

Vernon the Pig Reminds Us of Why We Do What We Do

That critical link between animal abuse and domestic violence is clearly illustrated time and time again. This time, the innocent victim is a very sweet, very badly injured pot belly pig, who with the help of rescue workers from other organizations made his way to the gates of Happy Trails. It's often difficult to wrap your head around the violent acts of others, and it is indeed tough to hear about what happened to this little guy. However, together let's try to focus on the fact that many good people already have outweighed the one bad person in this case, and that the team of people working together for the good of the pig is nothing short of incredible. So be prepared, for here is the story of Vernon.

A call came in to Happy Trails on Friday, Sept. 11th, from Chris Fontes, a rescue worker on the

Emergency Response Team at PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). Could the Happy Trails crew help catch an injured pig in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on Saturday morning? We wanted to rush over and help, but the timing was not great on our end. Though we had no-one available to drive to Pennsylvania the next day, we offered to help by accepting the pig into the rehab program at Happy Trails once they caught him. Chris was elated, knowing they would have somewhere safe to place the pig once he was in good hands.

It was later on Saturday we finally got the news about the pig and how his rescue came about.

A pissed-off man with apparently a violent temper who was angry at his wife took out his anger on the family pet, a precious, chubby black and white pot belly pig.

He allegedly repeatedly and violently stabbed the pig with a knife and beat him with a long, solid metal pipe. The pig laid in the yard for about a week before someone called PETA for help.

During that week,

the pig suffered with open wounds and horrific injuries from the beating.

On Saturday, Sept. 12th, rescue workers found the pig still alive and laying under a tarp, his now-week-old wounds covered in maggots. A veterinarian was called to the scene, and he sedated the pig to check his injuries. The vet didn't think the prognosis was very good, and he gave him about a 20% chance of survival. The stabs wounds covered the pig's face, abdomen, legs and hind quarters. Some of the flesh was dead, and his left ear had been nearly severed from his head and was now hanging by necrotic tissue.

At the direction of the field service vet, Cammy Ripley, a rescue worker with Sunrise Sanctuary located in Marysville, Ohio, and her crew, transported the pig to OSU (Ohio State University)



Sweet Vernon's left eye was badly damaged by the beating he sustained. His left ear had to be surgically amputated by the veterinarians at Ohio State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, where he remained for over a week.



Though Vern suffered a terrible injustice, his spirit, his optimistic outlook on life, and his love for people remains intact. He is friendly, kind, polite and loves belly rubs. Apparently Vernon chooses to forgive and move on, putting the violence of his past behind him and concentrating on healing and on a bright future.



The folks from Sunrise Sanctuary in Marysville handled the transportation of Vernon from Lancaster, PA, to Ohio State. They stayed with him and visited him throughout his stay at OSU. Happy Trails considers it an honor to work together with other rescue organizations for the higher good of the animals. With everyone working together, great things can be achieved!



(Above and left) Here open knife wounds on Vernon's legs show just two of many punctures across his abdomen, legs and face.

Veterinary Teaching Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

Upon arrival at the vet hospital, an emergency crew met them and began to work on the pig immediately.

After examining him closely under anesthesia, the vets determined that the pig, now named Vernon, should be given a chance to survive and live a full life. As many of you folks who work in the health profession know, any wounds left untreated for a week will start to heal, and stitching the open wounds up was not an option when Vernon got to OSU. His left eye was swollen shut, and there was immediate concern that the eye would have to be removed. An assortment of knife wounds covered his legs and abdomen, some open and raw. He was covered in scabs from scrapes from either the knife or the metal pipe where it cut into his skin. His wounds were cleaned up and his left ear was surgically removed, or at least what remained of his ear. They also determined that his eye was intact and that he wouldn't lose the eye, but if he would ever regain his sight was unknown. Everything was cleaned, treated and bandaged, and the pig was taken to a stall to wake up. During this time, the rescue crew from Marysville held vigil with him and waited to make sure he would not

wake up alone.

The pig's original name was "Hammie". Somehow it's funny to some pig owners to name the animal after the food they represent to them. I can't tell you how many people think they are being original by naming pigs Hammie, Kevin Bacon or Pork Chop. I personally feel it's disrespectful to the animal. The rescue workers from Sunrise Sanctuary re-named the



(Above right and bottom left) Both of Vernon's ears were badly damaged during the vicious attack. His left ear had to be amputated by the surgeons at Ohio State.



the Happy Trails logo truck, and sat on a pile of soft, comfy blankets like the king of his castle. He rooted around for a little while, then laid down and slept for nearly the entire two hour ride back to the sanctuary.

As we entered the front gates, an assortment of excited staff and volunteers were on hand to meet and greet our newest arrival. Immediately a ramp appeared from nowhere and was snugged up to the back seat so he could exit the vehicle safely. A huge, satin comforter was laid on the ground in front of him so he wouldn't have to walk on any rocks as he headed into the vet clinic. Once inside the vet clinic, he explored his world, ate a few snacks, and laid down in a heap of comforters for yet another nap, this time surrounded by a group of well-



little guy, Vernon — a fitting name for a handsome, lovable pig.

Authorities plan to charge the owner with domestic violence, vandalism, and animal cruelty.

In the meantime, Vernon spent more than a week at OSU being treated for multiple injuries. While PETA was kind enough to pay for his initial expenses, Happy Trails has picked up the bill for the second part of his stay and of course all the follow-up treatment and special care.

When it was time for Vern to be released from the hospital and come to Happy Trails, Board Member, Walter Shields, and myself went to pick him up. The little guy was absolutely precious, and we introduced ourselves to him as his new caretakers and friends. He was loaded into the back seat of



(Above top) Vernon quickly settled into the back seat of the logo truck for the two hour ride from Ohio State University in Columbus to Happy Trails in Ravennam not complaining one bit. He and Happy Trails Board Member, Walter Shields, became fast friends.

(Above left) Vern fell asleep snuggled against his pink stuffed toy pig companion he aquired while in the hospital. The cherished toy was compliments of his admirers and rescue workers from Sunrise Sanctuary in Marysville. We made sure to bring his little stuffed buddy with him on this next leg of his journey to a new life.

(Above) Vernon is carefully escorted out of the back seat of the truck and down the ramp. His little piggy hooves touched down on a teal-colored satin comforter to help him on his way walking into Happy Trails mini vet clinic.

wishers wanting to show their support for Vernon.

There have been times when he seems like he just can't get comfortable, and as things are healing, they are also starting to itch. Vernon is more than happy to itch his face, sides, belly and butt on anything and everything within reach.

If any person or animal has a reason to be grumpy, aggressive, angry, or even hateful, it would be Vernon. To realize the pain and suffering he experienced, anyone would understand if he were fearful and distant. However, he is none of the above. Vern does not appear to hold anything that happened in this past against the loving, caring people who are now in his world. Vernon adores belly rubs, he cooperates to have his open wounds cleaned and scrubbed, he takes his medication like a champ, and he stands politely while we examine him multiple times throughout the day. Vernon is very forgiving, very sweet, and very easy to fall in love with.

He looks at you out of that one eye he can still see with, and comes over to itch the bad eye on the side of your leg. You tickle his lumpy, stabbed belly and he falls over in bliss to have his tummy rubbed and his wounds tended to. Offer him a piece of banana and he takes it very gently out of your hand.

We can learn so much from Vernon about forgiving, about healing, and about moving forward in life.

In animal rescue, we have learned that forgiveness doesn't mean cruel owners still can't be prosecuted - they can and they are. In fact, we help make sure they are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. But that also means that we don't let the past hinder or restrict a bright future for the animals, for that is the goal — to help them heal and find a peaceful, loving home.

There are several ways you can help Vernon.

Adopt: We will be seeking an indoor home for this handsome fella. He is potty trained, loves blankies, and should live indoors where it is heated to help him get through the remainder of his healing processes during the winter season. He should be placed in an environment free from stress, and if other animals are present, they should be calm and gentle.

Donate: PETA graciously picked up Vernon's expenses through the Wednesday of his stay at OSU. From Wednesday on, Happy Trails is picking up Vernon's tab, and that includes not only his hospital expenses, but his daily care, bedding, grain, medication, and staff time to address his special needs. Donations may be sent to Happy Trails, 5623 New Milford Road, Ravenna, Ohio 44266 with a note for Vernon; donations can be made via the website at www.happytrailsfarm.org and make a note the donation is for Vernon; or you can call in a donation to the office at 330-296-5914 and donate via Master Card or Visa.



Vernon's many visitors include (from top) Jason Wolboldt, Walter Shields, Hope Evans (who gave Vern his meds in a delicious cup cake), and myself, Annette Fisher. His fans are many, as he is great teacher and his story has touched many hearts.

moves along. Please continue to send him good energy and keep him in your loving prayers.



(Above) Here Vern ventures outdoors at Happy Trails to see what he can see. His suite in the mini-vet clinic allows him indoor/outdoor access to either a warm, comfy room or to go outside to explore the great outdoors. He can see other pigs safely through a fence, so he can have friends while recovering. His spirit of adventure has not been dimmed, and his curiosity often gets the better of him. He loves to root and find treasures in the grass and dirt that only pigs know about. He seems to know that life has taken a turn for the better, and for right this very minute, Vern is content.

(Right) Vern LOVES to nest, and he puts things exactly where he wants them to be. That includes blankets, comforters, straw, and his pink stuffed toy pig. The bright pink ointment visible on Vernon is a product called SWAT, and it keeps flies away from wounds.

See pages 6 and 7 for more pictures.

Graphic alert: pages 8 and 9 contain pictures of Vern's rescue and exam at OSU and the weapons allegedly used.



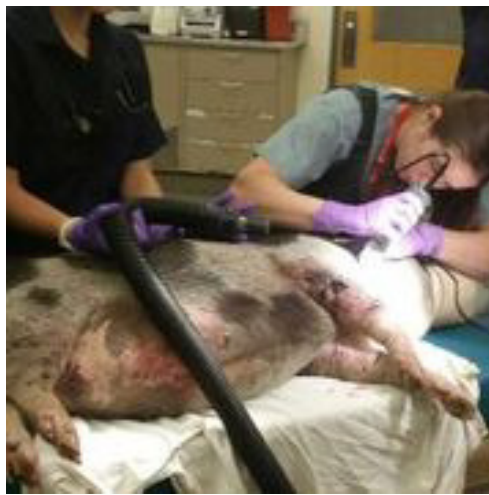


(Clockwise from top left) Vern at OSU with Cammie Ripley of Sunrise Sanctuary; Vern visiting with Hope Evans at Happy Trails; Vern snoozing on his pig stuffed pig, and a close-up of his amputated ear; Walter Shields and an OSU staff member peering into Vern's stall at OSU as we prepared Vern for the great journey back to Happy Trails



*(Clockwise from top left)
Vern in his recovery stall at
OSU; Vern enjoying a
sunbeam with his stuffed
pink pig friend; Vern
completely zonked out
under a warm blankie on a
chilly night*

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This group of photos is from Vernon's surgery at Ohio State University. The photo above shows the anesthesia mask used to sedate Vern for his exam and surgery to remove all the dead tissue on his ear.





(Top left and right) These two photos show the necrotic tissue of Vern's poor little ear.

(Left) This is one of the deep knife wounds to the top of Vernon's leg.

(Bottom left and right) The tools allegedly used to beat Vern were a knife and a metal pipe of sorts.

