

Suffield Veterinary Hospital August 2025 Patient of the Month

Meet Cocco, a six-year-old spayed female Havanese, rescued and nurtured by Donna Coyle of West Springfield. A little over 13 years ago Donna walked into a pet store and fell in love with a tiny black Havanese puppy. He was 4 months old and had spent most of his life in a crate at the pet store. She asked if he had come from a puppy mill and the clerk assured her that, "no he didn't, the kennel had been inspected by the Dept. of Agriculture." After some research, she later realized that he had indeed come from a puppy mill. Even though Mr. Murphy was a little quirky, the family loved him for 11 years.

Donna has always wanted to "give back" for having supported a puppy factory. The years 2023-2024 were difficult. Donna's husband, and two beloved dogs, including Mr. Murphy, passed away, and her son married and moved to Nova Scotia. Her bustling home was now shared just with Bentley, a Basset Hound, who developed separation anxiety after losing all his "pack" except Donna.

Donna decided both she and Bentley needed another dog and found a group in Vermont that rescues small breeds, mostly from puppy mills in Ohio. One look at Cocco's eyes and she was hooked. Donna describes some of her experiences:

"She was a 5-year-old Havanese and I thought she's mature — not nearly as much work as a puppy. So began our adventure. The rescue team was looking for a home with another dog for Cocco to learn how to be a dog. Until I picked her up on Veteran's Day 2024. I thought that I knew enough to rescue her — after all I had had dogs my whole life, but I didn't realize how fractured puppy mill dogs really are. She had spent her whole life in a cage in a barn making babies. The reality is that dogs in puppy mills are treated like chickens — they are not named or held, loved or even given a toy to play with. They are only considered a commodity to make a profit for the owners.



"Everything was new for Cocco. She had never ridden in a car, lived in a house, had rules about where to potty. What's this walking on a leash thing? Toys why? Some strange human who wants to pet her (ugh) and the biggest dog she has ever seen — a 75 lb. Basset Hound who was going to teach her to be a real dog.

"Initially I felt guilty putting her in an open-topped pen, but I soon realized that she had spent most of her life in a cage, so it was her safe space and also helped her not to have accidents in the house. I put it in the living room next to Bentley's dog bed.

"This has been a true adventure for nine months — slowly watching her come out of her shell a little at a time. Bentley has done a great job, so much so that when he recently had to have major surgery and was hospitalized, she moped, her tail uncurled, and she wouldn't play with any toys. When he finally came home, they kissed, her tail curled up again and she slept with him in his pen while he recovered.

"Out in the yard, she is still leashed. She has to meet people on her own terms. She will come up to smell them but will not let them pet her. She is only now letting me touch her and will once in a while come up to my legs and kiss my ankle. The best part is watching her do zoomies around the house and carry a rug down the hall shaking it and growling. She has toys that she plays with now and loves snacks! A heart wrenching part is when a television commercial comes on with puppies that are crying, she immediately stops whatever she is doing to search for all the babies she never got to keep.

"I'm glad that I rescued her, but I will caution that it's not for the faint of heart, and change is very slow to happen. I celebrate small victories. Once in a while when I go to pick her up and she is so scared that she poops, I think I could have adopted a puppy that was a blank slate that I could cuddle and kiss. But then I look into her eyes and I know that she was always meant to be with Bentley and me. Cause aren't we all a bit quirky?"

For reminding us that puppy mills are still supplying our pet shops, and how damaging that life is for the "breeding stock," we thankfully name Cocco our September 2025 Suffield Veterinary Hospital Patient of the month.

Suffield Veterinary Hospital

Dr. Ann Huntington ❖ Dr. Anita Sabellico ❖ Dr. Dawn Burke

Dr. Daniel Rothbart ❖ Dr. Emilie Laston

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