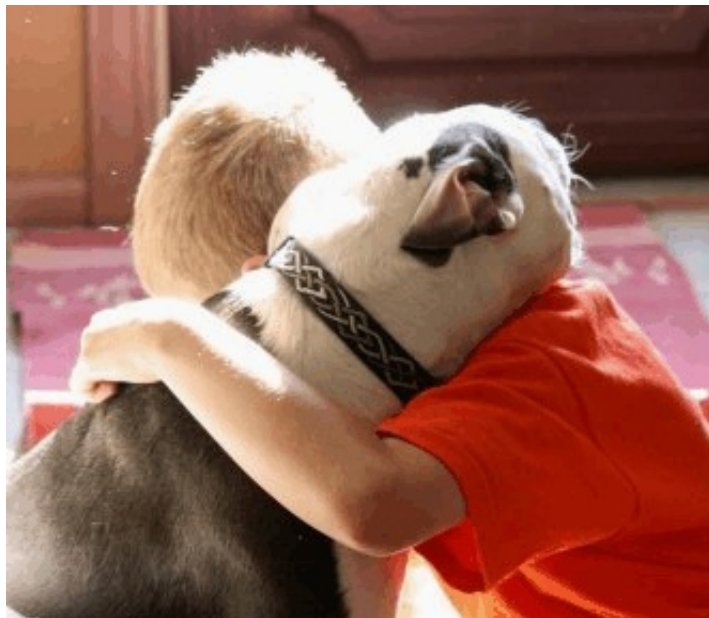


Forsaken No More

Reclaiming the Truth to Save Man's Best Friend



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“At perhaps no time in history has mankind been as ignorant of natural canine behavior as we are today. . . how easily we forsake the dogs rather than take responsibility for their behavior is a sad testament to how well humans fulfill their commitment to the canine/human bond. This is perhaps the ultimate act of betrayal which humans have inflicted on our canine companions - the refusal to own what is ours, what we have created.”

- Karen Delise¹

America is a nation of dog lovers. Dogs come in so many shapes and sizes that we often forget that they are all one species of animal. Forty-three million households have seventy-three million dogs. We spend billions of dollars each year on their care. Many of us consider dogs to be family members. We often hold our values regarding companion animals above the values of many other cultures.

There is a dark side to our relationship with dogs, however, which has become increasingly disturbing in recent decades. We have surrendered what we know about the human-dog bond and have allowed ourselves to be swept away by media reporting which is biased, at best, and which has the effect of being deadly, at worst. There is no dog more misunderstood, or more feared, in our country than the dog commonly referred to as the “pit bull.” This is our fault and it is our responsibility.

We must work to turn the tide of public opinion and perception about pit bulls by debunking the myths about them through fair and unbiased shelter adoption programs which allow them to join our communities and which allow people to see the dogs for what they really are and not for what they are feared to be. It’s time to reclaim the truth. It’s time to save man’s best friend.

What is a Pit Bull Anyway?

A pit bull *is not* a breed of dog. It is a term which is used to describe a group of dogs which most often include three specific breeds: the American Pit Bull Terrier,^{2,3} the American Staffordshire Terrier⁴ and the Staffordshire Bull Terrier.^{3,4} Although there is some disagreement regarding the origins of these breeds, the organizations which register them report that all three breeds are descended from crosses between Bulldogs and Terriers in 19th century England, Ireland and Scotland.^{2,3,4} Because of the similarities between the breeds, some dogs are dual registered with more than one organization.⁵ It is universally accepted that these dogs are descended from dogs who were originally bred for “bull baiting” and “bear baiting” hundreds of years ago and that after these forms of public entertainment became illegal in 1835, dog fighting became a popular replacement.

The phrase “pit bull” is also commonly used by many people to describe a number of other dogs who are presumed, based on appearance alone, to be pit bulls or pit bull mixes.⁶ There are more than 20 breeds of dogs that have similar appearances and are commonly mistaken for pit bulls. It is almost impossible for most people to accurately identify a pit bull.^{7,8,15} (For purposes of this paper, the phrases “pit bull” and “bully breeds” are used to describe these breeds of dogs and all other dogs who are presumed to be these breeds based on appearance.)

A Case of Mistaken Identity

In the Summer of 2007, animal control officers in Kansas City, Kansas, seized a dog named “Niko” from Mike and Amy Johnson for violating the city’s ban against “harboring” pit bulls. After Niko was seized, he remained in the custody of animal control authorities and lived in a kennel, losing weight and developing health problems. It took an eight-month legal battle and a DNA test on Niko before the city agreed with what the Johnsons (and their paperwork) had said all along: that Niko was a Boxer mix.⁹

Even though tragic stories like the one above have become more common in an age of breed bans, identifying the breed of a dog which comes from documented lineage is normally a relatively straightforward process. Visually identifying dogs of unknown parentage, however, is hardly an accurate process. Sometimes dogs just don’t look like their parents and many dogs look like a variety of breeds, based on their mixed ancestry. Breed assignments of shelter dogs are ordinarily based on what dogs look like to someone at the shelter (such as Animal Control Officers) or based on how the dog is identified by a person surrendering a dog to a shelter.¹⁰ In many shelters, most medium to large size dogs with straight, short/medium length brown hair coats are cast as German Shepherds or shepherd mixes; dogs with black spots on their tongues are designated Chow mixes; and most medium sized, stocky, broad headed, small eared dogs with short hair coats are cast as pit bulls or pit bull mixes.¹⁰

A July 2009 report published by the Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science shows that breed assignments of dogs by adoption agencies, and what they are determined to be through DNA testing, is rarely in agreement.¹⁰ DNA test results showed that only 25% of the dogs in the study ended up being the predominant breed identified by adoption agencies. In 87.5% of the adopted dogs, breeds were identified by the DNA analysis that were not proposed by the adoption agencies at all.¹⁰

Shameful Statistics, Deadly Assumptions

Common sense would dictate that you cannot regulate what you cannot identify. That is clearly not always the case when it comes to dogs and the numbers related to shelter deaths of dogs considered pit bulls speak for themselves. According to statistics maintained by Merritt Clifton of Animal People,¹¹ between eight and nine million animals entered American shelters in 2008. Approximately 45% of those animals were dogs. Although 90% of dogs are statistically considered to be savable,¹² almost two million dogs were destroyed in shelters in 2008 with 58% of them being those labeled as pit bulls. This is most often the result of a legislative breed ban (in the form of an ordinance or resolution), as the result of a de facto breed ban (in which Pit bulls are not adopted out by shelters under any circumstances) or as a result of so-called “temperament testing” which is utilized to determine which dogs will be put up for adoption and which dogs will be destroyed.^A

^A “. . .temperament testing requires skill and training that is not often a priority for shelters; the results vary depending on the environment in which the test is conducted. . .it can and often does result in dogs being executed when they are not really aggressive.”¹²

According to Mr. Clifton (who maintains statistics on a wide variety of animal species), a pit bull in America has approximately the same life expectancy as a steer raised for beef: about 18 months, on average. In any given year, about a third of all the steers on farms are sent to be slaughtered and about the same number of pit bulls are impounded and killed.¹¹

How Did We Get Here?¹

Dogs are part of America's rich history. Immigrants brought their dogs across the ocean along with their families and prized possessions. They soon became a fixture in our society; protecting homesteads from predators, helping on family farms and often serving as constant companions and nannies to young children who were entrusted in their care.⁵

Although dogs have served us faithfully in many capacities for many years, we have a long history of stereotyping certain breeds of dogs during different time periods. This "canine profiling" has been based on public perception and has been the result of hysteria which has had little, if anything, to do with actual dog behavior and aggression and which has had more to do with the manner in which types of dogs are objectified and used for negative or illegal purposes. From the late 1800s up until the 1970s, the dogs considered to be vicious and naturally aggressive during particular decades in our history include Bloodhounds, Newfoundlands, Mastiffs, a group of dogs simply referred to as the "Northern Breeds" (such as Huskies, Malamutes and, Eskimo Dogs), Collies, Boston Terriers, St. Bernards, Airedale Terriers, Great Danes, Chow Chows, German Shepherds, Doberman Pinschers and Rottweilers. The reputation of many of these stereotyped breeds has historically been a result of their use for some negative function (such as guarding or fighting) or as a result of being subjected to harsh environmental conditions and physical abuse.

How easily our opinion regarding different breeds of dogs is influenced is demonstrated by three breeds of dogs. In the case of Bloodhounds, the reputation of the dogs (from the late 1800s to the early 1900s) as fierce came not from actual reports of attacks, but from sensationalized stage versions of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which were not true to the novel and in which a pack of Bloodhounds chased an escaping slave, baby in tow, across the frozen Ohio River. In the 1920s, the German Shepherd was seen as having no redeeming qualities until a dog named "Rin Tin Tin" appeared in a number of silent movies and public opinion about the breed changed primarily as a result of one dog. The association of Doberman Pinschers with Nazi guards during World War II automatically led people to believe the dogs were some type of super-predator, even though the German Army used many other breeds of dogs and in spite of the fact that breed was also used by the United States Marine Corps for valiant purposes.

Those dogs we now think of as pit bulls were quite popular and enjoyed an excellent reputation in the United States up until very recently. They were considered all-purpose dogs who appealed to a wide variety of owners and who functioned as guard dogs, farm dogs, hunting dogs, police dogs, traveling companions and house pets. Pit bull type dogs show up in hundreds of turn of the century photos, flanked by loving family members. World War I posters displayed illustrations of American Pit Bull Terriers as proud mascots of neutrality and bravery.⁵ The most decorated war

dog of that time was an American Pit Bull Terrier named “Sergeant Stubby.”¹³ A pit bull type dog named “Tige” helped sell Buster Brown shoes and “Petey” from the “Little Rascals” comedy television series was the first Staffordshire Terrier registered by the American Kennel Club.⁶

Regardless of the breed, consistent in our history with dogs is a dark side to the human-canine relationship. Each time a breed of dog has been portrayed as vicious, there has been an immediate increase in the number of substandard owners of that breed which has led, in turn, to more reports of aggressive behavior because of the dogs’ use for negative functions. Karen Delise, the Founder and Director of Research of the National Canine Research Council, states the following in her authoritative book, *The Pit Bull Placebo: The Media, Myths and Politics of Canine Aggression*: “The bane of any breed is popularity. As seen time and time again, when a breed becomes exceedingly popular, especially if the breed has a negative function attached to it, there will be a significant increase in substandard and unsuitable owners . . . fatalities are directly associated with the increased popularity of these breeds among substandard owners.”¹

Yellow Journalism Alters Reality

From the late 1800s until the 1980s, media reports about dogs involved in attacks on people were not breed-biased. Newspapers focused on the circumstances which led to the attack and the breed of dog, if known, was simply one of the reported facts. Factors such as excessive heat, teasing, chaining and abuse were included in news reports of dog attacks to explain behavior. All of this changed three decades ago and a new era of the super-predator began.

By the middle of the 1970s, there was emerging public awareness of the blood sport of dog fighting in America. Dog fighting became a crime in all states in 1976 (even though it had been illegal in most states since the 1860s¹⁴) and in 1976 the Animal Welfare Protection Act was amended to make trafficking in dogs for the purpose of dog fighting a crime.⁶ As dog fighting got more attention from law enforcement authorities, it also got the attention of the media. This is when the true demise of the pit bull reputation began. Rather than follow the type of media reporting utilized for a hundred years, the media began to focus on the dogs, rather than the people who abused and objectified the dogs.¹⁵ “In a society of violent video games . . . gang warfare, drug abuse, serial killers [and] terrorist bombs. . . we [have become] increasing more difficult to shock. Our monsters need to be increasingly terrible in order to keep pace with a society easily bored by our own species’ violent acts. . .”¹

As had happened with other breeds in the past, the sensationalized, almost comic-book type of reporting about pit bulls whipped the general public into a frenzy and attracted even more unsavory owners who hoped to capitalize financially on this new super-predator. Myths of pit bull dogs with “super-canine powers” and deviant anatomy began to dominate news stories.^{1 B} The birth

^B All of these myths have since been exposed as having no basis whatsoever in fact: pit bulls do not have locking jaws, do not clamp with their front teeth and grind with their back teeth, do not have a greater bite force than other dogs, are not impervious to pain and do not attack without warning or when unprovoked.¹

of the Internet only served to make matters worse for the pit bull. The Internet “has allowed for instant accessibility to highly publicized media accounts of individual cases of dog attacks. Editorial columns about the vicious nature of certain breeds, dog-bite attorneys’ web sites filled with photos and statistics about dog attacks, quotes from politicians and outraged citizens about the nature and behaviors of certain dogs, and sensationalized headlines of dog attacks all seemingly offer instant and ample ‘proof’ of the vicious nature of certain dogs. To many people these Internet sources are perceived as a reliable and accurate source of information on what they believe to be a recent epidemic of canine aggression.”¹

In 1986 there were over 350 newspaper, magazine and journal articles printed about the pit bull in the United States.¹ “Over a decade later, the media is unrelenting.”¹ In 2006, more than 2,800 articles headlined the “pit bull.”¹ Reports about attacks by dogs other than pit bulls seldom garner more news coverage than a local paper whereas reports involving dogs believed to be pit bulls are consistently reported in hundreds of national and international newspapers and are covered by major television news networks, including CNN, MSNBC and FOX.¹ “Clearly a fatal dog attack by an unremarkable breed is not as newsworthy as a non-fatal attack by a Pit bull,” says Karen Delise. “This biased reporting is not only lethal to an entire population of dogs; sensationalized media coverage endangers the public by misleading them about the real factors in canine aggression.”¹⁵

The Wrong End of the Leash

The public hysteria created by the media hype caused people to demand that something be done about pit bulls, leading politicians to enter the fray and focus on the wrong end of the leash¹⁶ by concentrating on the dogs and not on the people responsible for their behavior. Relying upon myths of canine superpowers and on emotional pleas from constituents (often while completely disregarding expert opinions) politicians began taking steps to either ban pit bulls or severely limit the circumstances under which people could own them. By the end of the 20th century, more than 200 cities, communities and counties had enacted breed bans or restrictions against pit bulls or any dog that was viewed as having “pit bull characteristics.”¹ “Not only was ridding the community of pit bull-looking dogs touted as a cure-all for dog attacks, but at least another 26 breeds of dogs would be banned or restricted as ‘dangerous’ in communities across the country. Some breeds with no documented cases of severe or fatal attacks in the community (or even throughout the country) were banned. Many communities touted breed bans to be a pre-emptive strike, banning an entire breed *before* it had a ‘chance’ to attack.”¹ (Breed bans in other countries like Italy and the Netherlands have been lifted because they proved to be ineffective.⁶ Many breed bans in the U.S. have either been repealed or are being legally challenged as unconstitutional and unenforceable.⁷)

Pseudostatistics Become Proof

In the 1970s, a significant number of studies were published in response to increasing numbers of reported dog bites and dog attacks in many areas across the United States. None of these studies conducted in the 1970s make mention of the pit bull or the Rottweiler.¹⁵ Beginning in the middle 1980s, however, dog bite studies began to focus on only one aspect of dog bites: breed.¹⁷⁻²²

The problem with the vast majority of the studies is that the “statistics” relied upon were actually numbers derived largely from newspaper stories and from the media’s often incorrect identification of dogs involved in attacks. Following a number of studies conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and independent experts, it was determined that the studies did not “identify specific breeds that are most likely to bite or kill, and thus [were] not appropriate for policymaking decisions related to the topic.”²³ “Dog bite statistics are not really statistics, and they do not give an accurate picture of dogs that bite.”²⁴ Dr. Randall Lockwood of the ASCPA (who was involved in a number of major dog bite studies) has since stated, “it’s not the breed that makes a dog dangerous, it’s the attitude of the owners . . . in 1974 we saw more German Shepherd, Collie, and Cocker Spaniel bites. Today it is the Rottweiler, Chow and Pit Bull. The dogs are a victim of their own popularity.”²⁵ Lockwood has also opined that “a well-trained, neutered Rottweiler will probably make a much better pet than a poorly socialized Dachshund.”²⁶

The Truth about Canine Aggression

The media focus on pit bulls has been so intense that many people now believe that only certain breeds of dogs are aggressive when, in fact, all dogs have the capability to be aggressive under certain circumstances. All dogs have teeth. All dogs bite. “They bite other animals, they bite each other and they bite humans.”²¹ Approximately one-third of American households includes at least one dog.²⁷ This means that at least 96 million people are in daily contact with dogs, if we include only the members of the dogs' own households.²⁷ In spite of this level of interaction, dog bite fatalities are extremely rare, accounting for about one in 167,000 deaths per year in the U.S.²⁷ Dog bites represent 0.2 percent of emergency room visits, making them comparable in incidence to, but less severe than, accidents involving many common household objects like chairs.²⁷ Ninety-nine percent of emergency room treated dog bites are rated as minor punctures and lacerations.²⁷ About half of the people who require medical attention as a result of a dog bite are children.²³ “There is consensus among researchers that the majority of dogs who bite injure people they know well, in the dogs’ own homes . . . yet much of the public concern is directed at bites to strangers in public places. This statistically misplaced concern may occur because the victims of such bites often have not consented to the dog having access to them.”²⁷

“The reasons why dogs attack are often complex, but the answer to preventing dog attacks is relatively simple: humane care and control of dogs is often all that is needed to prevent most dog attacks.”²¹ Extensive research conducted by the National Canine Research Council^C has conclusively identified the practices that can cause a dog to behave dangerously. These include the function of the dog (such as use as a guard dog), owner management and control (such as chained dogs, dogs

^C The National Canine Research Council maintains the most extensive data file available of the rare instances of severe and fatal canine aggression. This data file includes autopsy reports, crime scene photos, incident reports and interviews of police investigators, animal control officers, coroners, forensic pathologists, veterinarians, health department officials, dog owners and eyewitnesses.¹⁵

roaming loose, failure to supervise interaction between children and dogs), and the reproductive status of the dog.¹⁵ Statistics¹⁵ regarding dog attacks which occurred in 2006 reflect the following:^D

- 97% of the owners of dogs involved in fatal attacks failed to spay or neuter their animals.
- 84% of the owners of dogs involved in fatal attacks either maintained their dogs on chains or in pens, allowed the dogs to run loose, neglected or abused their dogs, and/or allowed children to interact with unfamiliar dogs.
- 78% of the owners of dogs involved in fatal attacks maintained the dogs not as household pets, but as guard dogs, fighting dogs, intimidation dogs, breeding dogs, or yard dogs.

The Real Deal

In spite of the breed origins, the vast majority of pit bulls are very far removed from their origins as dogs used for baiting and fighting. The sad truth is that pit bulls have often been used as fighting dogs because of their intelligence, athleticism, tenacity, strong sense of loyalty and their overwhelming desire to please humans. Pit bulls are often described as fun loving, spunky and affectionate.⁵ They are extremely loyal, bold and courageous animals.⁵ Their athletic nature makes them excel at various dog sports and activities including obedience trials, agility trials, flyball and frisbee competitions, and weight-pulling events.⁵ “The soft side of the breed shows up in their gushing affection for humans - a desirable trait that was very important to the original breeders of this animal and remains so today. For this reason, many pit bulls work as Certified Therapy Dogs in hospitals and nursing homes.”⁵ Yet other pit bulls work as search and rescue dogs, in law enforcement (as narcotics and bomb detection dogs) and as service dogs.

When we put aside the hype and hysteria, we find that pit bulls are actually some of the most well-behaved dogs in our society. The 2008 breed statistics published by The American Temperament Test Society²⁸ (which conducts comprehensive behavior assessment testing which is often referenced in reports and studies) indicate that the average passing rating for pit bulls (American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier and the Staffordshire Bull Terrier) was 85.73. Of the 214 other breeds tested by the American Temperament Test Society, *133 breeds had lower passing scores* than dogs typed as pit bulls. Some of the breeds of dogs (of comparable size

^D A 2007 report by the Council indicates that from 2005 to 2007, 91% of all fatal dog attacks were due to one or more of these same critical factors. Although the Council’s 2008 report has not yet been published, a Council press release indicates that incidents of dog bite fatalities fell by one-third in 2008.¹⁵

to most bully breeds) with lower scores were the Beagle, Border Collie, Boxer, Cocker Spaniel, Collie, Dalmatian, Golden Retriever, Mastiff, St. Bernard, Standard Poodle and Weimaraner.^{28 E}

Like many other breeds of dogs who are considered “high energy” and very smart, pit bulls are not for everyone.²⁹ They *are not* a hands off breed which can simply be left alone. Early socialization and training are essential in order to teach them their proper place in the home and how to act around both people and other animals. Pit bulls who become bored will find ways to entertain themselves. An under-exercised pit bull will have a large amount of excess energy that will be utilized in some inappropriate way if not channeled properly, be it running around the house, jumping on people and play-biting, pacing, and so on. Pit bulls tend to be prone to dog aggression and are in general a breed with a high prey drive (they like to chase and catch small animals.)²⁹

Even when pit bulls have been subjected to the worst that humans have to offer, they are capable of defying the media hype of them as super-predators and of overcoming incredible abuse. After forty-nine pit bulls were seized from Michael Vick’s Virginia property in the summer of 2007, federal Judge Henry Hudson ordered them placed with eight rescue groups in five states.³⁰ All 10 of the dogs placed with BAD RAP are living in homes (the majority live with other animals), three have passed the AKC Canine Good Citizen Test, two are certified therapy dogs and one of the therapy dogs, “Jonny Justice,” also helps with a children’s literacy program.³¹ The 22 dogs deemed the most traumatized were placed with the Best Friends Animal Society at their sanctuary in Kanab, Utah. Five of the dogs have either been adopted or are in foster care³² and all but one of the dogs are considered adoptable at any time to the right home.^F

Where Do We Go From Here?

It’s a given that there is no quick fix for the undeserved reputation of pit bulls. Most people consider the media reports and information found on the Internet as “proof” of the inherently vicious nature of these dogs and we cannot simply flip a switch and regain our collective sanity about the true nature of dogs in general. The fact remains, however, that we *cannot* allow this trend to continue. We owe our canine companions better. It is up to us as communities to be responsible and to help take proactive steps in order to rehabilitate the image of pit bulls and to educate the public on the real reasons behind dog aggression. This will help prevent dog attacks and fatalities, and it will help people understand that aggression is not limited to certain breeds of dogs.

^E Although smaller breeds of dogs are generally considered less capable of being as aggressive as larger breeds of dogs, it should be noted that many small dog breeds also had passing rates lower than that of bully breeds, including Bichon Frise, Cairn Terrier, Chihuahua, the standard Dachshund, Jack Russell Terrier, Maltese and Yorkshire Terrier.

^F Due to the origins of the so-called “Victory Dogs” placed with Best Friends, and the potential that they could be sought by people with negative intentions, the dogs were not available for adoption until 2009, allowing one full year to work with the dogs and get to know them. Best Friends considers all but one of these dogs adoptable at any time to the right home, but there is a considerable process that each adopter must go through, including a background check and retaining a personal qualified dog trainer.³²

Getting Them Into Homes

- Shelter directors and staff (and those in management positions over shelters) should ensure that *all* dogs in shelters are given the same opportunities to be adopted, regardless of perceived breed, keeping in mind that even the most experienced shelter workers often cannot correctly identify dog breeds or their mixes. It has been proposed that it might just be easier to refer to them as “American Shelter Dogs.”¹⁰

- Shelters should use breed-blind, equitable, double-process behavior testing in order to *fairly* evaluate dogs for adoption. Prior to being tested, dogs should be given a chance to acclimate to the shelter for a period of days, they should be medically evaluated first and they should be given the chance to be walked outside of the building daily and interact with shelter staff or volunteers on a regular basis and away from the distractions inside the shelter. When the behavior assessment is conducted, it should be repeatable at different times and in different environments and it should accurately predict the dog’s behavior in a home. The goals of *true* behavior testing should be to screen out aggression while ensuring that dogs who are otherwise friendly but who are just scared, shy, traumatized, sick or injured are not wrongly destroyed. Assessments should not be pass/fail; any dog showing workable issues, such as resource/food guarding, can be helped and made ready for adoption by behavior rehabilitation.

- Potential adopters of pit bulls should be screened to make sure they possess a general understanding of dog behavior, the needs of high-energy, strong dogs, and that they understand the ordinary temperament and needs of pit bulls and pit bull mixes. They also need to understand and appreciate that the dog they adopt will become an ambassador of a breed with the potential to sway public opinion. Some organizations which regularly adopt out pit bulls require a home visit (to view the environment in which the dog will live and to ensure the dog will not be utilized for some negative purpose) both before and after the adoption, in addition to requiring a veterinary reference to ensure the dog will receive proper medical care.

Avoiding Litigation

According to attorney Bonnie L. Lutz (a member of the board of directors for the American Veterinary Medical Legal Association), “there is not a single reportable appellate opinion in which an animal shelter was found liable for a bite by a dog that it did not own.”³³ “If reduction in liability is the goal, refusing to adopt out certain breeds of dogs or placing blanket restrictions on adoptions of certain breeds, are not viable solutions.”³³ A variety of breeds of dogs which are statistically more aggressive²⁹ than pit bulls are adopted out on a regular basis by shelters and rescue groups across the country (Basset Hounds, Beagles, Boxers, Cocker Spaniels, Golden Retrievers, Jack Russell Terriers and Standard Poodles, etc.). It stands to reason then, that if suits are not brought following adoption of these other breeds of dogs, there is no reason to believe that adoption of pit bulls raises the potential of liability, particularly if the adoption process provides for adequate screening of adopters and efforts are made to educate the community.

In order to avoid litigation following adoption, the shelter should: 1) observe dogs while in the shelter environment, document those observations and document all information provided by the previous owner; and 2) disclose all known facts to the new guardian and transfer ownership of the dog fully and finally.³³ This is easily accomplished using a blanket adoption agreement which contains a hold harmless provision. The agreement can also contain an assumption of the risk form which allows for specific, known information about the dog's reported or observed history to be documented.³⁴

Keeping Them in Homes

- Adult Educational Programs. Offer free educational programs to teach responsible dog ownership, promote socialization of dogs at an early age and encourage owners to make dogs part of the family. (Approximately 80% of fatal dog attacks are by dogs that were isolated or not included in the family's activities.⁷) The training can be provided with the help of local rescue groups, animal welfare advocates and volunteers.

- Educational Programs for Children. Most of the exposure to dog-bite injury risk can be mitigated by providing appropriate education to well-intentioned but misinformed and/or uninformed guardians, and to the public at large.²⁷ Sixty-seven percent of injurious dog bites to children have been shown to be preventable by changing the child's or the caregiver's behavior in interacting with the dog. Even a single 30-minute lesson incorporated into a regular school day, taught by a dog handler, has been shown to dramatically reduce high-risk behaviors toward unfamiliar dogs in both very young and middle-school children.²⁷

- Bully promotion programs. Working with pit bull rescue groups and advocates, develop an outreach and intervention program for the local community serving the unique needs of pit bulls and pit bull mixes. Programs like this exist in a number of regions to educate the general public regarding the misunderstanding of the breeds' needs, to offer potential adopters advice and education about the breed and to encourage people to see their pit bulls as ambassadors to the community, with the potential to change public opinion.

Making People Feel Safe While Getting to the Roots of Canine Aggression

- Enforce dangerous dog laws (as opposed to breed specific legislation.) Rather than try to regulate the dogs, we must regulate the people who own them and who are responsible for their care and behavior. The best way to do this is by enforcing existing dangerous dog laws and by gauging the effectiveness of those laws over periods of time so that they can be modified to address true sources of canine aggression. Model dangerous dog laws are available for us to emulate, and they seek to individually identify potentially dangerous dogs based on a history of that dog's and owner's behavior and reported incidents.

- Enactment/strengthening of laws regarding dogs running at large that require spay/neuter after the second violation. More than 80% of dog bites are by dogs running loose.

(JAVMA, September 15, 2000⁷; National Canine Research Council) After passing a leash law, the city of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, reported a 35% drop in dog bites.⁷

- Enactment/strengthening of laws that restrict the tethering, chaining and penning or caging of dogs.³⁵ Dogs that are chained are 2.8 times more likely to be aggressive.⁷ Lawrence County, Kansas, adopted an anti-tethering ordinance. From 2005 to 2006, the number of calls concerning cruelty and dog fighting dropped from 800 to 260. Officials attribute the decline in large part to the anti-tethering law.⁷

- Encourage spay/neuter and help educate/inform the public about organizations or programs that promote low-cost spay/neuter in the community. In many communities, people are not aware of the health benefits of having their dog sterilized and are unaware of programs which provide financial support for low income families. More than 90% of fatal dog attacks are by dogs that are not spayed or neutered.¹⁵ Also, mandate spay/neuter for dogs determined to be dangerous (in accordance with existing laws) and dogs impounded more than once or found at large.

“It is long past time for us to rethink our policies about dog attacks and the role humans play in this inter-species relationship. We owe it to the future safety of our children and communities. We owe it to our canine companions.”¹

We owe it to ourselves.

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