

# LI Kids

A teacher who's an adoptive mom gives 3rd-graders a lesson in family

G18

# Life

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TALK ABOUT IT

What do you think of this way of helping animals? Do you have another way?

NEWSDAY.COM/LILIFE

Some tough guys rescue little helpless animals

# Shock and awww

G4



NEWSDAY PHOTO / DANIEL GOODRICH

Rescue Ink members gather at the Save-A-Pet Animal Rescue and Adoption Center in Port Jefferson Station for a group portrait with animals they have rescued.

# RESCUE INK

Riding shotgun with a band of **TATTOOED MEN**  
in search of pets in trouble

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**T**hey're a reality show waiting to happen — tattooed tough talkers with a soft spot for feral kitties and abandoned puppies.

Their white cargo van pulls in front of a ranch house in Copiague. Mike Tattoo — that's it, just

Mike Tattoo, and chances are you'll recall the skulls inked above his brow far more readily than his surname — bounds up the steps.

Jumping out of the front passenger seat, Robert, a corporate caterer from Smithtown who also declines to give his last name, joins Mike Tattoo on the brick landing. His regular-guy appearance is a stark contrast to the black panthers,

palm trees and bats that cover virtually every available inch of Mike's exposed skin.

Their group, Rescue Ink, has received a complaint from a neighbor that there is a dog in the garage that is never permitted out.

They knock on the front door, and it opens. The two men explain why they are there, and ask to see the dog.

The rest of the van watches

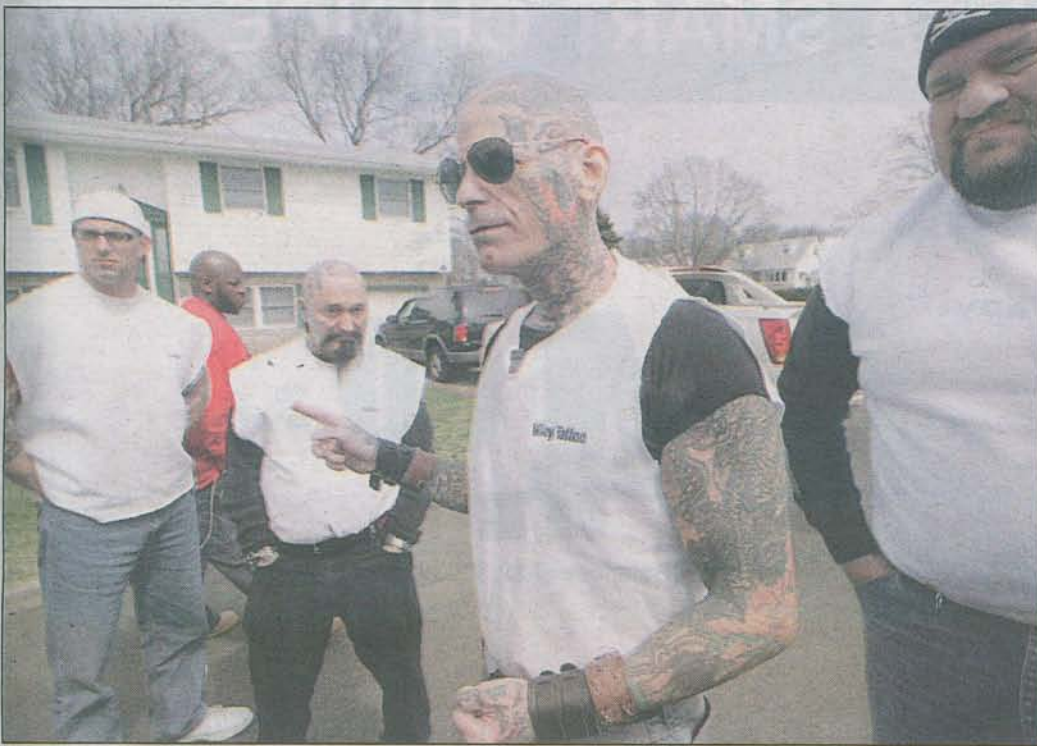
with interest. There's Angel, a retired city cop with a penchant for meringue and salsa. Batso, a 74-year-old with a Buddha tattooed on his bald pate and a skinny pigtail. Big Ant, who, at 6-foot-1 and 320 pounds, lives up to his name. Desi, the feral cat specialist with the skull-and-crossbones belt buckle.

The door begins to close, and Mike issues the stage

voice he honed playing Max Sands, Prisoner No. 99S812 on the HBO prison series "Oz": "If you want to call the police, we'd love it to happen . . ."

Back in the van, there's G, a burly landscaper who says that as a child he used Popsicle sticks to set birds' broken wings. Johnny O, a personal-security expert who makes it his mission to save dogs used as pit bull bait. Sal, who lost his

On a dog call in Copiague, Johnny O, G, Batso, Mike Tattoo and Big Ant, from left, await police. Below: Big Ant relaxes in Port Jefferson Station with a rescued Cano Corso, an Italian mastiff.



NEWSDAY PHOTO / JULIA GAINES



NEWSDAY PHOTO / DANIEL GOODRICH

job as a maintenance manager when he left on one too many Rescue Ink calls, and Biagi, whose specialty is "hard to handle" dogs.

The house door closes with finality, and through it the two men on the steps hear the phone call to police.

"It's on," someone in the van announces, and the full force of Rescue Ink steps out on to the blacktop to cheerfully await the coming Suffolk police cruiser.

It soon does, along with a SWAT-style emergency service vehicle as a backup. This is, after all, a scary-looking crew. But the introductions are cordial as the Rescue Ink men explain their concerns. The officer goes into the house, and the men mill around, noting the piles of dog feces outside the garage door.

For all the histrionics of the Copiague showdown, Rescue Ink has a quieter, subtler side. Earlier in the week, some of them delivered a doghouse to a pit bull without shelter in Bellport, and stayed out until 3 a.m. trapping feral cats in Flanders. In the back of the van is a bag of cat food for a woman "who won't eat anything herself until her cats are fed," Robert says.

Barely 6 months old, Rescue Ink is sort of a Hell's Angels' Toys for Tots drive by way of the Guardian Angels. Its members met through their passion for classic cars, then learned they also shared an interest in rescuing animals. Their name — written in Gothic script across the backs of white sweatshirts — is derived from their penchant for tattoos, which you might argue go along nicely with the shaved heads and industrial-strength biceps.

A dozen or so guys make up this rescue group, and a couple are missing today. Four are Long Islanders, two are from

Connecticut, the rest from the boroughs. All but three are married, and most are either retired or in jobs that give them the flexibility to take off a day — or two or three.

With equal doses of irreverence and intensity, they tackle the problems that no one else wants — business owners who poison feral cats, petty thieves who steal beloved pooches, fake rescuers who resell the animals relinquished to them.

"People look to us as a way

out" of the bureaucracy that can engulf animal-abuse reports, says Big Ant from the driver's seat. "They're used to 'Let's do the paperwork, fill out this form.' We don't do paperwork."

Not surprisingly, law-enforcement takes a somewhat dim view. "We don't encourage people to take the law into their own hands. Doing so could lead to charges against

See RESCUE on G8



NEWSDAY PHOTO / DANIEL GOODRICH

Batso, Mike Tattoo and G, pussycats when it comes to rescued critters, visit Save-A-Pet in Port Jefferson Station.

Batso, at right, and G, below, pose with animals they have helped rescue, during a recent visit to the Save-A-Pet Animal Rescue shelter in Port Jefferson Station.



NEWSDAY PHOTOS / DANIEL GOODRICH

# RESCUE INK

## RESCUE from G4

yourself," Tim Motz, public information director for the Suffolk County Police Department, said in an e-mailed statement. "We advise people to let the proper authorities handle such situations."

In the last month, Rescue Ink has gained publicity for its work in three "dognapping" cases: a bulldog taken from outside a midtown Manhattan supermarket, two corgis snatched after competing at a dog show in Edison, N.J., and a toothless 10-year-old Maltese stolen from a car on the Upper West Side.

All four dogs were recovered after Rescue Ink hit the pavement, spreading the word among local drug dealers, fencers and neighborhood wise guys that they weren't going away until the animals were returned.

One thing they have going for them is the shock factor. "When we show up," shrugs Mike Tattoo, who's a strict vegetarian, "it's obvious we're not here to play checkers."

In just a few short weeks, Rescue Ink's grass-roots efforts have reached critical mass. Robert, who usually orchestrates the Rescue Ink

missions from his Manhattan office, says the group receives 1,200 e-mails a day at rescueink.org, which crashed the other day because the server was overwhelmed. He logs about a hundred phone calls at 631-RESCUEINK (631-737-2834) daily.

Rescue Ink does not deploy lightly, Robert adds: The group checks out complaints to weed out disgruntled neighbors and scam calls. Helping out in this effort is Manhattan-based private investigator Vincent Parco, star of a now-defunct reality show, "Parco P.I." "I love working with them — they really have a heart for dogs and animals in general," he says.

As for venturing into vigilantism, "one thing we always make sure is that we don't cross the line," says Robert, claiming that none of the Rescue Ink members has a criminal record, and none of the missions has resulted in an arrest or other conflict with law enforcement.

And not all their calls end in action. Rescue Ink started the day at a Farmingdale aerospace company whose owner, they've been tipped, has been feeding antifreeze to the feral cats in his side lot. They way-lay a UPS truck to find out the

company's exact location, only to find the owner is not there. Everyone stays in the van — they'll visit again when he is.

For all their traffic-stopping looks, "they're total mushes with the animals," says Dori Scofield, founder of Save-A-Pet Animal Rescue in Port Jefferson, which adopts out some of the animals Rescue Ink saves.

The vast majority of animal rescuers are women, and "it's nice to have some brawn behind you," she adds. "I'm 5 feet tall and 90 pounds, and they can get people to talk when I can't."

There is a powerful message in a bunch of heavily inked hot-rod aficionados banding together to show that animals, with their vulnerable reliance on humans, are not only in need of protection, but worthy of it.

Back in Copiague, the police officer exits the home to say that he observed a very content black Lab puppy romping around. The other dog, according to the residents, was at the groomer.

Their suspicions still not assuaged, Rescue Ink piles back into the van. At the very least, "this guy will be on his toes," says Mike Tattoo. "Because we'll come back."

And with that, Big Ant revs up the van, off to the next stop.

