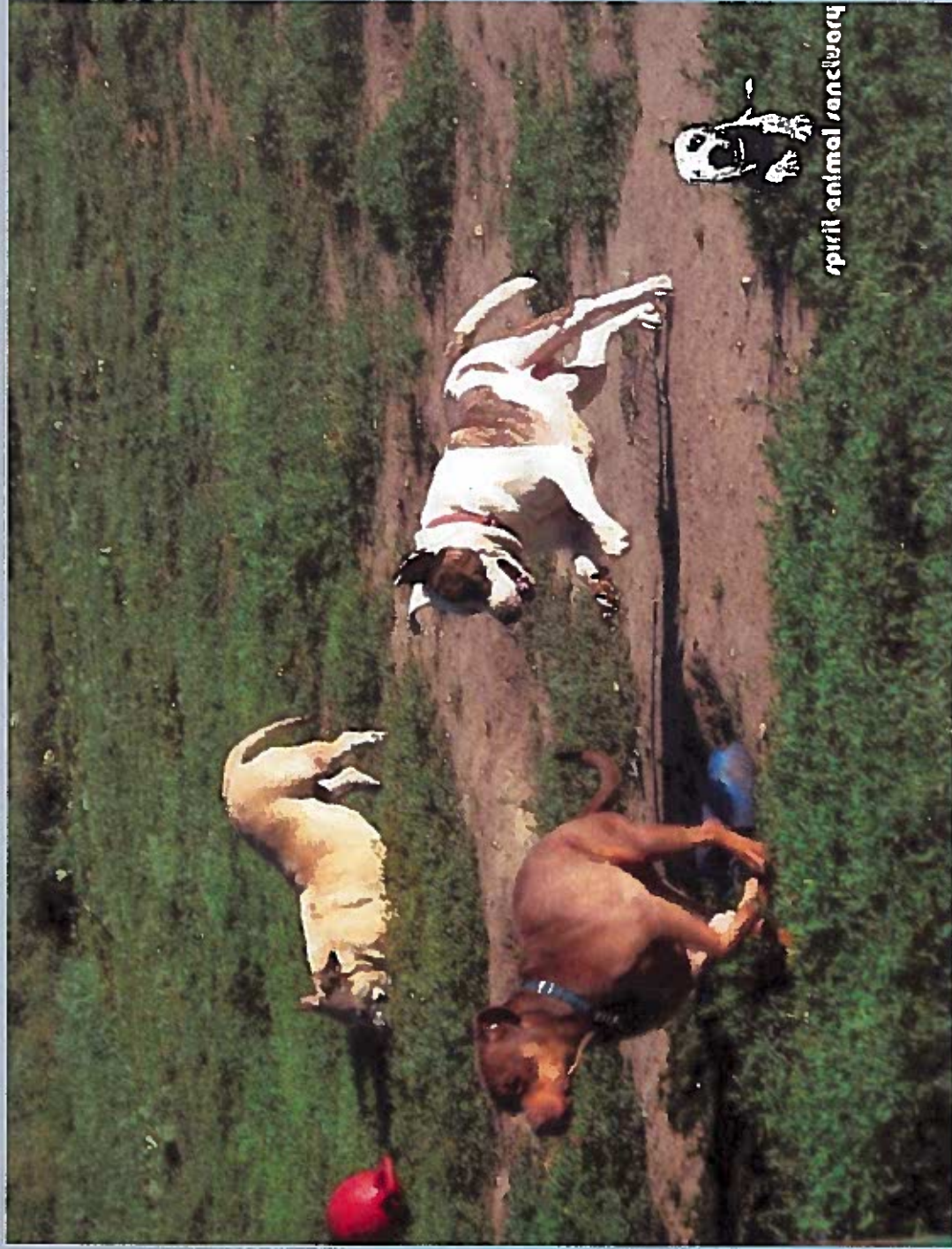
Following conclusion of the trial, the judge allowed the shelter to seek sanctuary placement and volunteers raised \$6,000 to save his life.



A staff member and volunteer
offered to fly with Goowa from
Texas to New York

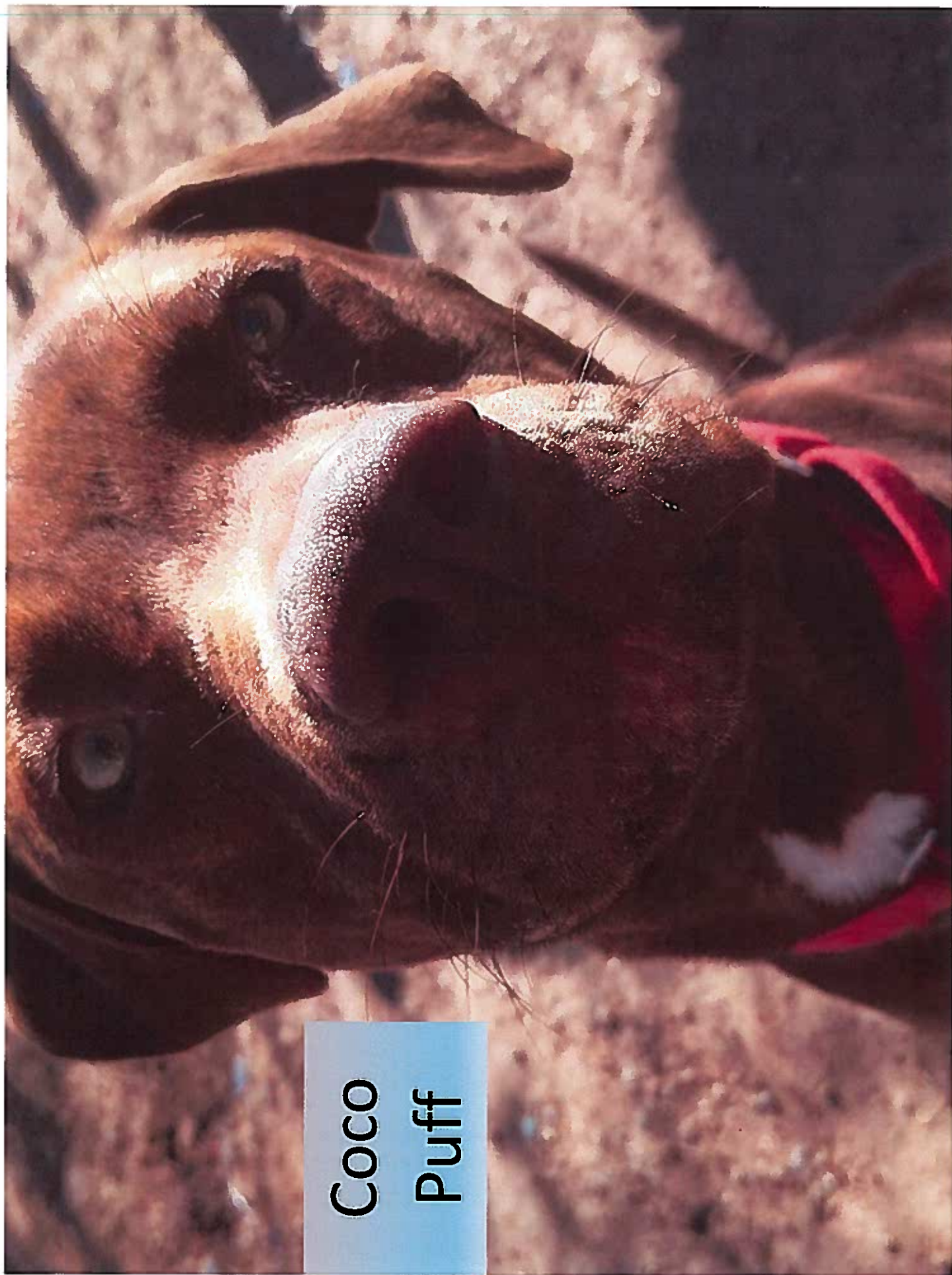


Goowa's New Life

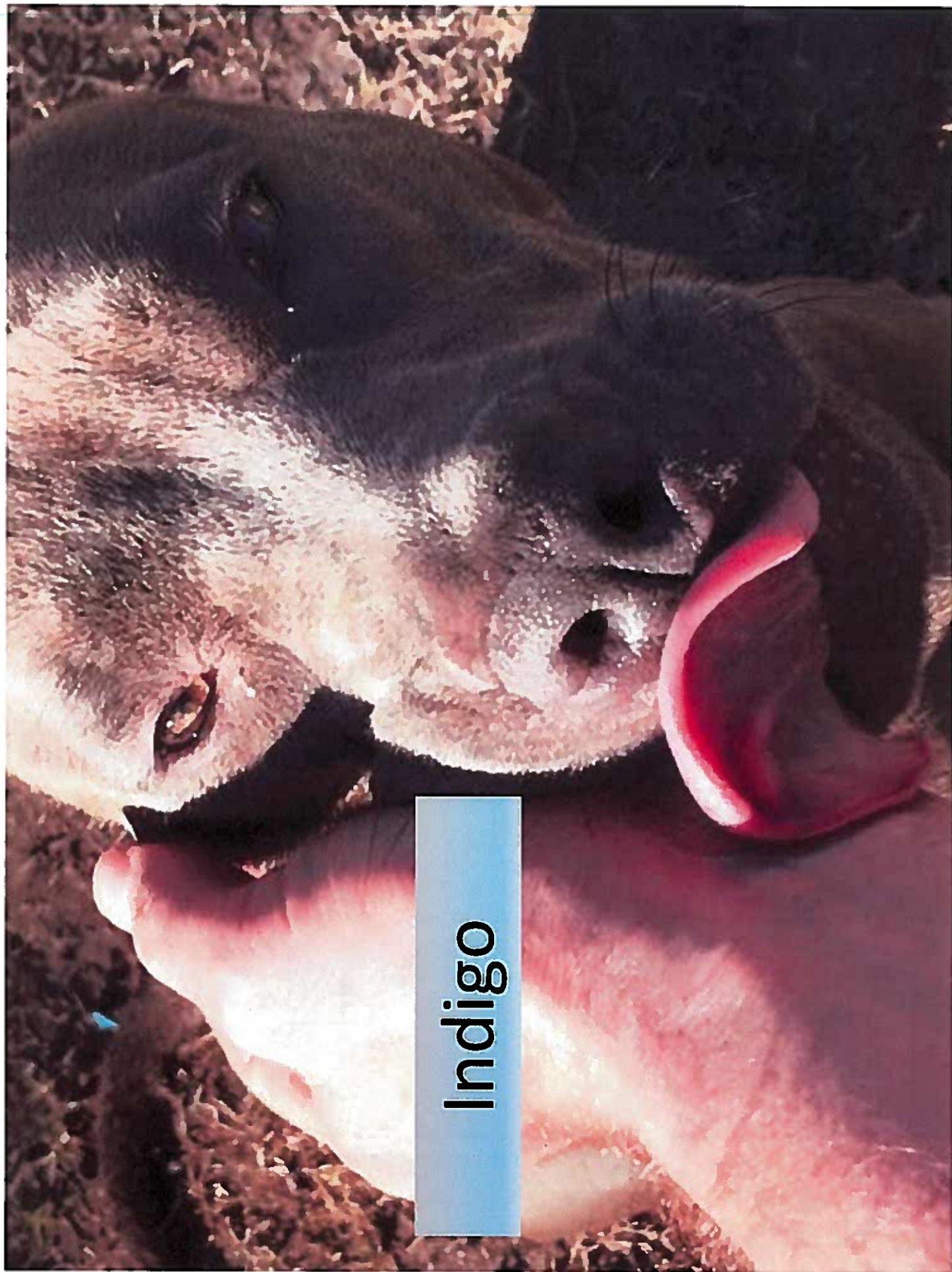


Other dogs saved by the process





Coco
Puff

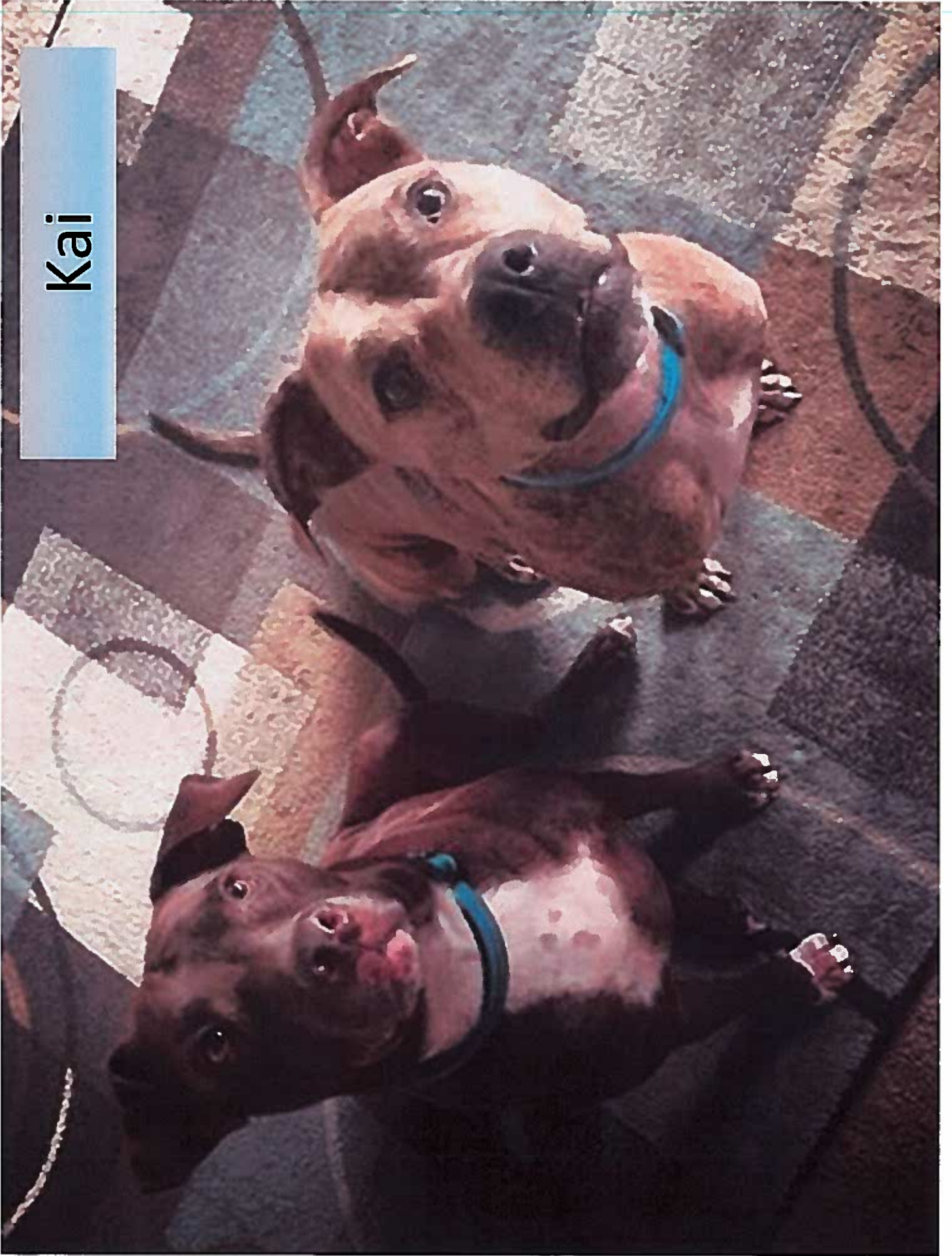


Indigo

Nala



Kai





Opal