

Good Morning, my name is Rhonda Lancaster, and I reside in Philadelphia County.

My peril began on September 21, 1993, when my cat, Kato disappeared. He went outside and never returned.

On Sept. 22, 1993, he still had not return. This was unusual for my cat. He always returned on command all the years I had him. In the days that followed, I frantically searched the neighborhood looking for Kato, leaving fliers in doors all over the community. Finally someone called me and suggested I check with the local Women's Humane Society and the SPCA. I got a call from the Women's Humane Society, stating that they found a cat in my area and that it was dead. I immediately rushed

rushed over to see this cat, not believing it would be Kato. When I got there the investigator asked me whether I wanted to see pictures or see the body. I requested the picture. What I saw was a mangled piece of black & white fur with markings that only I could identify as his permanent markings. The investigator told me they found him in what is known as a "sparring ground" where Pit Bulls are given bait such as a small cat or dog to kill, then made to fight another Pit Bull. In the photo was an area that was dug out in a circle to mark the boundaries of the fighting area. After seeing the photo of my beloved pet, I vowed to find out who did this and to get revenge. And I mean revenge. I had Kato for 7 years prior to this, so he was already an old cat, approximately 16 years.

On Sept. 28, 1993, I alerted neighbors about what had happened to me. I went to one neighbor in directly because he had two (2) Pit Bulls and I wanted to see what he had to say, or if he knew anything. This is when I found out how vicious this dogfighting was and who was behind this. My neighbor Barry Burton (depicted in article of Apr. 14, 1994), who owned two (2) Pit Bulls told me that this dogfighting had been going on for a while in the park across the street from us and that some guy named Al who lives in the area was having these dogfights. Barry also told me about how his spouse had been threatened over in the park one day when she witnessed a fight . Al told her she better not tell the cops or he would come after her. Not only that, she found a Pit Bull that was blood and maimed from a fight in the park tied to a tree and left to

die. She and Barry took the dog in, and nursed it back to health. Later that evening, there was some activity over in the park. Neighbors were running out of the park screaming “ *there’s a dogfight going on in the park!*”

Several people called 911 and the police came out almost immediately. When several of us went in the park an ungodly, sickening stench permeated the air, and dead open eyes of cats glowed a glow of death. I was horrified.

In all the years that I have lived in this neighborhood which is diversified and culturally different and a pet loving community, I had never seen such brutality and bloodiness. On Sept. 30th, agents from the Women’s Humane Society, the SPCA, Barry Burton, and me went to the park to get a daylight look at this horrible mess. What we saw even

stunned the agents. They said they never saw such destruction of animals in any of their careers as agents.

There were shredded pieces of body parts of cats strewn all over the baseball area of the park. A rope hanged from the baseball diamond, which confirmed that baiting and fighting of Pit Bulls was taking place right here.

Immediately after this gruesome discovery, Barry led us to Al's house. In the back of his house was a brown boxer that had bite marks on it (depicted in photo) Al come out of his house and promptly went back in, pushing the dog in the house. Luckily one of the agents gotten a photo of the sick looking boxer. His mother came out and denied Al had anything to do with the previous night's dogfight in the park. Al came back out and denude he was Al Thomas. In Al's car was a cage that was reported stolen by the SPCA,

where he was employed until people ^{started taking} ~~in~~ animals to his home with the S.P.C.A truck at all hours of the day, instead of taking them to the S.P.C.A. Ironically, people began to report animals disappearing at an alarming rate all over Southwest Germantown.

On September 30, we went back to Al Thomas's garage it had been all cemented and bricked up, now we could only hear muffled sounds of dogs barking. At this point I decided to contact as many politicians and animal rights groups as possible. I began to log all activity regarding any calls or sightings of dogfighting, disappearances, carcasses of animals. I stayed in constant contact with all local authorities involved. I received so many phone calls regarding everything from dead and missing animals to

people who saw Thomas riding around with different Pit Bulls every day. Ironically, Al was running this dog ring with a boy down the street from me. I got to see almost everything firsthand. After all, Thomas had to show off his latest catch to the guy down the street from me. The neighbors and I began to take daily walks through the park and monitor activity making notes of anything suspicious. On November 10, 1994, my telephone went crazy, Al Thomas was arrested, after he stole a Bull Mastiff who was owned by a family that had just moved in a house across the street from Thomas. The owner found his dog in Thomas's basement hanging from the ceiling by a chain the dog had been there for 3 days. While in the basement the neighbor saw 3 other dogs chained to a pole that were

starving, bloody and dehydrated. This neighbor was originally led to Barry, because he had Pit Bulls and through that, the new neighbor was able to find his dog. He was a lucky one. Most other people never even found out what happened to their missing animals.

Thomas admitted guilt to his charge of petnapping and was also bought up on charges concerning the emaciated dogs in his basement. I felt it was time to go public with this horrific story. I called every newspaper, TV station, and radio station to get this story heard. Finally, Dan Rubin of the Philadelphia Inquirer called me back. I met with him and showed him all photos taken of dead and mutilated animals, and all journal entries. He was very intrigued and decided to do a story on it. The next week Barry and

I were bombarded by the TV news stations and the UPI. I gave an interview to the UPI over the phone, Barry gave an interview to the Philadelphia Daily News. Now, everyone was talking about this case. I went to Thomas's preliminary hearing where he was ordered to be sentenced at a later date. In the meantime, Thomas was still parading around the area with dogs and the calls were still coming to me about sightings and he was still seen in most of them.

Investigator Bengle of the Women's Humane Society and the Narcotics Squad of the 14th Police District began to watch Thomas's activity out of his home. They saw everything from drug transactions to guys with dogs coming in and out of the house. By the way, we finally found out how Thomas was catching animals. He stole a cage and

a restraining pole from the S.P.C.A. upon his dismissal of employment. This answered the question of how he was kidnapping animals. I began to have visions of how my cat Kato, was tortured and killed. I obtained letters from every community group and every political office representing my area, requesting prosecution of the offender(s) to the fullest extent of the law. The information of sightings was still coming in. Every time the telephone rang, I was scared that another animal would be reported found dead or missing. Al had now moved to an aunt's house because the community ^{was} is clearly able to identify him in relationship to this case. As we got closer to the sentencing date everyone told me there was no way that the judge was going to convict Thomas because of all the homicides and other cases tying up the courts. Even the

investigators said it was going to be hard to get him convicted because we never caught him in the act.

This one time I had to believe in the justice system.

Finally on August 1, 1994 came and it was time to go

to court. Members of the community, the agents and officers

August 1, 1994 was the day of the sentencing. Members

of the community, police officers and representatives of

watchdog groups for animal rights showed up for support

in the conviction of Thomas. Of course his lawyer tried to

portray him as a child who was bought up in a broken

home. Officers gave testimony of the day Thomas was

arrested. Finally it was my turn to testify. I told my story

in synopsis of what happened and how my beloved cat was

mauled to death. I told the judge that Thomas's continued

freedom would jeopardize a tight-knit community and it's

beloved animals. After all, research has shown that most mass killers usually start off torturing and killing animals. After all testimony and a recess, the judge found him guilty mostly on the basis that he worked for the S.P.C.A., and violated the codes and ethics of the S.P.C.A. He was immediately sentenced to prison, community service upon release and restitution for the euthanization of the dogs found in his basement during his arrest. I felt that the work I did was not only for Kato, but all the animals and their owners who were tortured, most who never had a clue as to what happened to their pets. I support the hearings on this most important legislation not only for Pit Bulls, but for Bull Mastiffs, Rhodesian Ridgebacks and all dogs. I am happy to say that since Thomas was incarcerated our problem has diminished greatly, with no problem in our

park. Educating people about the dangers of this barbaric money making idea, will be the backbone to the strength of this legislation.

Thank you,

Rhonda Lancaster,
Resident of Philadelphia for
Stronger Dog Laws

THOMAS M. FOGLIETTA
1ST DISTRICT, PENNSYLVANIA

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION,
RANKING MEMBER

CONGRESSIONAL URBAN CAUCUS,
CHAIRMAN

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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ANTHONY GREEN
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT-COUNSEL

July 27, 1994

Honorable Judge Quinones
Room 224, City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Dear Judge Quinones:

My office has had calls regarding the issues of dog fighting and the disappearance of animals in the area of the 300 block of Zeralda Street.

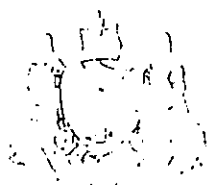
As a result of the allegations, I support the community's position in this matter.

Sincerely,

COPY

THOMAS M. FOGLIETTA
Member of Congress

TMF/dml
13/13
NP418
cc: Rhonda Lancaster



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
CITY COUNCIL
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

JOHN F. STREET
PRESIDENT
ROOM 494, CITY HALL
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19107
MU 6-3442-43
COUNCILMAN - 5TH DISTRICT

April 7, 1994

Honorable Judge Quinones
Room 224, City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

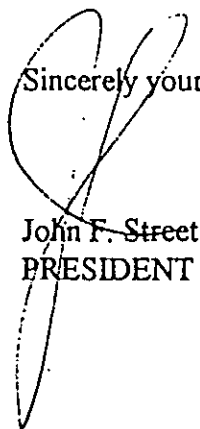
RE: CP -- 94-0122411

Dear Judge Quinones:

Darrell Clarke of my office has had several discussions with the Eighth Council District staff concerning the above captioned case. The severity of the reported allegations has led me to support the community's position in this matter. I ask you to consider all parties in reaching your final decision.

With kind regards, I am,

Sincerely yours,



John F. Street
PRESIDENT

JFS/t

Dogs, cats stolen for pit bull training

by Gloria Campisi

Daily News Staff Writer

The stolen pets are dangled from trees as "bait" for pit bull terriers being groomed for the fighting ring.

The pit bulls' owners believe they will become more ferocious with a little practice, authorities say.

The remains of more than 20 dogs and cats apparently used for pit-bull training have been found in three parks in lower Germantown since last fall, said Holly McGurgan of the Women's Humane Society.

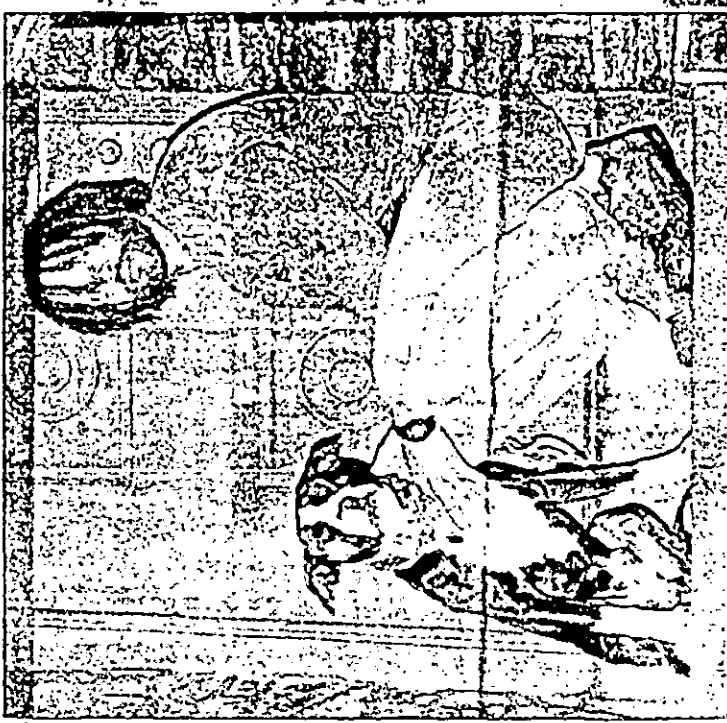
The stealing of pets that are tossed to pit bulls to be torn apart for practice "pops up in different locations throughout the city from time to time," McGurgan said.

"Right now, the only place we know it's located is Germantown." The parks are Fernhill, where some residents say the practice has dropped off since neighbors have been keeping a wary eye. Kay and Happy Hol-

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teen-agers. "We haven't been able



Barry Burton, with pit bull Boscov, is trying to end petnapping.

low.

"They kind of hang them from trees and sic the pit bulls on them," McGurgan said.

Cats are targets as well as dogs, she said. "If it's alive and it moves, it's bait," McGurgan said. "People are reporting to us that animals are still being used as bait for fighting."

The pit bulls later fight each

to catch anybody in the act," she said. "But it does seem to be the work of more than one person."

One arrest has been made in an ongoing investigation. Last No-

other, with owners and spectators placing bets on which will win and which will die. Another humane society expert said many street bettors wage \$5 on a dogfight but top level gamblers can bet more than \$1,000.

McGurgan said she didn't know if the pet kidnapping and pit-bull baiting was the work of

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vember, police arrested Alexander Thomas, 19, who lives in the neighborhood and worked briefly for the Pennsylvania SPCA, after a neighbor accused him of steal-

ing his dog.

According to a report in the Germantown Courier, the missing dog was found along with two others allegedly belonging to Thomas chained on Thomas' premises and a humane worker said the two other dogs had open wounds and appeared to have been used in dogfighting. The neighbor's dog reportedly was all right.

The two other dogs were taken to the Pennsylvania SPCA where one soon died and the other later had to be euthanized because of injuries, the paper quoted SPCA officials as saying.

Thomas faces a June 2 trial for

dogfighting, a felony that carries maximum penalties of seven years in prison and a \$15,000 fine if convicted. A theft charge was dismissed.

A resident of nearby Fernhill, Barry Burton, says he has heard dogs fighting within the last two weeks. "When the dogs are locking on each other, they don't let go," he said. "You can hear it all through the park."

Burton said he had cared for three pit bulls, including one rescued from the park, but eventually had to turn two of them over to the SPCA because they were too aggressive. □

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Dogfight Trainers Are Blamed For Missing Pets in Philadelphia

New York Times 4-25-94

PHILADELPHIA, April 24 (AP) — Residents of Northeast Philadelphia say they are losing their pets to organizers of the illegal dogfights that they often hear in city parks.

Since last year, dozens of house pets have been reported missing by residents who fear that their animals are being used as training tools for pit bull terriers that can earn trainers thousands of dollars a year.

More than 20 carcasses have been found in three parks since last summer, but the authorities said they had yet to catch a dogfight in progress, though a former humane society worker was arrested and charged with dogfighting, a felony.

Carcasses Torn Apart

Charles Spencer, an investigator for the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, said he received calls daily about dogfighting. Often, dogs are maimed or mangled beyond repair. "The animal always loses," Mr. Spencer said. "Today he wins, and tomorrow he's in another fight. You don't retire."

Holly McGurgan, spokeswoman for the Women's Humane Society, said of

the corpses: "Some have been ripped almost in half. It's pretty horrible."

Rhonda Lancaster, a professional musician, identified her mutilated 16-year-old cat, Kato, from pictures shown to her by officials investigating its disappearance in September. The police say Kato may have been pitted against a killer dog for practice before the dog fought for money.

"I think about what kind of terror they put him through, what kind of torture he went through," Ms. Lancaster said. "I try to put myself in his position to see how he must have felt. He probably had a heart attack."

In November, the police arrested Alexander Thomas, 19, of Philadelphia after neighbors accused him of stealing their dogs. Mr. Thomas faces trial on June 2. He is charged with dogfighting and would face a maximum of seven years in prison and a \$15,000 fine if convicted.

Officials said Mr. Thomas, a former S.P.C.A. employee, was keeping the animals in his house and using them as bait during practice fights. Neither Mr. Thomas nor his lawyer could be reached for comment.

Ex-SPCA driver ran dog-fighting racket

by Dave Raclier
and Gloria Campisi

Daily News Staff Writers

Alexander Thomas knows firsthand about the suffering of animals.

He worked for a nearly a month for the Pennsylvania SPCA, driving an ambulance that picked up sick and injured stray animals, and he went out with agents on cruelty complaints.

"He knew the sufferings and the needs of the animals more than a lay person," said Charles Spencer, manager of the SPCA.

But this knowledge didn't stop Thomas from adding to that suffering.

Yesterday, he pleaded guilty to charges in connection with fighting stolen dogs for sport in a Germantown park.

When Thomas, 20, was arrested last November, police and SPCA agents were shocked by what they found in his garage at Zeralda Street near Pulaski Avenue, Germantown.

They found two emaciated and dehydrated pit bulls tied by

chains too short to permit them to exercise. Their bodies bore infected wounds from fights. They had no water.

An expensive dog, that had been recently stolen from a neighbor, was in relatively good shape, but another dog died immediately and the other had to be destroyed two weeks later.

"This is bad," Spencer said at the time. "This is barbaric, is what it gets to be."

Dog fighting is going on in "quite a few places in the city" and is difficult to control unless authorities get a tip, Spencer said last night. "Usually, it's after the fact," he said.

Thomas said in a statement to Detective Gary McDonald that he and his friends don't bet on the dog fights they run with stolen animals in Fernhill Park, under the Roosevelt Expressway.

"If you don't bet on the dogs, why do you and your friends do it?" McDonald asked.

"To know what dogs to breed," replied Thomas, who pleaded guilty to charges of cruelty to animals and receiving stolen property before Common Pleas Judge Nitza I. Quinones Alejandro.

Sentence was deferred. He faces a possible jail term of three-and-a-half to seven years and a \$15,000 fine.

When McDonald asked Thomas if he knew anything about a rash of dog thefts in the Germantown area, he said, "We all got our dogs the same way. Mine was stolen. I guess theirs were also."

Assistant District Attorney Carmen Lineberger said Thomas was arrested after Damon Williams, a neighbor, found his expensive Pressa Canario dog chained in the cellar of Thomas' home near two battered pit bulls. His dog was unharmed.

Williams said his dog was stolen from his yard. He said someone told him to ask Thomas about it.

"I wanted him for breeding, not fighting," Thomas said to the detective. He claimed he bought the animal for \$25.

Thomas said he doesn't get medical attention for any of the wounded dogs after the fights.

"I take care of them myself," he said.

Neighbors and SPCAs want an end to dogfighting in Fernhill Park

By JUDY HARTHEIMER
Associate Editor

Starting about two years ago, Morris Street block captain Orrothea King, she would occasionally find the carcass of a dead animal in Fernhill Park, across the street from her Southwest Germantown home. But in recent months, say King and other concerned residents near the park, the problem has exploded.

Residents and SPCA officials have found the mutilated bodies of numerous cats, as well as several pit bull dogs, in or near the park. That, and unmistakable sounds coming from inside the sprawling 38-acre park at different times have convinced them that dogfighting, as well as the baiting of fighting dogs with other animals has been taking place in the park. Fernhill Park is bordered by Morris Street and Wissahickon Avenue between Abbottsford Road and Berkley Street.

King and other neighbors went to 14th District police and both the Pennsylvania SPCA and Women's Humane Society with their con-

cerns. Last week, a Southwest Germantown man was ordered to stand trial on one count of dogfighting, a felony under state law.

Nearby resident Rhonda Lancaster found out about the problem of dogfighting in a way that was both personal and painful. On September 21, Lancaster let her 16-year-old black and white cat, Kato, out as usual in the morning. "I let him out and he didn't come back in the evening," she says.

She put flyers out when Kato didn't show up by the next morning, says Lancaster. Then, several people called and told her there was dogfighting in the neighborhood, and suggested she check at the Women's Humane Society at 29th and Clearfield streets.

There, Lancaster was approached by Cruelty Investigator George Bangle. "He asked me to come in back and look at pictures," she says. The photos were of mutilated cats that had been found in or near the park. One of the pictures, says Lancaster,

was of her Kato.

She was told Kato and another cat were found near the park in what, in dogfighting parlance, is called a "sparring circle" — a pit or circle in the dirt where dogs are placed to face off. "I was the first person to actually identify a cat out of all the cats they had found that had been destroyed or mutilated in this particular fashion," says Lancaster. It would not have been hard for someone to lure Kato to his death, she says. "He was a very people oriented cat." Ironically, she says, "the night before he disappeared we had a meeting here and he went over to everybody so they would pet him." The next morning she unknowingly let Kato out for what would be the last time.

King, Lancaster and other concerned residents organized a meeting on October 19 of last year with representatives from the Women's Humane Society and Pennsylvania SPCA as well as the police, says King. The residents outlined their concerns and got the SPCAs to agree to investigate, she says.

Spencer says that a change in state law about a year and half ago made dogfighting a felony crime, punishable by up to seven years in prison and a maximum fine of \$15,000. Chargeable under the law, he says, are owners of fighting animals, promoters of fights, owners of property used for fighting, those who bet on fights and even

(DOGS from page 1)

mere spectators. The SPCA, says Spencer, is officially designated by the state to enforce that and other laws relating to animals.

So far, one neighborhood resident has been charged with dogfighting. At a preliminary hearing last Tuesday, Alexander Thomas, 20, of the 300 block of Zeralda Street, was ordered to stand trial on one count of dogfighting, and one count of receiving stolen goods.

The charges stemmed from an incident last November 10, say Pennsylvania SPCA and police officials, in which police and SPCA agents went to Thomas' house with a warrant based on information that a dog stolen from a neighbor would be found there. In addition to the missing dog, SPCA agents also removed two other dogs, allegedly belonging to Thomas.

"They weren't in good condition, I'll tell you that," says Gary Lovett. The two dogs were taken to the Pennsylvania SPCA, where one died almost immediately, and another had to be euthanized several weeks later, according to SPCA officials.

According to Spencer, the second dog failed to respond to treatment for infected wounds under his car and on his face, as well as diarrhea and eczema. "He had reached the suffering stage and our veterinarian recommended euthanasia," says Spencer.

At last week's hearing, fellow investigator Leonard Knox says he testified that the basement where the dogs were found chained was unsanitary, that the two dogs seized by the SPCA "were emaciated, had open wounds and appeared to have been used in dogfighting, in my opinion."

Also testifying at the hearing

was North Detective Division Sgt. Gary McDonnell. McDonnell told Judge Lynwood Blount that Thomas admitted to him in a statement that he had participated in dogfighting. McDonnell says Thomas told him he fought dogs "in the park" or "on the baseball field," which is also in Fernhill Park.

Judge Blount ordered Thomas to stand trial on the one count of dogfighting, and a single count of receiving stolen goods. A charge of theft against Thomas was dismissed, says Assistant District Attorney Vernon Chestnut, because there was no direct evidence that Thomas had taken the allegedly stolen neighbor's dog found in his basement.

It is not clear what plea the defendant will enter to the charges. Thomas' lawyer, Lee Mandell, responded with a "no comment" when asked about his client.

Ironically, Thomas was em-

Spokesmen for both SPCAs cur-
Fernhill Park, but won't comment on specific evidence collected so far. "We were aware that there were problems going on in there," says Pennsylvania SPCA Cruelty Investigator Gary Lovett. "We were finding carcasses of dead animals in the park. It's a group of people that I have been told have been in there (fighting dogs)," he says.

"Dogfighting, whether you know it or not, is a felony and carries a substantial penalty," says Pennsylvania SPCA Shelter Manager Charles Spencer.

Spencer says that a change in state law about a year and half ago made dogfighting a felony crime, punishable by up to seven years in prison and a maximum fine of \$15,000. Chargeable under the law, he says, are owners of fighting animals, promoters of fights, owners of property used for fighting, those who bet on fights and even

(DOGS on page 4)

mer as an ambulance driver for the Pennsylvania SPCA, acknowledges Charles Spencer. Spencer says Thomas was hired on July 28 of last year and fired less than a month later, on August 25.

Spencer says Thomas was hired because he seemed to have some solid knowledge of animals. "He was fired upon information received that he was into dogfighting," says Spencer. The information, he says, "was actual evidence, it wasn't suspicion."

The concerned neighbors of Fernhill Park say they intend to continue their vigilance, to try and put an end to the use of the park for dogfighting. One of those neighbors is Barry Burton, who lives on Abbottsford Road.

Burton says that he and a neighbor often walk their own dogs in Fernhill Park, keeping an eye out for anyone using the park for negative activity.

Burton owns three pit bull ter-

dogfighters. "Someone tried to kill one of the dogs, (they) tried to hang him in the park," he says. The second dog was found tied outside a house, says Burton. "His whole neck was ripped open. He had mange and worms. They (veterinarians) had to shave the whole side of his neck, throat and head."

Both dogs have recovered now, he says, and show no signs physically or in their behavior of the abuse they suffered. All three pit bulls have proven to be good family pets, he adds, even around his 4-year-old daughter, as well as other animals in the house.

"We have two cats and four rabbits. (The dogs) don't bother them. They just want someone to love them," he says. "That's all they ever wanted."

Anyone with information on dogfighting or missing pet animals is asked to call investigators at either the Pennsylvania SPCA, 29th and Clearfield streets, or the Women's Humane