

# From Rags To RICHES

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Aruba's Cunucu dogs, also referred to as Coconut Retrievers or West Pointers, are the island's charming ambassadors. Many visiting tourists find a mutt to love while vacationing here. The foundlings make amazing pets once nurtured back to health. Intelligent, resourceful, and often quite handsome, they are more resilient than any pedigree beauty, and more grateful than any aristocrat would ever be. And they deserve our attention. Animal Rights

## Personal stories starring "Man's best friend"

Aruba (ARA) has been making progress here in teaching locals to spay and neuter their dogs, but it is a long process; education takes time. Meanwhile, if you fall in love and would like to take your newly found friend back home with you, it is a very simple process and the local vets would be happy to assist.

So, what's a Cunucu dog? The definition changes every few years. Once upon a time when Labrador Retrievers were in fashion, the

local mutts showed great resemblance to that lovable breed. Then *101 Dalmatians* became a Hollywood hit and every homeless dog on Aruba displayed the irresistible spotty look in some form or fashion. Recently, pit bulls have become the preferred companion of Aruba's testosterone-driven, young male population (although the pit bull breed common to Aruba lacks the aggression and unpredictability of the American pit bull). Many stray dogs I now see sport slanted eyes and square heads, befitting their pedigree roots. Look closely and you may even come across a streamlined, docile mutt

with greyhound genes, as a few years ago a slew of racing rejects were rescued and brought here. It is true what they say: "Mutt make the best dogs." Genetics and Mother Nature pass along the best of traits, yielding a smart and savvy pooch with great resilience, survival instincts, and a lack of the health problems that often plague the pure-bred. In an effort to attract some attention to the goodness of our local dog breed, we decided to collect a handful of heartwarming Rags to Riches stories for you, starring some of the island's cute four-legged friends.



### Are Nine Dogs Too Many?

Susan and Ewald Biemans, the owners of Bucuti Beach Resort & Tara Suites, own at the moment, nine formerly homeless Cunucu dogs. "The dogs all crossed our paths," says Susan, "and they now live with us like our children." Hobo, dog #1, was fed by guests at the Bucuti Beach Resort. When they left, they cried for assistance; they wanted Hobo to have a home. Softhearted Ewald immediately scooped him up. To this day, they enjoy a special bond. "He is my

walking stick," jokes the famous hotelier in reference to his loyal morning-walk partner.

Another proud member of the clan is Smokey. Her homeless, pregnant mother roamed the neighborhood. Then mom brought her just-born pups to live with Susan and Ewald. They managed to find homes for the entire family, except Smokey, which they kept.

Fred and Ginger, a brother and sister duo, were dropped off by a tourist who knew the Biemans' weakness for sweetness. "They danced into our hearts," Ewald reveals. Then diminutive

### SPECIAL FEATURE

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Pasha followed Ewald home from Fisherman's Huts, and Tiger just looked so lost and lovable, he could not be left behind.

DotCom, a Dalmatian derivative and the bravest of the Biemans' dogs, wedged himself half-starved into the small space between the stone fence and the electronic gate in search of food, and did not back off when the resident pack snarled and barked ferociously at him. He was determined to do or die. He fearlessly persevered in search of a better life. "And his story," says Susan, "is the most heartbreaking

of all the adoptees, because he survived, yet his sister did not make it through the night." Sadly, or perhaps fortunately, DotCom and his sister were the dogs that propelled Susan and Ewald into the role of activists.

"It is simply unimaginable to turn a blind eye on domestic animals who need our help and who are dependent on us," states Susan. "Feeding a stray? Neuter or spay," she adds to sum up her philosophy regarding responsible ownership.