

Rescuing Brian's Pack

By Joanne Chantelau

When the Cumberland flooded downtown Nashville in May 2010, Brian Breagel rescued lost dogs and helped reunite them with their families. Once, he and a friend saw a dog in the river, and his friend swam out to get him. The stray dog, maimed, turned out to have heartworms. Brian cared for the dog, getting treatment through his veterinarian, then found a home for him. He kept all the stray dogs in his home until they were reunited with their owners or placed with new owners.

“One time my house was like a zoo, totally full,” Brian says. “It was crazy.” All in all, he rescued 15 to 25 dogs during the flood alone. “He goes over and above to rescue a dog,” says his friend Mary Warren. “There’s not a single dog who is not good enough for him to rescue.”

One day last fall Brian, a five-year resident of East Nashville, collapsed. He became paralyzed from the chest down, requiring long-term care in hospital and rehabilitation facilities. At the time Brian had eight dogs at home, which his friends affectionately call “Brian’s Pack”, all of which he rescued from abuse or abandonment. That’s when friends and neighbors in the community he’s helped so much came to his rescue.

“People took time out of their day, two to three hours, to help me out,” Brian says. One woman created a schedule with morning, afternoon and evening shifts, built around Brian’s regular routine with the dogs.

“They did it for me and the dogs, and it was really amazing. I’m really lucky to have such a group of friends.”

Even his neighbors, who adopted a rescued dog through the services of the East Nashville-based

nonprofit organization East C.A.N. (Community Action Network), helped out when the snow prevented others from coming over.

“As much as his friends always cared about the welfare of Brian, we also cared about the welfare of Brian’s Pack, because that’s ultimately what Brian cares about,” says Mary, a member of East C.A.N., which facilitates neighbors helping neighbors with animal and human welfare needs.



Photo Courtesy of Brian Breagel

Kravitz and Jerry anxiously await Brian's homecoming

As it became clear that Brian’s illness was not going to be temporary, Mary enlisted East C.A.N.’s help with the dogs’ care. The group found new homes for four of Brian’s Pack, and two more have been placed in foster homes.

Those two dogs are Bam Bam, a male pit bull, and Jefferson, a male black lab mix, and both need permanent homes. Both dogs were weak and sick when Brian found them. “Bam Bam reminded me of the kid on *The Flintstones*, kind of stout, a brute, but he was strong,” Brian says. He came home one day to find the dog lying on his porch, bleeding. At first, Brian thought he was dead. But he took him inside, bathed

him, covered his puncture wounds with Neosporin, and wrapped him in gauze. Because Bam Bam's wounds were all located on one side, Brian suspects he may have been a "bait dog"—tied to a post and exposed to attacks of fighter dogs without the ability to defend himself. But thanks to Brian, Bam Bam is now healthy and likes to sleep under the covers with his owner. "He's very attached to people," Brian says. "He is a little snuggler."

Jefferson is named after the place where Brian found him—the Jefferson Street exit. Brian didn't even recognize him as a dog because he was emaciated and without fur. Brian's veterinarian treated him for skin infection, fleas and parasitic worms. Jefferson, who now has a beautiful coat of hair, visited Brian while he was in rehab. "He's very spunky, almost like a cat," Brian says. "He likes to play and needs exercise."

East C.A.N. will ensure that Bam Bam and Jefferson are current on all their shots and medical needs before adopting them out.

Originally from Chicago, Brian moved from Los Angeles to East Nashville with four rescued dogs in tow. His friends from his college days at the University of Kentucky recommended he settle in East Nashville. "I love it!" he says. "It's off the main road." He likes the small businesses—"mom and pop" coffee shops and bistros, the tattoo parlor. "The people are very laid back...it's an amazing mix of people, really diverse."

Brian, who used to keep stray dogs in his back yard as a child, learned of East C.A.N. and had planned to contact the organization before he got sick. He wanted to talk about his ultimate goal: creating a safe haven for rescued dogs on a rural property. "I read an article last year that said last August they had 3,000 dogs put down in Metro Nashville," Brian says. Part of his passion is to help prevent dog abandonment and abuse by educating people, including children, on proper pet care and the importance of vaccinations and neutering. "I just really would like to encourage people in general to go get a rescue dog before they go to a breeder," he says. "They are very loyal pets, have more compassion, more emotion." Besides that, Brian believes people can learn a lot from owning a rescued dog. "I think when a dog has had a rough life, their individual personality shines through more than their breed-specific personality. They are pretty resilient," he says. "They learn to trust people again."


The final two dogs of Brian's Pack, Rottweiler-Australian shepherd mixes Jerry and Kravitz, are waiting for him to come home. And Brian, uncertain about his future medical needs, is hoping to get home to them soon.

He's been ill for every holiday since Halloween, including his birthday. He admits that he's spent some difficult nights alone thinking about what he's been

through since the collapse. "They don't know if I'm going to walk again," he says. But the 35-year-old's passion for dogs, for his future, and for life is evident in his upbeat and expressive voice. "You can't waste time being depressed when you could be in a good mood," he says.

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It's that resilience and positive personality that has kept him from responding in anger when he sees mistreated dogs and animals, even though he does sometimes feel angry. "It's not going to stop you from getting dog a home," he says.

"Brian's larger-than-life energy and enthusiasm for dog rescue is why I'll continue to do dog rescue for the rest of my life," Mary says. "If for nothing else, Brian's Pack." 

For more information about Bam Bam, Jefferson or other dogs in need of adoption, send an email to: info@eastcan.org.



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