



THE VICK DOGS

In 2007, the world learned that NFL star quarterback Michael Vick had been running a dog fighting operation. For almost six years, Vick and his friends had been breeding, training and fighting pit bulls at Bad Newz Kennels on Vick's property. Sheds painted black were found behind Vick's house. One was an infirmary for the dogs wounded in fights. Others had equipment for training and a "rape stand" for breeding. Fights took place in the biggest shed, where police found a blood-stained room, an outline of a pit on the floor and a dog's tooth on the windowsill. Buried in the backyard were the bodies of dogs. At least 12 dogs, ones that did not fight very well, were killed by Vick and his friends. Some were hanged; others were electrocuted. One dog was slammed repeatedly against the ground until it died. When authorities busted Vick, 51 pit bulls were seized from his property.

At that time, it was a common belief that dogs seized from fight busts could not be saved, that they were uncontrollable, violent and untrustworthy. They were referred to as "kennel trash." They were typically held as evidence until their "owners" trial was over, and then all of them were euthanized. Many called for the same treatment here. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) recommended euthanizing them and called them "...some of the most aggressively trained pit bulls in the country." People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) also said they should be put down, stating that "these dogs are ticking time bombs." Statements like these were even being made by people who had never met the dogs. However, there was a public outcry to save them.

A court ordered for the dogs to be evaluated. The ASPCA convened a group of experts, including BAD RAP's founders Donna Reynolds & Tim Racer, to evaluate the dogs. The team examined the dogs individually. Some thought they would only be able to save at most 10 percent of the dogs. They ran each dog through a series of tests and were surprised by what they found. Some were so shy they would "pancake"—flatten and not move off the ground, a few were dog aggressive and almost none were aggressive toward people. Instead of saving just five dogs (10 percent) as originally hoped, 47 of the 51 dogs seized were candidates for rescue: 25 were appropriate for foster homes; and 22 for sanctuary, since they needed further rehabilitation and socialization. Only one dog, who had been fought and bred so much that the dog had had enough of people and life, had to be put down.

These dogs had spent deprived lives caged or chained in the woods. After they were confiscated, they were parceled out to six different Virginia animal control facilities, where they were held as evidence. Here their isolation continued. This confinement, with little socialization or stimulation, was hardest on the young dogs—who during a critical point in their development knew little of the world outside of their small kennels. By the time all of these dogs were released from custody, most had spent more than seven months in isolation.



BAD RAP rented an RV and drove 13 of the dogs that were ready for a foster home back to California. Almost all of the 22 dogs that needed further rehabilitation and socialization went to Best Friends Animal Society (BFAS) in Utah, where they came to be called the "Vicktory Dogs." The remaining dogs were dispersed to smaller rescues. The Vick property was bought by animal rights, rescue and advocacy group Dogs Deserve Better, which is turning the kennel into a rehabilitation facility, "Good Newz," for former penned and chained dogs.

It is important to remember that all of these dogs would have been put down if it had not been for the efforts of a few determined individuals who believed in these dogs and stood up for what they knew was right. As Donna Reynolds said, "Vick showed the worst of us, our bloodlust, but this rescue effort showed the best."

It was not just a dog fighting case, but a hoarding case and a neglect case, as well, since Vick had amassed more dogs than he could fight or sell. Jim Gorant, author of *The Lost Dogs*, which chronicles the case, said, "For the first time in a legal setting, dogs were viewed not as the implements of a harsh and brutal undertaking, but as the victims of it."

The following pages contain portraits and stories of 10 of the Vick dogs. Some of these dogs were suitable for a foster home, and others were sent to sanctuary at BFAS for rehabilitation. Just as people react differently to the experiences that have shaped them, dogs react differently, too. Sweeping generalizations do not apply. While no two of these dogs had the exact same experiences at Bad Newz Kennels or in custody, they are dealing with their past in their own way and coping the best way they know how. What is clear is that these dogs, despite the opinion of many that these dogs should have been put down, are proving every day to us that they deserved a chance: a chance not only to live, but to live in a loving home where they could let their true selves shine. They are proving they are more than capable of making wonderful pets and of giving love.

The Vick case and these dogs have set a precedent. Most dogs seized from dog fighting busts are now individually evaluated in an attempt to save as many of the stable and well-adjusted ones as possible. HSUS now supports individual evaluations of fighting dogs. These dogs are no longer viewed as "bad dogs" but as victims of crimes perpetrated by human hands. Because of their success, the Vick dogs have given all dogs seized from fight busts a chance at life. They have elevated the public's opinion of pit bulls. They have shown us that all dogs should be treated as individuals. They have shown us what it means to forgive, to trust, to be brave and to love. These are some very special dogs.

Further information about the Vick dogs can be found in the book *The Lost Dogs* by Jim Gorant.





TEDDLES

CALIFORNIA

THIS 72-LB. LAPDOG LOVES CUDDLES, KISSES, BELLY RUBS & EVERYONE HE MEETS
AKA TED, TEDDY, TED-BABY, TEDLITO & T-MAC
ADOPTED FROM BAD RAP

Teddles was the largest pit bull seized from Bad Newz Kennels. It is believed he was not fought: bigger dogs do not do well in the pit; and he showed signs of having spent time elsewhere. For example, he knew how to climb stairs and jumped up on the couch as if he had done it before. He had also been photographed with Vick for a magazine article back in 2001. Teddles was one of the dogs evaluated as ready for a foster home. Cindy Houser was looking for a companion for her rescued pit bull, Izzi, when she viewed Teddles' "available dog" video on BAD RAP's website. She fell in love with the big, goofy, rambunctious boy. Only after she put in an application did she find out that he was a Vick dog. At first, Teddles had some challenges. He was afraid of train whistles, gunshots from the nearby gun range and his shadow. He guarded food at times and did not know how to play with toys. Today, however, he has triumphed over his past. In 2009, he earned his Canine Good Citizen certificate. Everyone who meets him loves him. Friendly Teddles loves being with his family, going on long walks and car rides, running alongside Cindy's bike, playing fetch for food, wrestling with Izzi and playing with toys. Flirt-pole sessions and his beloved naptime on the sofa rank high on his list of favorite activities, too. He is the happy, well-adjusted family pet of Cindy, her husband, Gil Ramirez, and her mother, Karen Anderson. Cindy said, "We feel so blessed to have Ted in our lives!"



JONNY JUSTICE

CALIFORNIA

ONE-THIRD DOG + ONE-THIRD PIG + ONE-THIRD COW = 100 PERCENT HAM

AKA PIG & PIGGY

ADOPTED FROM BAD RAP

Jonny has starred on the cover of *Parade* magazine, was featured in an article on "Amazing Animals" in *U.S. News & World Report*, was talked about at length in Jim Gorant's *The Lost Dogs*, has appeared as a guest on the *Rachael Ray* show, was showcased on the cover of this book and was mentioned in countless other media outlets...isn't it about time Jonny got an agent? With all of the wonderful, positive press on Jonny, it is easy to forget how far this dog has come. One of the Bad Newz dogs, Jonny spent the first 12 months or so of his life chained outside and the following six months in a Virginia shelter, languishing with little to no stimulation. Things changed for the better when he was driven to BAD RAP. It was not until the USDA signed his evidence release paperwork in late 2007 that he was finally free of his past. He never looked back. Jonny even underwent a name change from Jonny Rotten to Jonny Justice, since he got his justice from Vick and could get justice for pit bulls. Jonny was fostered and then adopted by Cris Cohen. After some downtime, the work of acclimating to a home began. Jonny soon learned that life was more than a kennel or a chain. It was wonderful and exciting. He took it all in as fast as he could. Within 18 months of his being confiscated, he passed the ATTS temperament test, earned his Canine Good Citizen certificate, earned a therapy dog certificate and worked as a reading assistant in a children's literacy program. Jonny also pulls a draft cart for exercise and knows over 30 commands. Cris & Jonny resigned from their therapy program (pit bulls were banned by a city agency); however, he & Jonny continue to be in the public eye educating people about pit bulls, about dogs from fight busts and about forgiveness and trust.







UBA

CALIFORNIA

"A PARTY IN A DOG SUIT," UBA CAN MAKE A GAME OUT OF ANYTHING
ADOPTED FROM BAD RAP

Uba's image was first seen in the *New York Times* next to the headline "Menacing Dogs Await Their Fate." Sweet and loving Uba is about as far from menacing as you can get. One of the dogs evaluated as ready for a foster home, Uba made the cross-country trip in an RV to BAD RAP, where he was fostered by Letti de Little. Letti fell in love with his intelligence and fun personality and adopted him. Uba now has many dog friends and helps his home's many foster dogs, including other victims of dog fighting, acclimate to the real world. Smart and athletic, Uba knows countless commands, has earned his Canine Good Citizen certificate, competes in rally, has qualified to start his first nose work trial and loves to run on his doggy treadmill. Uba does face challenges, though. He was around 6 months old when he was seized and held in isolation for another six months. Since he lacked any exposure to normal activities for the first very formative year of his life, he can be fearful and shut down in new situations. Letti said, "He has come an extremely long way." People often become emotional when they hear his story, but Letti tries to focus on how lucky he is now and the positive impact the Vick dogs have had for all pit bulls and rescued dogs. "Uba has been a part of this change in perceptions alongside his friends Jonny Justice, Hector, Audie, Zippy...and all the others. He has a profound effect on many who meet him. We have been on an amazing journey together."



HECTOR

MINNESOTA

HIS MOTTOS: "MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME" & "THE ONLY THING I FIGHT IS DISCRIMINATION"

AKA HECTOR THE INSPECTOR

ADOPTED FROM BAD RAP

Because of his great demeanor, Hector, after evaluation, was marked to go to an organization that trains law dogs. However, Hector was found to be too old for the program, and so he was returned to one of BAD RAP's foster homes. Andrew "Roo" & Clara Yori, who adopted him, were the perfect candidates, given the Yoris' work with their pit bull Wallace (see pgs. 128 & 129). Despite having physical scars that cover his body from his time at Bad Newz Kennels, Hector shows no psychological or emotional scars. He needed no rehabilitation except for some time adjusting to a home environment, such as learning that plants are not chew toys. A sweet and confident dog who loves to please, adorable Hector now lives the good life. He shares his home with five other dogs, where he lets Mindy Lou, a little 12-lb. toy Australian Shepherd, boss him around all day and naps with his best friend, a Rat Terrier mix named Scooby Snack. He enjoys running around the house with a toy in his mouth, sunning himself and eating vegetables. Hector has no trust issues, loves people and dogs, is a certified therapy dog, has twice earned his Canine Good Citizen certificate and passed the ATTS temperament test. Hector & Wallace both do their part to educate the public about "all dogs labeled as 'pit bulls'" and even have their own website (pitbullunited.com) and Facebook fan pages. Hector visits elementary schools teaching children compassion toward animals and how to act safely around dogs. Hector is quite happy to have Roo hold him in his arms while schoolchildren surround them to scratch Hector's face and rub his belly. Hector's work earned him a humane education award presented through Brooklyn Law School. His story has been highlighted in both local and national media outlets, including, CBS's *The Early Show*, *Good Day New York*, *People*, *E!*, *Entertainment News*, *Parade*, *Entertainment Weekly* and NPR's *Fresh Air*. Hector cares less about the media attention and more about the best gift he was ever given: a chance to be a good dog in a loving home. Hector's scarring speaks volumes about his horrific time at Bad Newz Kennels. However, his remarkable ability to forget his past, trust people and dogs, forgive all that has happened to him and move on to enjoy life provides us with a blueprint for the way we should live our lives. The Yoris said, "Hector is getting a second chance, and he's proving he deserves every moment of it. Hopefully, people will continue to be open to the many lessons Hector can teach us."

