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Wednesday, September 9, 2009

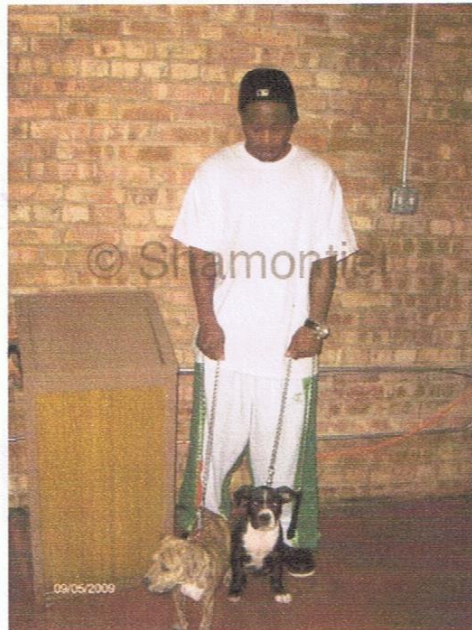
The Humane Society of the United States and Carroll Care Center partner to end dogfighting

by Shamontiel L. Vaughn



Twelve pit bulls stood in one room sizing each other up and looking at their owners for approval. And one by one, some leaped, circled and walked near each other. But they weren't in a dogfight. These pit bulls were being trained by Humane Society of the United States trainers at the Carroll Care Center at 3334 W. Carroll.

Some of the dogs seemed calm and innocent—like Oreo who wrestled around and was in heat, Chocolate who just wanted to play and climb on its owner, and puppies Weezy and Ioey who watched the bigger dogs like they were superstars.



But other pit bulls had a past. Honor hid under her owner's legs, scared to be around other people and dogs, after recovering from a broken hip and missing an eye after her previous owner shot her.

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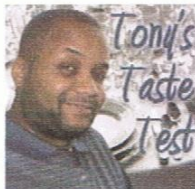


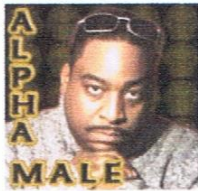
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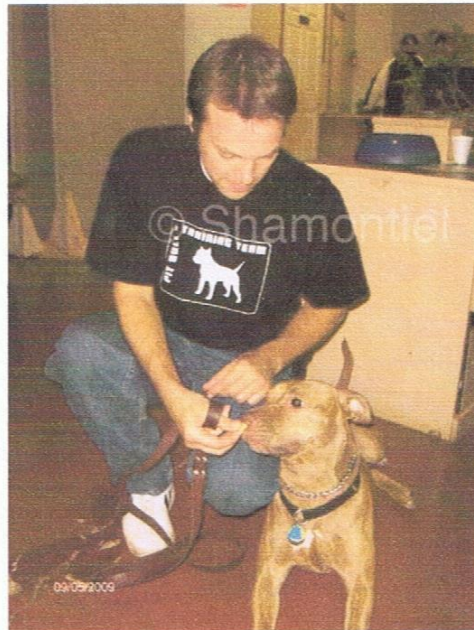
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Cocoa had a couple scars and was rescued a week ago. And Jeff Jenkins, 41, the founder and lead pit bull trainer, brought Junebug—a rescued dog of a 14-year-old boy who loved the dog but older family members constantly abused him.

"The owner tried his best to take care of the dog, but he didn't have the right resources," Jenkins explained to the *Defender*.

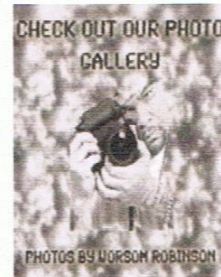
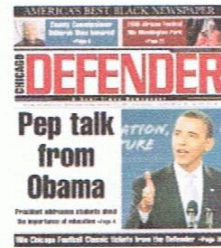
But at the Carroll Care Center on the West Side of Chicago and a second location on the South Side at 6810 S. Ashland, the Humane Society provides a dog care program with the necessary equipment. In Englewood, pit bull owners can frequent the South Side location at 6 p.m., and the West Side location at 1 p.m. The training usually has a maximum of 20 dogs and lasts an hour.



"(HSUS) educates you," said former dogfighter turned dog trainer, Sean Moore, 38. "A lot of us in the neighborhood are told pit bulls are supposed to fight. We're miseducated."

Moore learned about the HSUS at the age of 36, but for 24 years, he'd been a consistent winning dogfighter. At 12, he was chased home by German Shepherd owners regularly, but one day, his pit bull had had enough. A few months old, one of Moore's dogs grabbed a German Shepherd by the neck, killing him instantly. Moore found out the thrill other family members had when their dogs won fights.

"Now that I'm older, I know a dog never wins," Moore said. "In the neighborhood, that's good press, but all that wore on me."



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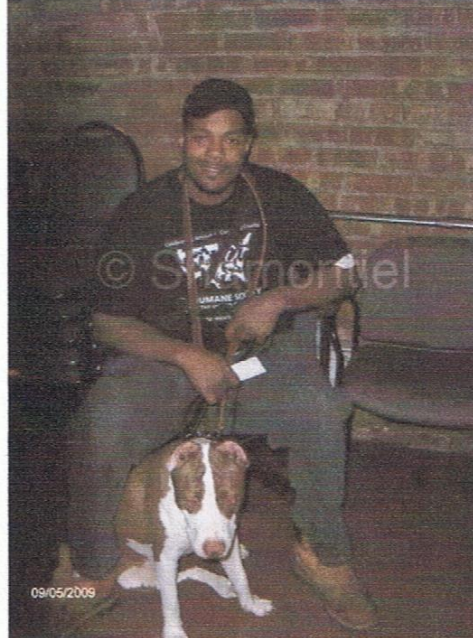
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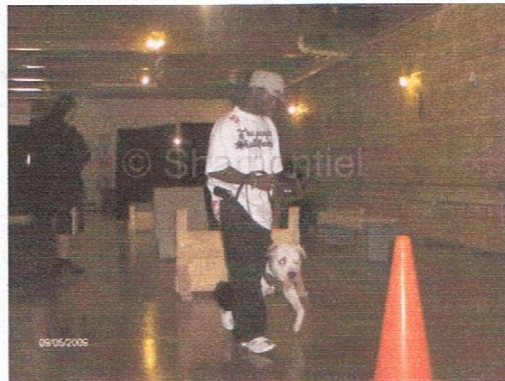
After admitting to killing hundreds of dogs, Moore stated, "It's senseless. It's a lot of preparation that goes into that, like training them, walking them, feeding them, all of that time I'm using to do something inhumane, I could be doing something positive."



And so he did. Moore, a dog trainer for two years with the HSUS, now owns three trained pit bulls and is a graduate of the eight-week dog training program. Jigga, who he joked "is a poster child for this program," Beyonce, who he said, "was worse than Jigga," and Chinchilla, who sat calmly under his feet, are now certified dogs. And Chinchilla jumped through the dog obstacle course like a pro, stopping only to let Moore pet her and lean against Moore's legs.

Nino, another pitbull who completed Jenkins' exercise tasks with no flaws, is owned by one of two brothers, also dog trainers for the HSUS.

"A dog that's trained is an asset to you instead of a liability," said Anthony Pickett, 42. "If you got a dog in the yard using the bathroom everywhere, out of control, some days you want him, some days you don't."



But the HSUS dog trainers are adamant that pit bulls being aggressive and untrained isn't just the dog's fault.

"I've had some guys who've come in and been extremely aggressive towards their dogs," Jenkins said. "But that's what they saw growing up."

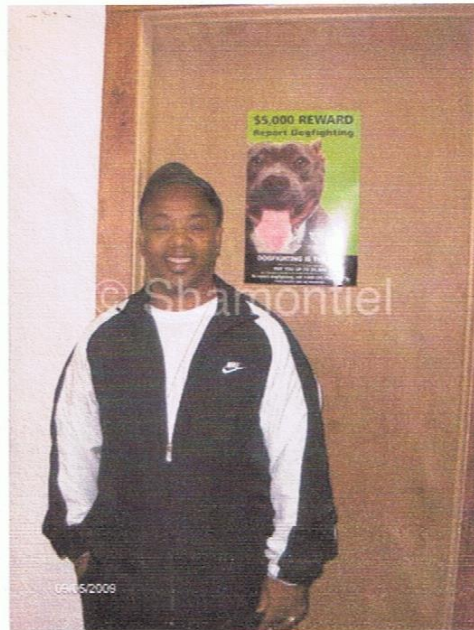
And although there's a sign on one of the doors by the entrance about a \$5,000 reward for reporting dogfighting, none of the trainers—including the owner of the building, Minister Tim White Sr.—is thrilled with the idea of turning the dogfighters over to police.

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"Far as me telling the police on somebody, I wouldn't be too quick to do that," Minister White Sr. said. "You grow up in a culture that you don't just tell the police on someone. Some of the dogfighters don't even think they're doing something wrong. Some of them think that this is what these dogs were made for—fighting."

Minister White Sr., a pit bull owner too, has an alternate outlook from the sign on his building's door.

"In order to get the dogs from fighting, you have to train the masters to teach them that dogs aren't made to fight, they're taught to fight," Minister White Sr. explained.

But pit bulls being taught to fight does give some owners an economical gain.

Tio Hardiman, 46, and a special consultant to the HSUS and an anti-dogfighting advocate recruiter, explained how the money worked.

"Level one is dogfighting for \$20, \$50 or a pair of shoes. Level two is more organized, in vacant lots, and may make a lot of money," Hardiman said.

Antonio Pickett, 44 and Anthony Pickett's older brother, recalled trying to stop a guy from going to a dogfight when the dogfighter needed the money for moving expenses.

"We're asking them to give up a lot," Antonio Pickett said. "Even if I get (a dogfighter) a McDonald's job, he's giving up \$1,500 a night for \$60 a day. But that dog is not put on Earth to make you money."

And while Hardiman estimated that there are 40,000 dogfighters on the radar across the United States, Jenkins said, "most of the dogfighting in Chicago is not high level."

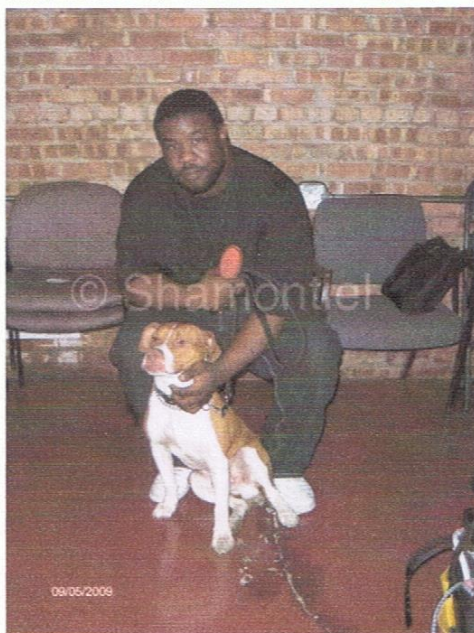
According to the Humane Society of the United States, dogfighting is illegal in all 50 states, and 250,000 dogs suffer each year. In addition to 40,000 organized dogfights, an additional 100,000 street dogfighting happens in alleys, vacant lots and other hidden locations. The Chicago Police Department reported that 65 percent of the people charged with dogfighting also committed crimes against people.

All of the trainers stated that dogfights have affected young dog owners between the ages of 12-14 years old too. And some are even younger.

"These (dogfighters) are 9 and 10," Antonio Pickett said. "That's a dangerous weapon in a little kid's hands so we educate them."

On Aug. 29 at the Englewood location, 65 pit bulls were brought out for free shots and vaccines, microchips, given proper leashes, and according to Hardiman, "there was only one lightweight

incident" during their Community Outreach Initiative program. The Humane Society of the United States funded the drive, the Carroll Care Center's training, along with private donors.



The Pickett brothers, Hardiman, Jenkins, Moore and Minister White Sr., are all proud pit bull owners who want the same goal for this little-over-a-year old program.

"The main goal is to reduce the dogfighting by about 60 percent by spreading the message and getting involved," Hardiman said. But Hardiman picks the anti-dogfighting advocates wisely. "Nobody can work the community unless they understand the dynamics of the people. I commend the Humane Society (of the United States) for allowing the inner city into their arena."

The Humane Society of the United States is the only organization that has a dedicated campaign focused on stopping animal fighting. For more information on this Chicago anti-dogfighting program and HSUS, [click here](#).

In photos: (main photo) Tio Hardiman with Minister White Sr.'s dog Brisko (additional photos) Pit bulls Icey and Weezy with their owner, pit bull Honor with her owner, pit bull trainer Jeff Jenkins with pit bull Oreo, pit bull trainer Sean Moore with pit bull Chinchilla, Anthony Pickett with pit bull Nino, Minister White Sr. stands next to rescue sign, pit bull Diago sits with his owner

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