Buchanan, Rita

Subject: FW: PLEASE READ this article before tonight's council meeting
Attachments: The State of The American Dog - Esquire.pdf

-----Original Message-----
From: Lisa Killen [mailto:lkillen@mac.com]
Sent: Monday, July 14, 2014 3:45 PM
To: Bogaard, Bill; Robinson, Jacque; McAustin, Margaret; Kennedy, John; Masuda, Gene; Gordo, Victor; Madison, Steve; Tornek, Terry; Beck, Michael; Gutierrez, Julie; Mermell, Steve; Bagneris, Michele; cityclerk; Foster, Siobhan; Walsh, Eric
Subject: PLEASE READ this article before tonight's council meeting

Dear Mayor Bogaard and Pasadena City Council members,

I encourage all of you to read the following article regarding pit-bull type dogs before tonight's meeting.

Thank you,
Lisa Killen

http://www.esquire.com/features/american-dog-0814?src=soc_fcbks

07/14/2014
Item 18

PRINT CLOSE

Esquire

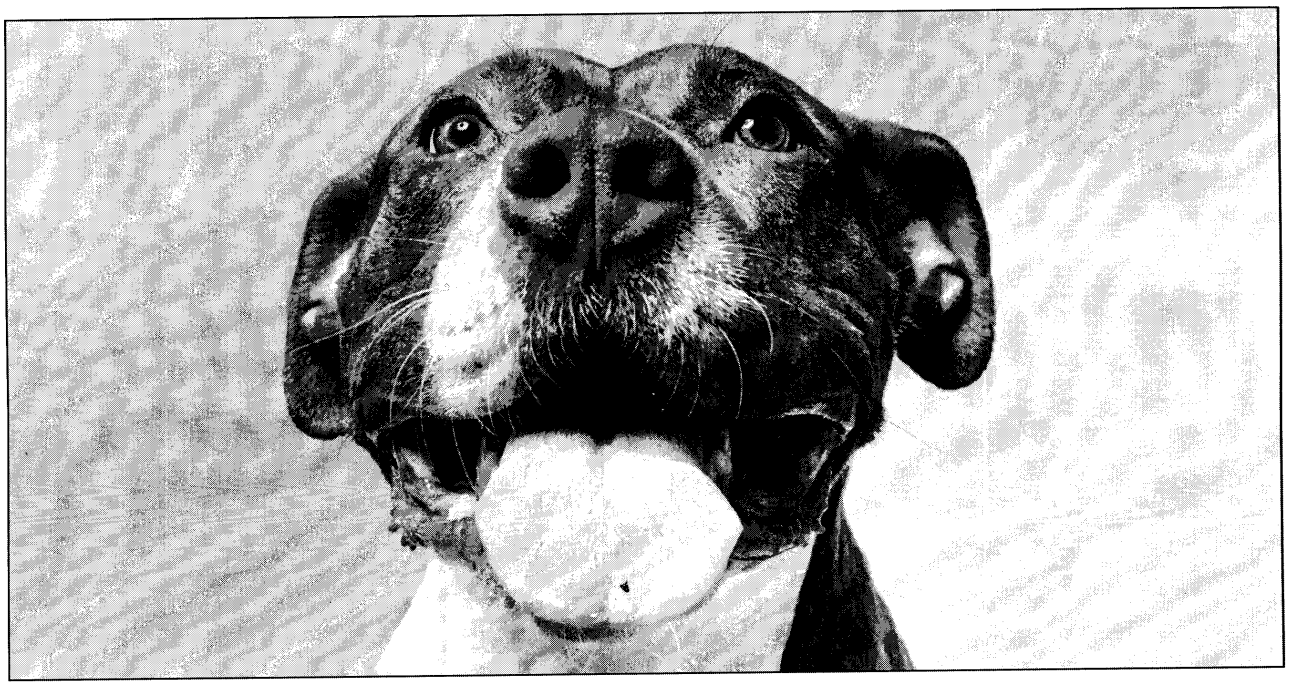
http://www.esquire.com/features/american-dog-0814

The State of The American Dog

The most ubiquitous dog in the U. S.—the dog in whose face we see our collective reflection—is now the pit bull. Which makes it curious that we as a culture kill as many as three thousand of them per day.

PLUS: See all of the dogs here, in one place >>

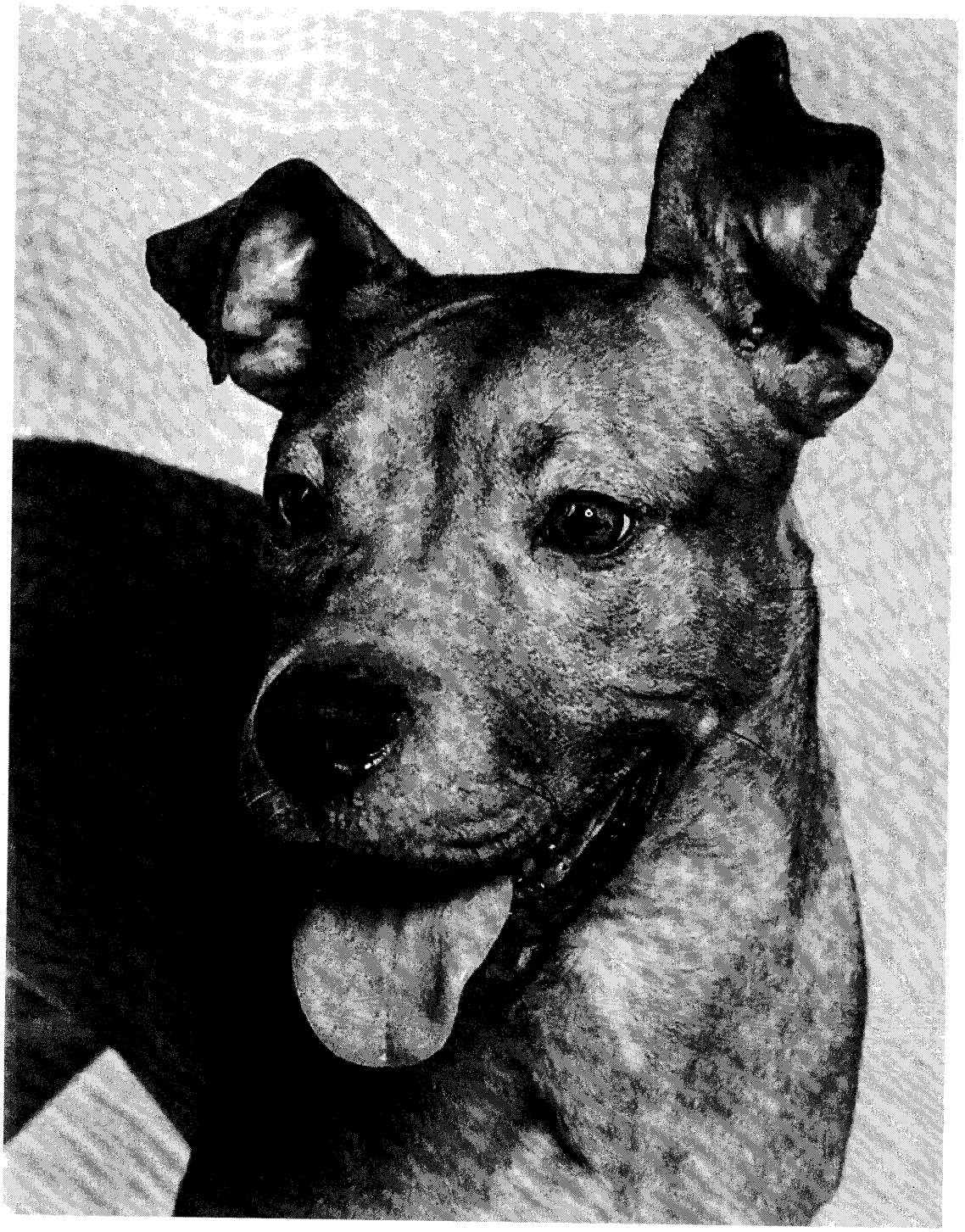
By Tom Junod



LOIS

FOUR-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER- AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX

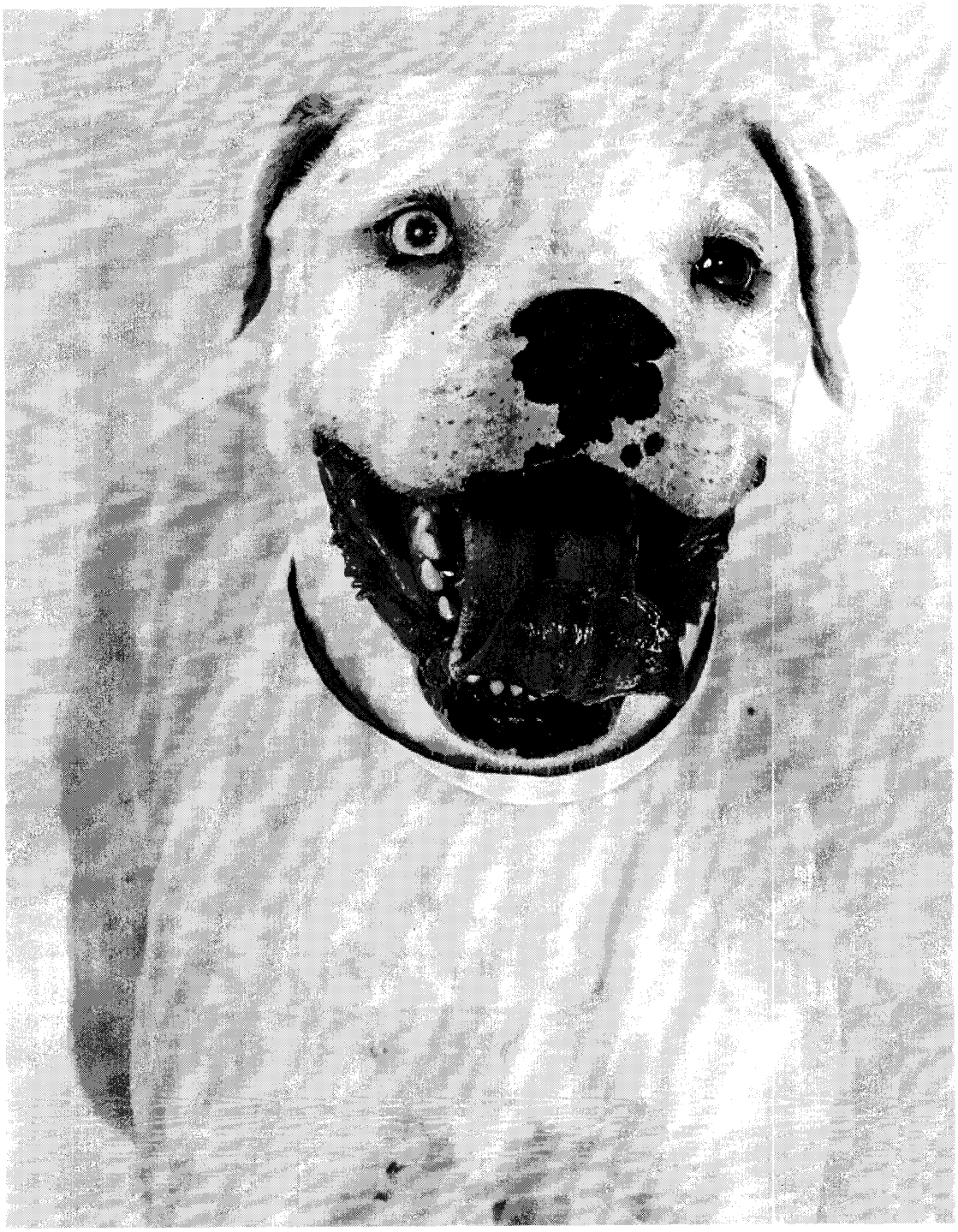
Picked up as an injured stray with large bite wounds on her neck, February 28, 2014. Available for adoption.



JAMAICA

TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 33 LBS

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, April 19, 2014. Adopted.



MELVIN

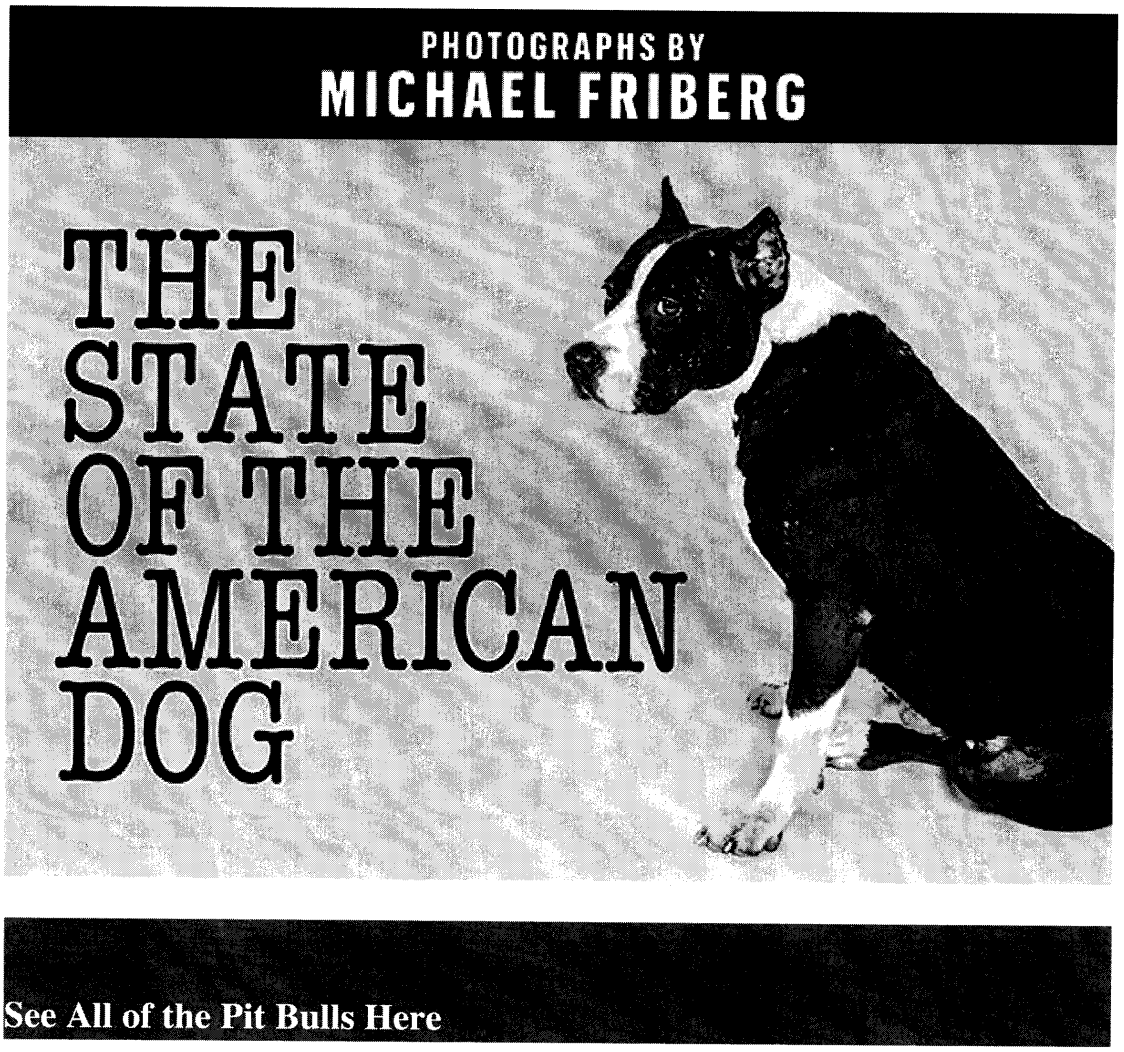
THREE-YEAR-OLD MALE PIT-BULL-AMERICAN-BULLDOG MIX, 57 LBS

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, May 6, 2014. Adopted and renamed Smiley.

Published in the August 2014 issue

It was night, and we—my daughter and I—were walking our dog. His name was, and is, Dexter. He was, and is, a pit bull. We had just gotten him. We'd had him for four days. An ambulance came slowly and silently up the street, its light whirling. It stopped in front of a

house, and we watched an emergency technician climb out. Then a woman began shouting, "Watch out—he doesn't like other dogs!" I looked away from the house being visited by the ambulance to the house next door. The woman who had shouted the warning was standing in the doorway; her dog, at full tilt, was already halfway across her lawn, its teeth bared, its eyes as big as eggs. It was a cocker spaniel, a breed well known for its aggressiveness toward both dogs and humans. And it was heading for my pit bull.



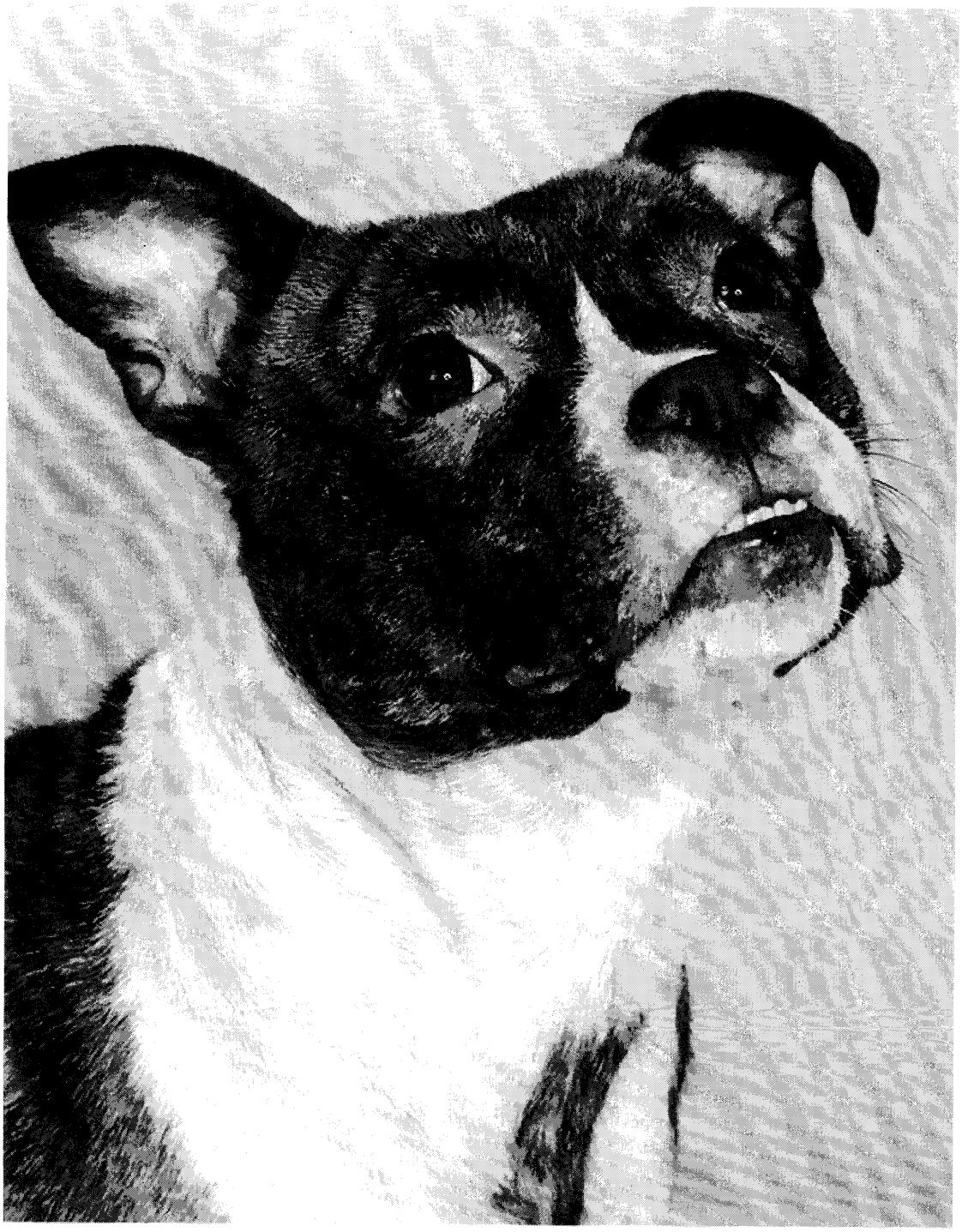
I stepped between Dexter and the dog charging him. I was used to this—I had just lost a pit bull whom I'd had for eleven years and whom I'd frequently had to protect. I'd had success dissuading dogs from attacking him by posturing and by unleashing torrents of unhinged obscenity. Despite my daughter's presence, I tried both on the cocker spaniel. But he went right past me, seemingly right through me. I tried to kick him but missed, and when I turned around, he was already on Dexter's neck.

It was not a good idea. The cocker spaniel weighed about thirty pounds. Dexter weighed sixty, with a head scaled to a dog twice his size. The length of Dexter's slender body, indeed, was just a suspension bridge between the edifices of his head and his hind legs. I looked, and the cocker spaniel was biting Dexter's neck; I looked again and Dexter was gripping the cocker spaniel's. I told my daughter to run to the house where the woman had opened her door to look at the ambulance and mistakenly let her dog outside. Then I tried to save the cocker spaniel's life so that I could save Dexter's.

STARLET

THREE-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 44 LBS

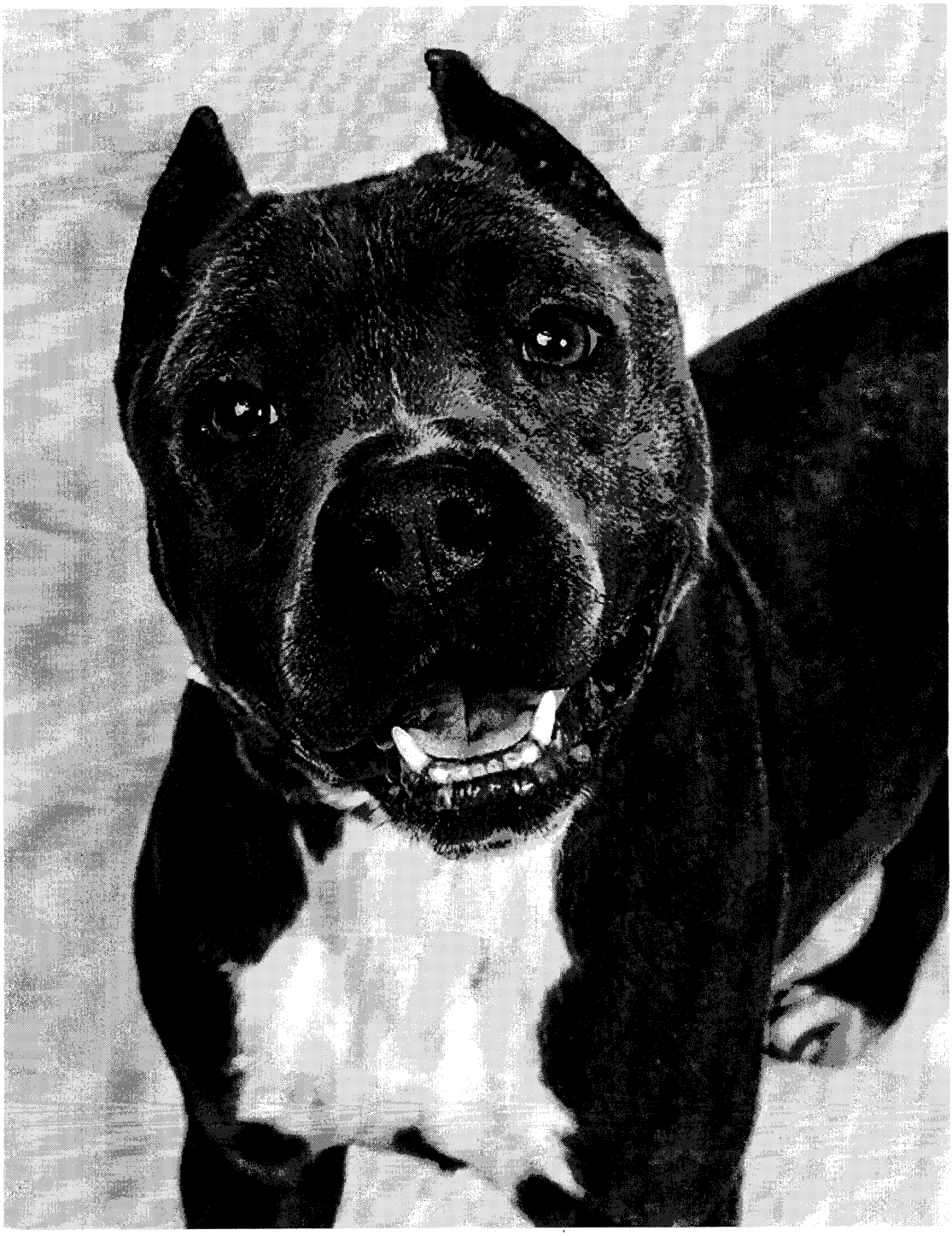
Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, April 13, 2014. Available for adoption.



QUEENY

TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE PIT-BULL MIX, 42 LBS

Dropped off as a stray by a member of the public, March 8, 2014. Available for adoption.



LEVI

FOUR-YEAR-OLD MALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-STAFFORDSHIRE MIX, 50 LBS

Abandoned in yard by owner; brought in by an animal-control officer, April 22, 2014. Adopted.

The cocker spaniel was screaming. It was the only sound as the emergency technician pushed an old woman on a gurney to the ambulance, oblivious to what was taking place before him. I told Dexter to let go; he didn't. He was breathing through his nose, but there was an untroubled serenity in his eyes, almost an innocence. And his jaws were set in concrete. With a burst of adrenaline, I picked him up by his hind legs and was horrified to see that I had picked up the

cocker spaniel as well—that he was a foot off the ground, swinging from Dexter's mouth.

I put them down and tried prying my dog's jaws apart. This is not what you are supposed to do, but I knew what happens to pit bulls who kill other dogs, even when other dogs attack them. The cocker spaniel bit me once on the forearm, then again and again, but I neither felt the bites nor blamed the dog. Blood ran down my arm, mixed with sweat, and I enfolded Dexter in a kind of bear hug, in a kind of loving embrace, and he let go. The ambulance, that mute and glowering witness, drove away. The cocker spaniel went back to its house and then eventually to an animal hospital, where it was treated for infection. Its owner walked me and my daughter back home, apologizing for the attack and expressing surprise at how docile Dexter had become in its wake —how calm and friendly, how sweet.

JOSE

ONE-YEAR-OLD MALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX

Abandoned in home by owner; brought in by an animal-control officer, January 13, 2014. Available for adoption.

This is a story about an American dog: my dog, Dexter. And because Dexter is a pit bull, this is also a story about *the* American dog, because pit bulls have changed the way Americans think about dogs in general. Reviled, pit bulls have become representative. There is no other dog that figures as often in the national narrative—no other dog as vilified on the evening news, no other dog as defended on television programs, no other dog as mythologized by both its enemies and its advocates, no other dog as discriminated against, no other dog as wantonly bred, no other dog as frequently abused, no other dog as promiscuously abandoned, no other dog as likely to end up in an animal shelter, no other dog as likely to be rescued, no other dog as likely to be killed. In a way, the pit bull has become the *only* American dog, because it is the only American dog that has become an American metaphor—and the only American dog that people bother to name. When a cocker spaniel bites, it does so as a member of its species; it is never anything but a dog. When a pit bull bites, it does so as a member of its breed. A pit bull is never anything but a pit bull.

The argument against pit bulls is not necessarily racist. It does, however, employ racial thinking.

There are two ironies here: The first is, as pit-bull advocates like to point out, "the pit bull is not a breed; it's a classification." Even the municipalities that have banned it acknowledge as much in the language of their laws, which is a language of approximation. Denver, for instance, stipulates that a pit bull "is defined as any dog that is an American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, Staffordshire Bull Terrier, or any dog displaying the majority of physical traits of any one (1) or more of the above breeds, or any dog exhibiting those distinguishing characteristics which substantially conform to the standards established by the American Kennel Club or United Kennel Club for any of the above breeds." Yet Luis Salgado, the animal-services investigator charged with enforcing the pit-bull ban in Miami, admits that "there is no reliable DNA testing for that breed. DNA is useless. If you look at where that breed came from, there's American bulldog, there's terrier—all watered down and mixed together to produce the dog we now call the pit bull." What Salgado uses to establish a dog's genetic identity is not genetics but rather "physical characteristics—we have a forty-seven-point checklist. Any dog that substantially conforms to the characteristics of a pit bull is considered a pit bull."

CHICA

TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, March 28, 2014.
Euthanized for medical reasons, May 19, 2014.

You know one when you see one, in other words—and so the second irony proceeds from the first: You see a *lot* of them. The pit bull is not a breed but a conglomeration of traits, and those traits are reshaping what we think of as the American dog, which is to say the American mutt. A few generations ago, the typical mutt was a rangy dog with a long snout and pricked ears—a shepherd mix. Now it looks like a pit bull. This is not simply because so many pit-bull owners oppose spaying and neutering their dogs and their dogs are bred so frequently and haphazardly; nor is it simply because so many of the traits associated with pit bulls have proven common. It's because the very definition of a pit bull is so elastic and encompassing. As Salgado says, "It doesn't have to be purebred to be considered a pit bull." A German shepherd crossed with a pit bull is a pit bull. A cocker spaniel crossed with a pit bull is a pit bull. "We had a beautiful dog in here not long ago that was a pit-Weimaraner mix," says Lieutenant Cheryl Shepard, who runs the animal shelter in Cobb County, Georgia, where I live. "But we try not to call dogs pit mixes, because then nobody will adopt them. So we called it a Weimaraner mix. And it *looked* like a Weimaraner. It had a lot of the traits of a Weimaraner. We found a woman to adopt it. But she took it to her vet and he said, 'No, that's a pit bull.' She returned it the next day."

Thirty years after it first attained notoriety as an accessory to the inner-city drug trade, the pit bull has become commonplace in the United States. No one knows exactly how many there are, especial ly if pit-bull mixes are included in the estimate, for despite going unregistered and uncounted, the pit bull has achieved near omnipresence in big cities and even a certain hard-won popularity in the suburbs. But at the same time, it has become less a type of dog than a *strain* of dog that still makes many Americans deeply uncomfortable. The demographic shifts that are transforming America's human population find a mirror in the demographic shifts that are transforming

When we met Carson, his past as a "bait dog"—a nonfighting dog whom fighting dogs gnaw on as a prelude to combat—was inscribed on his body.

America's canine one, with the same effect: More and more we become what we somehow can't abide. We might accept pit bulls personally, but America still doesn't accept them institutionally, where it counts; indeed, apartment complexes and insurance companies are arrayed in force against them. And so are we: For although we adopt them by the thousands, we aban don them by the millions. The ever-expanding population of dogs considered pit bulls feeds an ever-expanding population of dogs *condemned* as pit bulls, and we resolve this rising demographic pressure in the way to which we've become accustomed: in secret, and in staggering numbers. We have always counted on our dogs to tell us who we are. But what pit bulls tell us is that who we think we are is increasingly at odds with what we've turned out to be.

Dexter is a rescue. Of course he is—half the dogs one meets nowadays are introduced by their owners as "rescues." Once a term for dogs taken out of abusive or precarious situations, it now often refers to dogs on their second homes. The number of rescue dogs rises almost as inexorably as the number of pit bulls, and for good reason: The rescue movement came to its current prominence addressing the impossible plight of pit bulls—a plight that lent moral prestige to the cause of unwanted golden retrievers and Labradors. This is not to minimize the challenges faced by unwanted dogs of any breed; there are, after all, nearly four million American dogs in American shelters. But an unwanted pit bull is different from an unwanted golden retriever in that a market exists for unwanted golden retrievers and golden-retriever mixes; they are literally shipped from animal shelters in the south to animal shelters in the north because there are not enough of them. There are plenty of unwanted pit bulls. An unwanted pit bull generally *stays* unwanted, and the moral reward for rescuing one—okay, the moral self-congratulation—is doubled by the knowledge that it beat overwhelming odds just to stay alive.

FLOWER

TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 49 LBS

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, March 27, 2014. Available for adoption.

LESTER

THREE-YEAR-OLD MALE PIT-BULL MIX, 61 LBS

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, January 28, 2014. Adopted.

Take, for example, the story of our first pit bull, Carson. Carson was a fighting dog—or, to be more exact, a nonfighting dog that survived life in a fighting ring. He was a brown-and-white dog found covered in dried blood at a drug bust in Henry County, Georgia. Dogs like that are often euthanized as a matter of routine, but Carson showed something—a glimmer. He wasn't killed, and a rescue organization claimed him from the shelter. For a year and a half, he stayed with a woman who rehabilitated him; then we lost our dog, and she called us out of the blue. She worked at a vet. By some mysterious agency, she'd heard our dog—a guard-dog breed—was

sick, and so she waited for him to die. Now that he was gone, she wanted to know:

"Would you be willing to adopt a pit bull?"

Now, any dog that comes as a rescue comes with its own apocrypha. Nobody knows his past, so a past is ascribed to him. But when we met Carson, his past as a "bait dog"—a nonfighting dog whom fighting dogs gnaw on as a prelude to combat—was inscribed on his body. He had broken teeth. He had filigrees of scarring around his eyes. He had broad hairless patches of scarring around his neck that revealed his pale porcine skin. He had a ten-inch burn down his back that people often mistook for raised hackles. And yet he managed to strike a comic figure instead of a tragic one—that was his glimmer. He had one ear up and one ear down, protuberant green eyes, a panting grin that wrinkled his cheeks, and an air of insistence and optimism that was never anything less than ridiculous given his circumstances. He climbed onto my wife's lap on a day that happened to be my wife's birthday, and we thought he was giving himself to her as a special gift; we didn't know until later that climbing onto the laps of perfect strangers was his *move*: his survival mechanism and perhaps his con. Whatever it was, it worked. We took him home that day and promptly freaked out.

COCO

TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 52 LBS

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, October 11, 2013. Available for adoption.

BERNADETTE

ONE-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 53 LBS

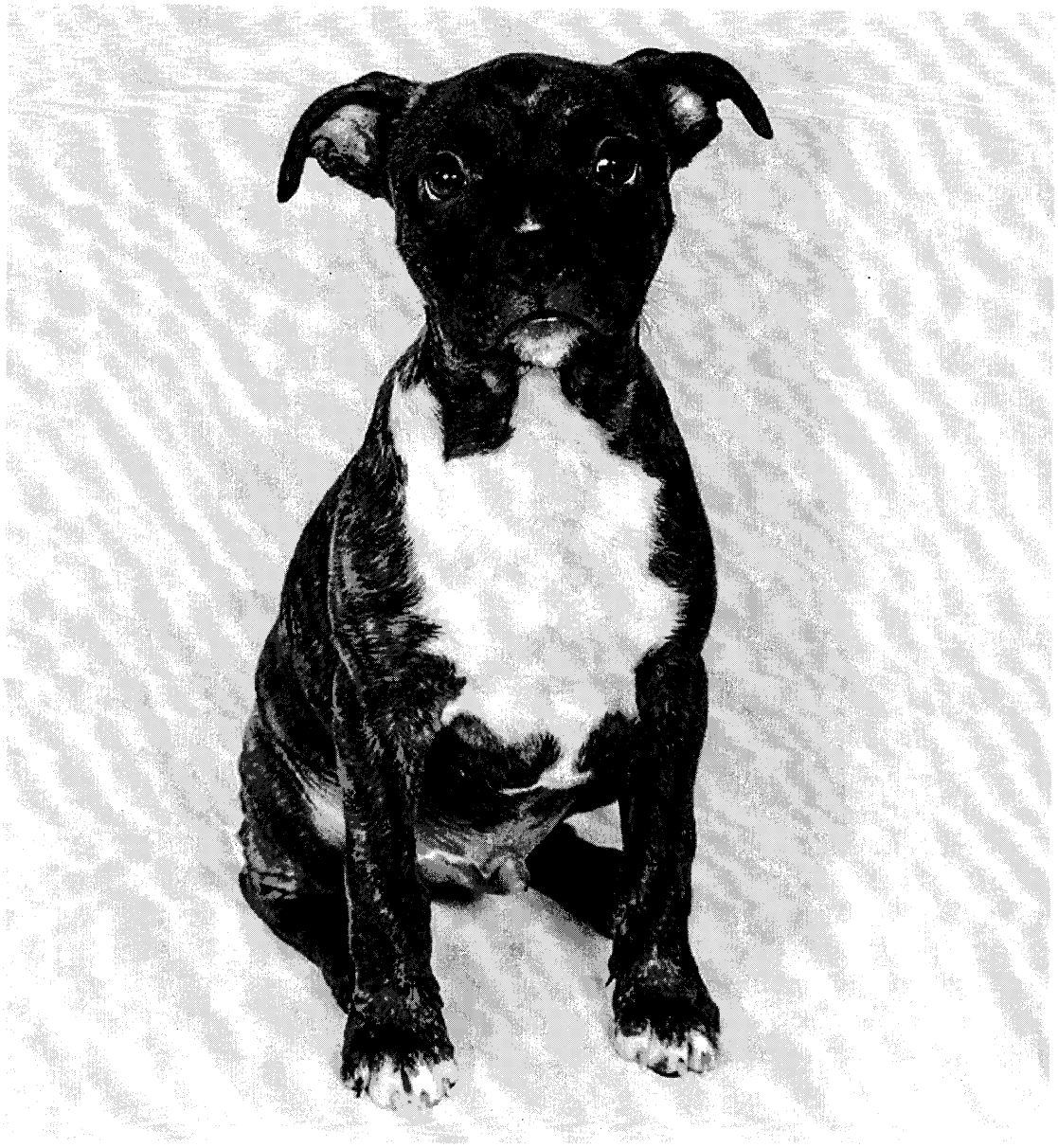
Picked up as a stray, January 13, 2014. Available for adoption.

Well, my wife did. Her friends did. We were in the process of adopting our daughter, and they told her that she was putting everything at risk. *You got what? A pit bull? A fighting dog? Have you lost your mind?* We contemplated giving Carson back until we took him for a walk one day and a school bus emptied out in front of us. We tried to stop the children from accosting him —"We don't know him!"—but they were all over him, and there he stood in the middle of them, with his grin and his glimmer. We wound up taking him to a canine behaviorist at the University

of Georgia, who spent four hours with him and said, "He's a great dog" while assuring us that he *was* a dog before he was a pit bull.

And that is the heart of the matter when you own a pit bull. The language of institutional animosity toward your dog—the language of breed bans and insurance restrictions—takes great pains to declare that your dog is not *like* other dogs but rather something less and at the same time something more: something Other. And I have to admit there was something different about Carson. For reasons that must be hardwired to our own species, dog owners everywhere ask the same question of their dogs: "Are you a good boy?" But when you have a dog as brutalized as Carson had been, a dog as indelibly marked by blood ritual, the question acquires an existential urgency. You really want to *know,* and what distinguished Carson from any other dog I've owned was how he answered. We had him for eleven years, and in that time he demonstrated that the goodness of certain creatures has to be innate, since his was definitely not instilled by humans. If he triumphed over his own supposed nature, he also triumphed over ours, and as such he had the sheen of miracle about him—there was just no accounting for him, even when he died. He was old and he was arthritic, and we thought he had kidney disease when in fact he had a tumor comprised of blood vessels seated deep in his abdomen. It ruptured one night last September, and as he was bleeding out internally at 2:30 in the morning, he managed to jump into our bed to spend his last hours with us. I still don't know how he did it.

My ten-year-old daughter sobbed for three days. We had adopted her after we adopted Carson, and they had never been particularly close. She fed, walked, and cared for him, but she always told us that he wasn't *her* dog; he was ours. But when he died, she was shattered—"I've had him my whole life!"—and she started looking for a dog of her own. As it happened, she found him on the morning of my wife's birthday, exactly eleven years after we met Carson, being walked in the parking lot of a Starbucks by a woman with a rescue organization. He was a pit bull, and, like Carson, he came with a name: Dexter. He also came with a history. He had been abandoned and he had been relinquished, and both times he had wound up in local animal shelters. If his story was more typical than Carson's, his survival was just as unlikely. The next day, we adopted—rescued—him. He was ours; or, to be exact, he was my daughter's, and since then our house has been filled with the sound of them running after each other while she asks him, again and again, if he is a good boy.



PRESTON

TWO-MONTH-OLD MALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 10 LBS

Dropped off as a stray by a member of the public, April 15, 2014. Adopted.

When we had Carson, we tried to change our homeowner's policy. My wife called up an underwriter for a quote, and he began to assess what kind of risk we presented. Eventually, he asked if we had a dog. "Yes," my wife said. What kind? "A mixed-breed terrier," my wife said. He asked how much he weighed. "Fifty-five pounds," she said. He then proceeded to ask about his coat, his coloring, the width of his head, and the shape of his tail—he then proceeded, in other words, to profile him, using the same kind of checklist that Investigator Salgado uses in Miami.

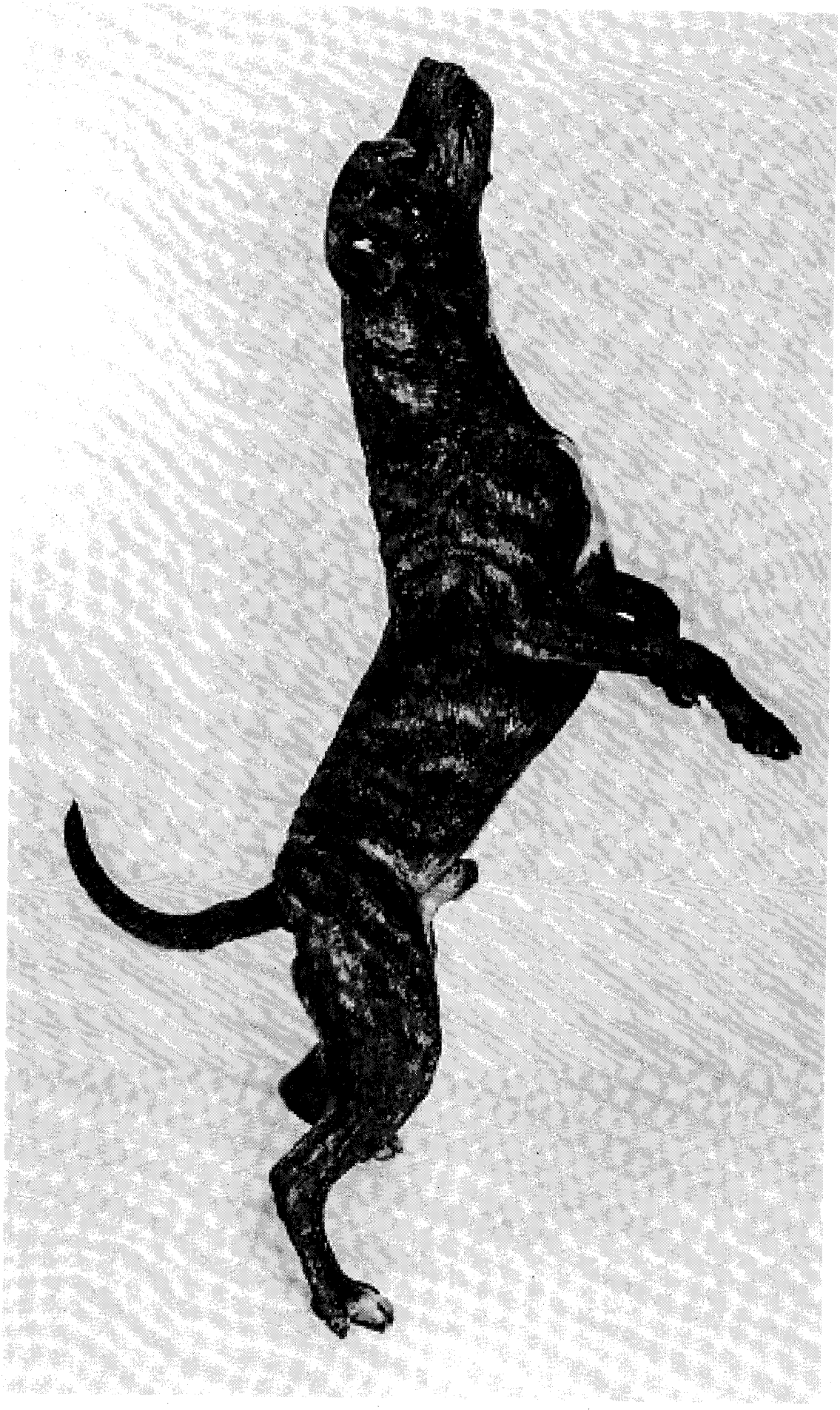
I was outraged—not because they were profiling us but rather because they were profiling *Carson*. He had never hurt anybody or anything; he was who he was because he *wouldn't* fight. Several times he had been attacked while I walked him—by a chocolate Lab, by a big old hound dog, and by a pack of dogs led by an overwhelmed walker. He was a good dog, and we were

responsible dog owners who obeyed leash laws. Why were we paying the price for pit-bull owners—dog owners—who didn't?

I am aware that my argument has been made before: for Second Amendment rights and gun ownership. There is a reason for this besides the frequent comparison of pit bulls to AK-47's and the like. More and more, the arguments we have in our society boil down to the *same* argument, with members of an aggrieved group asking to be considered as individuals and members of society at large insisting on judging them as a group—with the exception deemed the rule. When pit bulls are criminalized, will only criminals have pit bulls? Not exactly. But in 2013, Farmers Insurance decided to limit liability coverage for American Staffordshire terriers, rottweilers, and wolf mixes in the state of California. The company said that those three breeds figured in more than 25 percent of its dog-bite claims and "caused more harm when they attack than any other breed." That left about 75 percent of dog-bite claims unaccounted for by breed—but then, even if dalmatians top bite statistics, most insurance companies don't decline to cover dalmatians.

Every year, American shelters have to kill about 1.2 million dogs. But both pro- and anti-pit-bull organizations estimate that of these, anywhere from 800,000 to nearly 1 million are pit bulls. We kill anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000 pit bulls a day.

In a statement, Farmers declared that it was "one of the last insurance companies to make this policy change." If so, then the last will certainly be State Farm, which has a policy of declining to ask homeowners making a dog-bite claim what kind of dog they have. The company expects dog owners to report that they have a dog, to follow leash laws, and to educate themselves about the factors that cause dogs—all dogs—to bite. But it doesn't even keep statistics by breed. It never has, in the belief that, in the words of Heather Paul, State Farm's animal expert, "all dogs have the potential to bite and a dog bite is a dog bite." It does, however, keep track of the number of dog bites in places like the State of Ohio, which removed pit bulls from its "vicious-dog law" two years ago. "We recently pulled our bite numbers for 2012 and 2013," Paul says. "We found that they went down."



ONE-YEAR-OLD MALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 57 LBS

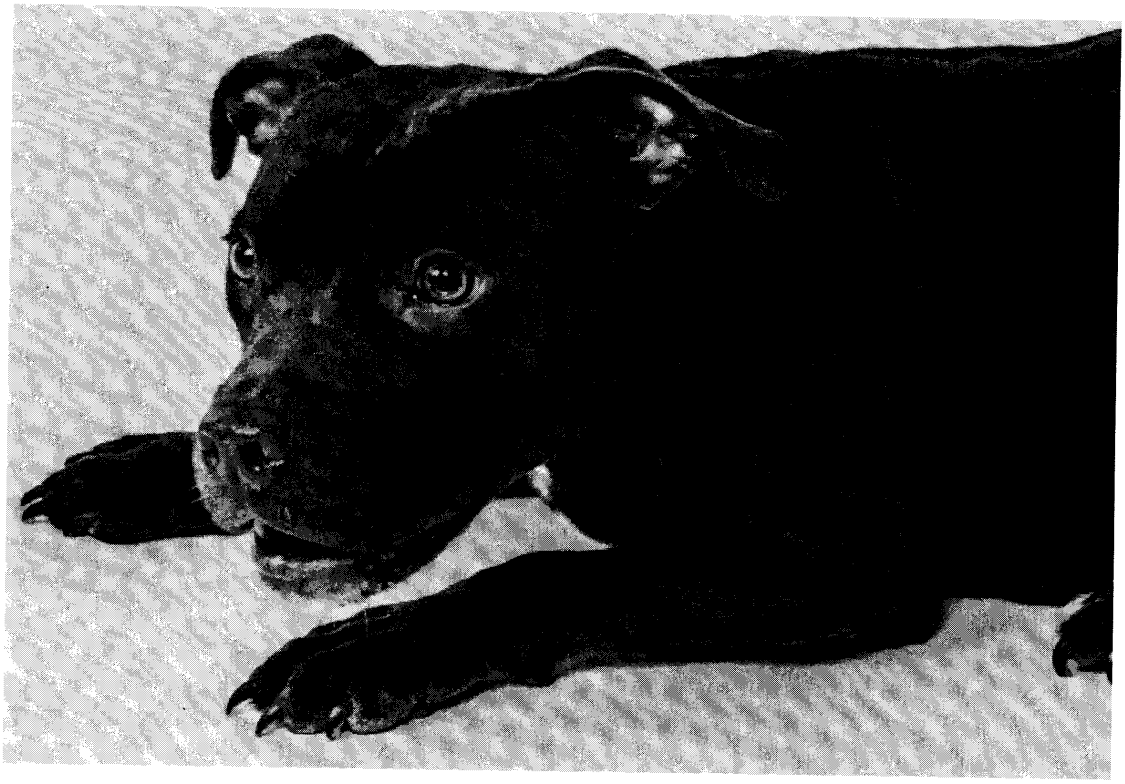
Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, October 6, 2013. Adopted.

You learn a lot about America when you own a pit bull. You learn not just who likes your dog; you learn what *kind* of person likes your dog—and what kind of person fears him. You generalize. You profile. You see a well-heeled white woman walking a golden retriever and expect her to cross the street and give you a dirty look; you see the guy who's cutting down her trees or pressure-washing her driveway and you expect him to say: "That's a beautiful dog." Or: "How much you want for that dog?" Or: "You fight that dog?" You learn that the argument about pit bulls takes place along the lines of class and, to a lesser extent, race. The opposition to pit bulls might not be racist; it does, however, employ racial *thinking*. If a pit-bull-Labrador mix bites, then the pit bull is always what has done the biting, its portion of the blood—its taint—ineradicable and finally decisive.

Is he a good boy, the pit bull being turned in to the animal shelter in Cobb County? He looks like one. He's squat and short-legged and muscular. He's gray as iron, with a white insignia on his chest. He has green eyes and cropped ears. He's panting with his tongue out, and yet he continually looks at his owner with attention and a kind of stoic calm. She's an African-American woman, thirtyish, dressed for work in a skirt and heels. She has her dog on a leash. He sits while she leans against the counter and fills out a form. Why is she turning in her dog? Lieutenant Shepard, Cobb's managing director of animal control, insists that anyone surrendering a dog say why so they can assess the dog's chances for adoption, then discourage the surrender, then figure out alternatives. The woman says what a lot of people say. She is moving. Her new apartment complex doesn't allow pit bulls. She has no choice.

Lieutenant Shepard steps up to talk to her along with Rodney Smith, who's worked at the shelter for twenty years. Has the woman considered turning in her dog to a rescue organization? The woman doesn't know what they're talking about. When She pard and Smith explain what rescue organizations do, the woman seems heartened. "Can you bring my dog to one?" she asks. Smith says that she'll have to do it herself: "We have fifty just like him." And with that, she hands him the leash and walks out without turning around. She has to go to work.

Smith was not speaking metaphorically. He leads the dog back into the shelter, where he joins not just his species but his *kind*. It is an enormous place with painted cinder-block walls and a concrete floor, booming with sound, dim with shadow, and overpowering with wordless sorrow. It is not a hellish place, like some of the shelters around Atlanta—like, for instance, Rockdale County's, where every dog vies for cage space with piles of its own excrement, and every pit bull is deemed unadoptable and routinely euthanized. Cobb is not like that; it's merely heartbreaking. Row upon row of cage upon cage and dog upon dog—and 80 percent of them pits and pit mixes. In two rows, there is nothing *but* pits and pit mixes, some wagging and wiggling, some barking and glaring, some slumped in resignation, and all of them, all of them, with a doctoral study of the human species in their eyes. "I have three myself," Lieutenant Shepard says. "I took one home—I had to—and I was unprepared for how emotional they are, how sensitive. It's why they don't do well in shelters."



EMERALD

TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 32 LBS

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, April 11, 2014. Adopted.

This is where Dexter came from. He has his own story and perhaps his own apocrypha: His first home was in DeKalb County, where his owners let him roam and where he often went to the house of a woman down the block, who returned him in the evening. One day, she brought him back, and his owners were gone. They'd moved away. They hadn't taken their dog with them. She brought him to the county animal shelter, another place where 80 percent of the dogs are pit bulls. He was taken in by a rescue organization, which found him a home. His new owner moved in with his girlfriend, and then left behind both his girlfriend and his dog. The girlfriend turned Dexter in to Cobb County, where a rescue organization found him, and then he found us.

Lieutenant Shepard remembered him. We had been told when we adopted him that he had been the dog shelter workers kept at the front desk, and she confirmed this was true. He was a good boy when he was at the shelter, and that was one of the reasons he survived. He had also gotten lucky. In 2013, Cobb County took in ten thousand animals, domestic and wild. Five thousand of them were dogs. By conservative estimates, between a quarter and a third of the dogs were pit bulls or pit-bull mixes. But pits and pit mixes accounted for at least three quarters of the shelter population, and a preponderance of the dogs who were unrescued, unadopted, and unclaimed. Last year, the Cobb shelter took in 1,351 dogs identified as pit bulls. It had to euthanize 876 of them—more than 2 a day, 15 a week, 70 a month, in a place run by an animal-control officer sympathetic to their cause.

The numbers can be extrapolated to the rest of the country, and they are unconscionable. America is two countries now—the country of its narrative and the country of its numbers, with the latter sitting in judgment of the former. In the stories we tell ourselves, we are nearly always too good: too soft on criminals, too easy on terrorists, too lenient with immigrants, too kind to animals. In the stories told by our numbers, we imprison, we drone, we deport, and we euthanize

with an easy conscience and an avenging zeal. We have become schizophrenic in that way, and pit bulls hold up the same mirror as the 2.2 million souls in our prisons and jails and the more than 350,000 people we deport every year. Every year, American shelters have to kill about 1.2 million dogs. But both pro- and anti-pit-bull organizations estimate that of these, anywhere from 800,000 to nearly 1 million are pit bulls. We kill anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000 pit bulls a *day*. They are rising simultaneously in popularity and disposability, becoming something truly American, a popular dog forever poised on the brink of extermination. There is endless argument over the reliability of bite statistics and breed identification and over the question of whether aggression in dogs is associated with specific genes or environmental triggers common to all dogs: that is, whether pit bulls who bite do so because they are pit bulls or because they are more likely to be intact male dogs at the end of a chain. But even if you concede the worst of the statistics—even if you concede the authority of a fourteen-year-old CDC report that implicated pit bulls and rottweilers in a majority of fatal dog attacks—one thing is certain about pit bulls in America: They are more sinned against than sinning.

My daughter is an only child who has found her sibling in her dog, Dexter. She feeds him; he allows her to take his food. She rides her bike when I walk him; he cries and whimpers and moans when she strays from his side. He has been, from the start, the most obedient dog we've ever had, the quickest to learn and most eager to please; and so when she had to write an essay for school, she wrote one extolling his intelligence. When she had to write a poem, she wrote a cycle of four with him as her muse, including one that contemplated his difficult passage to our home: "*trying/sighing/crying/not dying—Dexter.*" She calls him Bro and writes him letters; and when her school asked her to do her spring project on the subject of change, she decided to raise money for an advocacy group called StubbyDog.

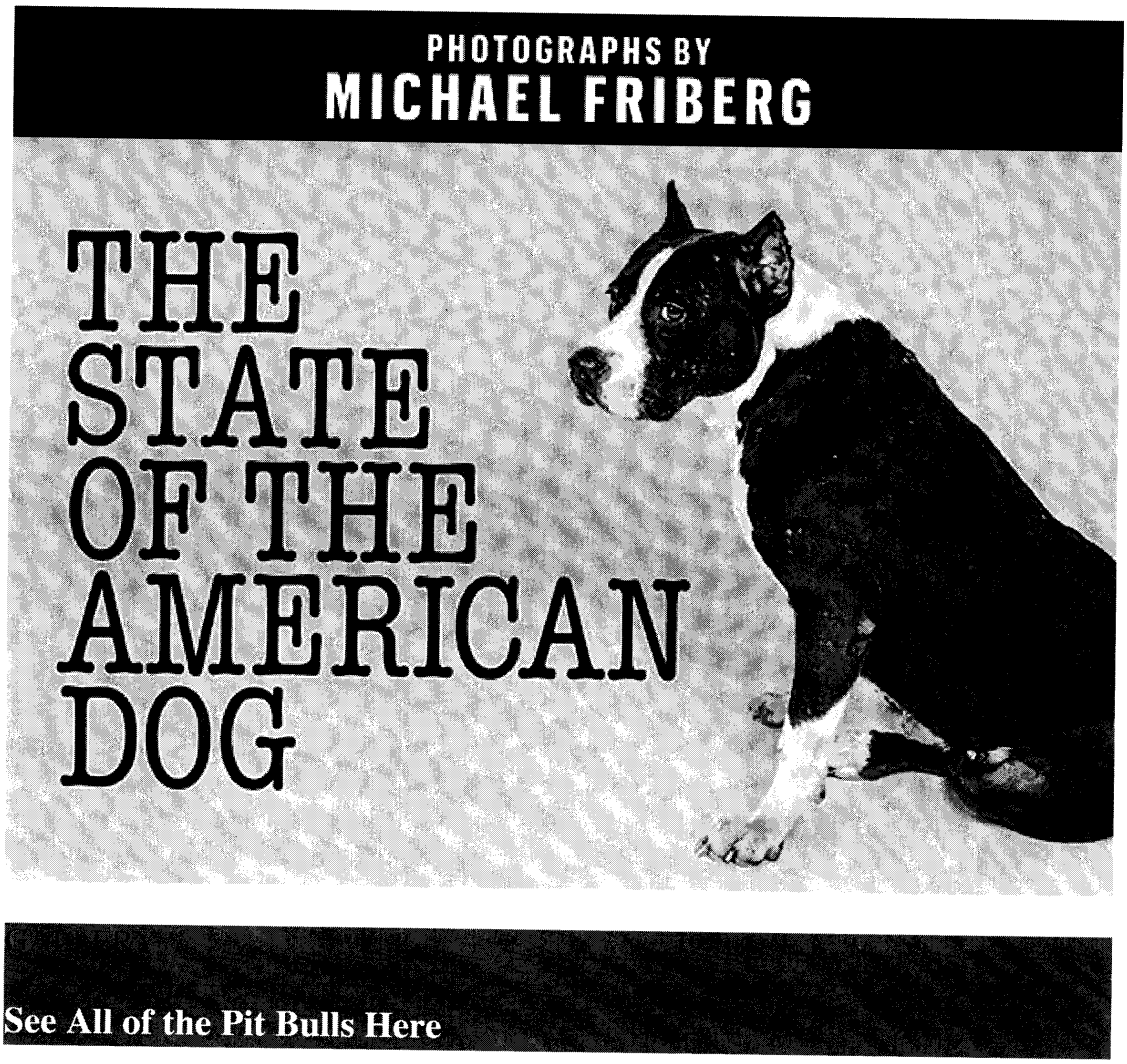
StubbyDog is dedicated to changing how people think about pit bulls. It offers online education and resources; its leaders also join the debate when states and cities contemplate breed-specific legislation. When Cedar City, Utah, contemplated banning pit bulls, StubbyDog's chairman, Russ Mead, began his presentation to the city council this way: "In looking at your dog-bite statistics, you don't have a pit-bull problem, you have a cocker-spaniel problem." When my daughter found StubbyDog, she found an ally for her own cause, and so one afternoon in March she perfected a spiel, rigged a cardboard box for the purpose of taking donations, and went door-to-door in our neighborhood. My wife went with her. So did Dexter.

One of the first houses they visited was owned by a couple in their sixties, with an expansive front porch and a seven-year-old male shih tzu. My daughter climbed the ten steps to the porch and knocked on the front door; my wife stayed back with Dexter on a leash. The owner came outside, a kind and genial man delighted by my daughter's initiative; he brought his shih tzu with him, and when he saw my wife standing on the lawn with Dexter, he invited them up the steps. His dog loved other dogs, he said. He would love to meet Dexter.

My daughter told my wife not to. She had seen what happened four months earlier, when Dexter was attacked by the cocker spaniel, and she knew that ever since, we had been extremely careful when introducing Dexter to other dogs. We made sure he was always under our control, and we tried to walk the two dogs side by side before we allowed them to meet face-to-face. She said, "Mom, that's not a good idea."

There are two temptations to which people fall prey with dogs. The first is to think that biology counts for everything. The second is to think it counts for nothing. My wife wanted to be a good neighbor. She was used to Carson, who wouldn't fight. She wanted to help my daughter change how people thought about pit bulls. So she let our pit bull climb the stairs at the end of a six-foot leash. She was five steps behind him when, upon reaching the top, he encountered a shih tzu standing between him and my daughter.

Dexter attacked him. He bit the shih tzu's leg and broke it, and when the homeowner tried breaking them up, he did what dogs often do to peacemakers—he bit his hand. My wife reached into her pocket and found the can of citronella spray we'd purchased after Dexter's fight with the cocker spaniel and sprayed it in Dexter's face. He stopped. She stopped him, but not before she experienced the feeling of not knowing if she could stop him—not before she understood, in her bones, that Dexter had the power to kill another dog.



We paid for the surgery that mended the shih tzu's broken leg. We waited to see if his owner would report Dexter to animal control and were awed by the power of his charity and forbearance when he didn't. But mostly, we did what people involved in a traumatic incident often do, which is to go over it again and again, the better to imagine what might not have happened and did and what might have happened and didn't.

In the space of four months, our dog had put two dogs in the hospital. There was human error both times: The cocker spaniel's owner made the mistake of letting him get outside; my wife made the mistake of letting Dexter meet another dog without keeping him under her control. Indeed, when I talked to trainers and behaviorists, they told me that when Dexter went up those stairs, he went into a situation in which some kind of fight was almost inevitable ... that he probably thought he was protecting my daughter ... that any time a sixty-pound dog goes after a fifteen-pound dog, the fifteen-pound dog is going to get hurt ... that anybody who tries to break up a dogfight is going to get bit ... and that there is not necessarily a correlation between aggression toward dogs and aggression toward humans. But human error wasn't what concerned me. What concerned me was the loss of our *margin* of error with Dexter. What concerned me was the question of whether Dexter did what he did as a dog or as a pit bull.

And so I called a professor of comparative genomics from the College of Veterinary Medicine at Western University of Health Sciences named Kris Irizarry. "You look at a pit bull's DNA," he said, "and the only thing you can really tell is that it's a dog. That's why the tests don't work. There's no boundary between what genes may or may not be in the breed, and that's why it's not a breed. It's just a general dog and there's no way to predict its behavior from its appearance. I'm not saying it's not biology that caused your dog to attack another dog. It's biology. But it's dog biology rather than pit-bull biology. And so I'm respectfully asking you: However your dog acts, keep it to your dog. Don't extrapolate and think that all pit bulls do this. Or that all dogs from shelters do this. Or that all short-haired dogs do this. Look at your dog as an individual. That's the challenge."

And then I called Jason Flatt, who lives in Dallas, Georgia, and runs a rescue organization called Friends to the Forlorn. He has a hundred pit bulls on his property. He has pit bulls that have attacked other dogs, pit bulls that have killed other dogs in fighting rings, pit bulls that have bitten people, pit bulls that have bitten him. He has last-chance dogs, dogs deemed dangerous, and a large paw print tattooed on his face as a sign that he will never give up on them, no matter what. And when I told him about Dexter, he said, "Just because a dog doesn't like other dogs doesn't make him a bad dog. But that's the downside to these dogs. A lot of advocates for the breed get mad at me for saying that. But not everybody should have a dog, and not everybody should have a pit bull. I get a lot of dogs out of shelters, and each time I do I expect four things: that he's going to have an upper respiratory infection; that he's going to be heartworm positive; that he's going to have worms; and that he's going to be dog aggressive. If he's not, great. But if he is, well, that's not the point. The point is that we've decided these dogs are *expendable*. The point is that so many of them are owned by assholes. The point is that people buy and sell them for bags of weed. There are so many out there—I get fifteen hundred e-mails a day from people asking me to take their dogs. And if I took a thousand today, there would be another thousand tomorrow. And they don't deserve that. So you have to take total responsibility for your dog. You have to make sure you don't set him up to fail. You have to save his life, man. Because he'll save yours."

We are not a pure country or a country that values purity. We are a country of adoption, a country of rescues, a country of mutts. At least that's how we like to think of ourselves. But we are also a country that likes to create idylls of its own good intentions and then penalize what doesn't fit. Pit bulls don't fit. They don't fit in the idyll of the dog park or sometimes even in the idyll of rescue, in which dogs that demand total responsibility are instead expected to rise above what they really are. They have upped the ante on American dog ownership by narrowing the margin of error to the point of nonexistence. Their detractors say they are more likely to kill; their advocates say the only thing they are more likely to do is die. We make a habit of asking dogs about their own goodness without expecting or getting an answer. But go to an animal shelter and before they are euthanized, ask the dogs you see there—the pit bulls you see there—about our goodness. You will get all the answer you need.

Iraheta, Alba

Subject: FW: NO BSL (NO Breed Specific Legislation)

From: julie honadel [mailto:jahonadel@hotmail.com]
Sent: Monday, July 14, 2014 3:51 PM
To: Bogaard, Bill; Robinson, Jacque; McAustin, Margaret; Kennedy, John; Masuda, Gene; Gordo, Victor; Madison, Steve; Tornek, Terry; Beck, Michael; Gutierrez, Julie; Mermell, Steve; Bagneris, Michele; cityclerk; Foster, Siobhan; Walsh, Eric; Saenz, Leticia; Recchia, Kristi
Cc: Julie Honadel
Subject: RE: NO BSL (NO Breed Specific Legislation)

READ THIS **Current Article from "Esquire" magazine. It begins with a cocker spaniel attacking a pitbull, unprovoked, of course, and continues to educate on the plight of the wrongly accused and discriminated against pitbull breeds.**

http://www.esquire.com/features/american-dog-0814?src=soc_fcbks

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The State of The American Dog

The most ubiquitous dog in the U. S.—the dog in whose face we see our collective reflection—is now the pit bull. Which makes it curious that we as a culture kill as many as three thousand of them per day. *PLUS: See all of the dogs here, in one place >>*

By Tom Junod on July 14, 2014

LOIS
FOUR-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER- AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX
Picked up as an injured stray with large bite wounds on her neck, February 28, 2014. Available for adoption.


JAMAICA
TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 33 LBS
Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, April 19, 2014. Adopted.


MELVIN
THREE-YEAR-OLD MALE PIT-BULL-AMERICAN-BULLDOG MIX, 57 LBS
Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, May 6, 2014. Adopted and renamed Smiley.

Published in the August 2014 issue

It was night, and we—my daughter and I—were walking our dog. His name was, and is, Dexter. He was, and is, a pit bull. We had just gotten him. We'd had him for four days. An ambulance came slowly and silently up the street, its light whirling. It stopped in front of a house, and we watched an emergency technician climb out. Then a woman began shouting, "Watch out—he doesn't like other dogs!" I looked away from the house being visited by the ambulance to the house next door. The woman who had shouted the warning was standing in the doorway; her dog, at full tilt, was already halfway across her lawn, its teeth bared, its eyes as big as eggs. It was a cocker spaniel, a breed well known for its aggressiveness toward both dogs and humans. And it was heading for my pit bull.


GALLERY

I stepped between Dexter and the dog charging him. I was used to this—I had just lost a pit bull whom I'd had for eleven years and whom I'd frequently had to protect. I'd had success dissuading dogs from attacking him by posturing and by unleashing torrents of unhinged obscenity. Despite my daughter's presence, I tried both on the cocker spaniel. But he went right past me, seemingly right through me. I tried to kick him but missed, and when I turned around, he was already on Dexter's neck.

It was not a good idea. The cocker spaniel weighed about thirty pounds. Dexter weighed sixty, with a head scaled to a dog twice his size. The length of Dexter's slender body, indeed, was just a suspension bridge between the edifices of his head and his hind legs. I looked, and the cocker spaniel was biting Dexter's neck; I looked again and Dexter was gripping the cocker spaniel's. I told my daughter to run to the house where the woman had opened her door to look at the ambulance and mistakenly let her dog outside. Then I tried to save the cocker spaniel's life so that I could save Dexter's.


STARLET

THREE-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 44 LBS

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, April 13, 2014. Available for adoption.


QUEENY

TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE PIT-BULL MIX, 42 LBS

Dropped off as a stray by a member of the public, March 8, 2014. Available for adoption.


LEVI

FOUR-YEAR-OLD MALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-STAFFORDSHIRE MIX, 50 LBS

Abandoned in yard by owner; brought in by an animal-control officer, April 22, 2014. Adopted.

The cocker spaniel was screaming. It was the only sound as the emergency technician pushed an old woman on a gurney to the ambulance, oblivious to what was taking place before him. I told Dexter to let go; he didn't. He was breathing through his nose, but there was an untroubled serenity in his eyes, almost an innocence. And his jaws were set in concrete. With a burst of adrenaline, I picked him up by his hind legs and was horrified to see that I had picked up the cocker spaniel as well—that he was a foot off the ground, swinging from Dexter's mouth.

I put them down and tried prying my dog's jaws apart. This is not what you are supposed to do, but I knew what happens to pit bulls who kill other dogs, even when other dogs attack them. The cocker spaniel bit me once on the forearm, then again and again, but I neither felt the bites nor blamed the dog. Blood ran down my arm, mixed with sweat, and I enfolded Dexter in a kind of bear hug, in a kind of loving embrace, and he let go. The ambulance, that mute and glowering witness, drove away. The cocker spaniel went back to its house and

then eventually to an animal hospital, where it was treated for infection. Its owner walked me and my daughter back home, apologizing for the attack and expressing surprise at how docile Dexter had become in its wake—how calm and friendly, how sweet.

JOSE

ONE-YEAR-OLD MALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX

Abandoned in home by owner; brought in by an animal-control officer, January 13, 2014. Available for adoption.

This is a story about an American dog: my dog, Dexter. And because Dexter is a pit bull, this is also a story about *the* American dog, because pit bulls have changed the way Americans think about dogs in general. Reviled, pit bulls have become representative. There is no other dog that figures as often in the national narrative—no other dog as vilified on the evening news, no other dog as defended on television programs, no other dog as mythologized by both its enemies and its advocates, no other dog as discriminated against, no other dog as wantonly bred, no other dog as frequently abused, no other dog as promiscuously abandoned, no other dog as likely to end up in an animal shelter, no other dog as likely to be rescued, no other dog as likely to be killed. In a way, the pit bull has become the *only* American dog, because it is the only American dog that has become an American metaphor—and the only American dog that people bother to name. When a cocker spaniel bites, it does so as a member of its species; it is never anything but a dog. When a pit bull bites, it does so as a member of its breed. A pit bull is never anything but a pit bull.

The argument against pit bulls is not necessarily racist. It does, however, employ racial thinking.

There are two ironies here: The first is, as pit-bull advocates like to point out, "the pit bull is not a breed; it's a classification." Even the municipalities that have banned it acknowledge as much in the language of their laws, which is a language of approximation. Denver, for instance, stipulates that a pit bull "is defined as any dog that is an American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, Staffordshire Bull Terrier, or any dog displaying the majority of physical traits of any one (1) or more of the above breeds, or any dog exhibiting those distinguishing characteristics which substantially conform to the standards established by the American Kennel Club or United Kennel Club for any of the above breeds." Yet Luis Salgado, the animal-services investigator charged with enforcing the pit-bull ban in Miami, admits that "there is no reliable DNA testing for that breed. DNA is useless. If you look at where that breed came from, there's American bulldog, there's terrier—all watered down and mixed together to produce the dog we now call the pit bull." What Salgado uses to establish a dog's genetic identity is not genetics but rather "physical characteristics—we have a forty-seven-point checklist. Any dog that substantially conforms to the characteristics of a pit bull is considered a pit bull."

CHICA

TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, March 28, 2014.

Euthanized for medical reasons, May 19, 2014.

You know one when you see one, in other words—and so the second irony proceeds from the first: You see a *lot* of them. The pit bull is not a breed but a conglomeration of traits, and those traits are reshaping what we think of as the American dog, which is to say the American mutt. A few generations ago, the typical mutt was a rangy dog with a long snout and pricked ears—a shepherd mix. Now it looks like a pit bull. This is not simply because so many pit-bull owners oppose spaying and neutering their dogs and their dogs are bred so

frequently and haphazardly; nor is it simply because so many of the traits associated with pit bulls have proven common. It's because the very definition of a pit bull is so elastic and encompassing. As Salgado says, "It doesn't have to be purebred to be considered a pit bull." A German shepherd crossed with a pit bull is a pit bull. A cocker spaniel crossed with a pit bull is a pit bull. "We had a beautiful dog in here not long ago that was a pit-Weimaraner mix," says Lieutenant Cheryl Shepard, who runs the animal shelter in Cobb County, Georgia, where I live. "But we try not to call dogs pit mixes, because then nobody will adopt them. So we called it a Weimaraner mix. And it *looked* like a Weimaraner. It had a lot of the traits of a Weimaraner. We found a woman to adopt it. But she took it to her vet and he said, 'No, that's a pit bull.' She returned it the next day."

When we met Carson, his past as a "bait dog"—a nonfighting dog whom fighting dogs gnaw on as a prelude to combat—was inscribed on his body.

Thirty years after it first attained notoriety as an accessory to the inner-city drug trade, the pit bull has become commonplace in the United States. No one knows exactly how many there are, especial ly if pit-bull mixes are included in the estimate, for despite going unregistered and uncounted, the pit bull has achieved near omnipresence in big cities and even a certain hard-won popularity in the suburbs. But at the same time, it has become less a type of dog than a *strain* of dog that still makes many Americans deeply uncomfortable. The demographic shifts that are transforming America's human population find a mirror in the demographic shifts that are transforming America's canine one, with the same effect: More and more we become what we somehow can't abide. We might accept pit bulls personally, but America still doesn't accept them institutionally, where it counts; indeed, apartment complexes and insurance companies are arrayed in force against them. And so are we: For although we adopt them by the thousands, we aban don them by the millions. The ever-expanding population of dogs considered pit bulls feeds an ever-expanding population of dogs *condemned* as pit bulls, and we resolve this rising demographic pressure in the way to which we've become accustomed: in secret, and in staggering numbers. We have always counted on our dogs to tell us who we are. But what pit bulls tell us is that who we think we are is increasingly at odds with what we've turned out to be.

Dexter is a rescue. Of course he is—half the dogs one meets nowadays are introduced by their owners as "rescues." Once a term for dogs taken out of abusive or precarious situations, it now often refers to dogs on their second homes. The number of rescue dogs rises almost as inexorably as the number of pit bulls, and for good reason: The rescue movement came to its current prominence addressing the impossible plight of pit bulls—a plight that lent moral prestige to the cause of unwanted golden retrievers and Labradors. This is not to minimize the challenges faced by unwanted dogs of any breed; there are, after all, nearly four million American dogs in American shelters. But an unwanted pit bull is different from an unwanted golden retriever in that a market exists for unwanted golden retrievers and golden-retriever mixes; they are literally shipped from animal shelters in the south to animal shelters in the north because there are not enough of them. There are plenty of unwanted pit bulls. An unwanted pit bull generally *stays* unwanted, and the moral reward for rescuing one—okay, the moral self-congratulation—is doubled by the knowledge that it beat overwhelming odds just to stay alive.


FLOWER

TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 49 LBS

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, March 27, 2014. Available for adoption.


LESTER

THREE-YEAR-OLD MALE PIT-BULL MIX, 61 LBS

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, January 28, 2014. Adopted.

Take, for example, the story of our first pit bull, Carson. Carson was a fighting dog—or, to be more exact, a nonfighting dog that survived life in a fighting ring. He was a brown-and-white dog found covered in dried blood at a drug bust in Henry County, Georgia. Dogs like that are often euthanized as a matter of routine, but Carson showed something—a glimmer. He wasn't killed, and a rescue organization claimed him from the shelter. For a year and a half, he stayed with a woman who rehabilitated him; then we lost our dog, and she called us out of the blue. She worked at a vet. By some mysterious agency, she'd heard our dog—a guard-dog breed—was sick, and so she waited for him to die. Now that he was gone, she wanted to know:

"Would you be willing to adopt a pit bull?"

Now, any dog that comes as a rescue comes with its own apocrypha. Nobody knows his past, so a past is ascribed to him. But when we met Carson, his past as a "bait dog"—a nonfighting dog whom fighting dogs gnaw on as a prelude to combat—was inscribed on his body. He had broken teeth. He had filigrees of scarring around his eyes. He had broad hairless patches of scarring around his neck that revealed his pale porcine skin. He had a ten-inch burn down his back that people often mistook for raised hackles. And yet he managed to strike a comic figure instead of a tragic one—that was his glimmer. He had one ear up and one ear down, protuberant green eyes, a panting grin that wrinkled his cheeks, and an air of insistence and optimism that was never anything less than ridiculous given his circumstances. He climbed onto my wife's lap on a day that happened to be my wife's birthday, and we thought he was giving himself to her as a special gift; we didn't know until later that climbing onto the laps of perfect strangers was his *move*: his survival mechanism and perhaps his con. Whatever it was, it worked. We took him home that day and promptly freaked out.

COCO

TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 52 LBS

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, October 11, 2013. Available for adoption.

BERNADETTE

ONE-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 53 LBS

Picked up as a stray, January 13, 2014. Available for adoption.

Well, my wife did. Her friends did. We were in the process of adopting our daughter, and they told her that she was putting everything at risk. *You got what? A pit bull? A fighting dog? Have you lost your mind?* We contemplated giving Carson back until we took him for a walk one day and a school bus emptied out in front of us. We tried to stop the children from accosting him—"We don't know him!"—but they were all over him, and there he stood in the middle of them, with his grin and his glimmer. We wound up taking him to a canine behaviorist at the University of Georgia, who spent four hours with him and said, "He's a great dog" while assuring us that he *was* a dog before he was a pit bull.

And that is the heart of the matter when you own a pit bull. The language of institutional animosity toward your dog—the language of breed bans and insurance restrictions—takes great pains to declare that your dog is not *like* other dogs but rather something less and at the same time something more: something Other. And I have to admit there was something different about Carson. For reasons that must be hardwired to our own species, dog owners everywhere ask the same question of their dogs: "Are you a good boy?" But when you have a dog as brutalized as Carson had been, a dog as indelibly marked by blood ritual, the question acquires an existential urgency. You really want to *know,* and what distinguished Carson from any other dog I've owned was how he answered. We had him for eleven years, and in that time he demonstrated that the goodness of certain creatures has to be innate, since his was definitely not instilled by humans. If he triumphed over his own supposed nature, he also triumphed over ours, and as such he had the sheen of miracle about him—there was just no accounting for him, even when he died. He was old and he was arthritic, and we thought he had kidney disease when in fact he had a tumor comprised of blood vessels seated deep in his abdomen. It

ruptured one night last September, and as he was bleeding out internally at 2:30 in the morning, he managed to jump into our bed to spend his last hours with us. I still don't know how he did it.

My ten-year-old daughter sobbed for three days. We had adopted her after we adopted Carson, and they had never been particularly close. She fed, walked, and cared for him, but she always told us that he wasn't *her* dog; he was ours. But when he died, she was shattered—"I've had him my whole life!"—and she started looking for a dog of her own. As it happened, she found him on the morning of my wife's birthday, exactly eleven years after we met Carson, being walked in the parking lot of a Starbucks by a woman with a rescue organization. He was a pit bull, and, like Carson, he came with a name: Dexter. He also came with a history. He had been abandoned and he had been relinquished, and both times he had wound up in local animal shelters. If his story was more typical than Carson's, his survival was just as unlikely. The next day, we adopted—rescued—him. He was ours; or, to be exact, he was my daughter's, and since then our house has been filled with the sound of them running after each other while she asks him, again and again, if he is a good boy.

PRESTON

TWO-MONTH-OLD MALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 10 LBS

Dropped off as a stray by a member of the public, April 15, 2014. Adopted.

When we had Carson, we tried to change our homeowner's policy. My wife called up an underwriter for a quote, and he began to assess what kind of risk we presented. Eventually, he asked if we had a dog. "Yes," my wife said. What kind? "A mixed-breed terrier," my wife said. He asked how much he weighed. "Fifty-five pounds," she said. He then proceeded to ask about his coat, his coloring, the width of his head, and the shape of his tail—he then proceeded, in other words, to profile him, using the same kind of checklist that Investigator Salgado uses in Miami.

I was outraged—not because they were profiling us but rather because they were profiling *Carson.* He had never hurt anybody or anything; he was who he was because he *wouldn't* fight. Several times he had been attacked while I walked him—by a chocolate Lab, by a big old hound dog, and by a pack of dogs led by an overwhelmed walker. He was a good dog, and we were responsible dog owners who obeyed leash laws. Why were we paying the price for pit-bull owners—dog owners—who didn't?

> ***Every year, American shelters have to kill about 1.2 million dogs. But both pro- and anti-pit-bull organizations estimate that of these, anywhere from 800,000 to nearly 1 million are pit bulls. We kill anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000 pit bulls a day.***

I am aware that my argument has been made before: for Second Amendment rights and gun ownership. There is a reason for this besides the frequent comparison of pit bulls to AK-47's and the like. More and more, the arguments we have in our society boil down to the *same* argument, with members of an aggrieved group asking to be considered as individuals and members of society at large insisting on judging them as a group—with the exception deemed the rule. When pit bulls are criminalized, will only criminals have pit bulls? Not exactly. But in 2013, Farmers Insurance decided to limit liability coverage for American Staffordshire terriers, rottweilers, and wolf mixes in the state of California. The company said that those three breeds figured in more than 25 percent of its dog-bite claims and "caused more harm when they attack than any other breed." That left about 75 percent of dog-bite claims unaccounted for by breed—but then, even if dalmatians top bite statistics, most insurance companies don't decline to cover dalmatians.

In a statement, Farmers declared that it was "one of the last insurance companies to make this policy change." If so, then the last will certainly be State Farm, which has a policy of declining to ask homeowners making a

dog-bite claim what kind of dog they have. The company expects dog owners to report that they have a dog, to follow leash laws, and to educate themselves about the factors that cause dogs—all dogs—to bite. But it doesn't even keep statistics by breed. It never has, in the belief that, in the words of Heather Paul, State Farm's animal expert, "all dogs have the potential to bite and a dog bite is a dog bite." It does, however, keep track of the number of dog bites in places like the State of Ohio, which removed pit bulls from its "vicious-dog law" two years ago. "We recently pulled our bite numbers for 2012 and 2013," Paul says. "We found that they went down."


AUGUST PIE

ONE-YEAR-OLD MALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 57 LBS

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, October 6, 2013. Adopted.

You learn a lot about America when you own a pit bull. You learn not just who likes your dog; you learn what *kind* of person likes your dog—and what kind of person fears him. You generalize. You profile. You see a well-heeled white woman walking a golden retriever and expect her to cross the street and give you a dirty look; you see the guy who's cutting down her trees or pressure-washing her driveway and you expect him to say: "That's a beautiful dog." Or: "How much you want for that dog?" Or: "You fight that dog?" You learn that the argument about pit bulls takes place along the lines of class and, to a lesser extent, race. The opposition to pit bulls might not be racist; it does, however, employ racial *thinking.* If a pit-bull-Labrador mix bites, then the pit bull is always what has done the biting, its portion of the blood—its taint—ineradicable and finally decisive.

Is he a good boy, the pit bull being turned in to the animal shelter in Cobb County? He looks like one. He's squat and short-legged and muscular. He's gray as iron, with a white insignia on his chest. He has green eyes and cropped ears. He's panting with his tongue out, and yet he continually looks at his owner with attention and a kind of stoic calm. She's an African-American woman, thirtyish, dressed for work in a skirt and heels. She has her dog on a leash. He sits while she leans against the counter and fills out a form. Why is she turning in her dog? Lieutenant Shepard, Cobb's managing director of animal control, insists that anyone surrendering a dog say why so they can assess the dog's chances for adoption, then discourage the surrender, then figure out alternatives. The woman says what a lot of people say. She is moving. Her new apartment complex doesn't allow pit bulls. She has no choice.

Lieutenant Shepard steps up to talk to her along with Rodney Smith, who's worked at the shelter for twenty years. Has the woman considered turning in her dog to a rescue organization? The woman doesn't know what they're talking about. When She pard and Smith explain what rescue organizations do, the woman seems heartened. "Can you bring my dog to one?" she asks. Smith says that she'll have to do it herself: "We have fifty just like him." And with that, she hands him the leash and walks out without turning around. She has to go to work.

Smith was not speaking metaphorically. He leads the dog back into the shelter, where he joins not just his species but his *kind.* It is an enormous place with painted cinder-block walls and a concrete floor, booming with sound, dim with shadow, and overpowering with wordless sorrow. It is not a hellish place, like some of the shelters around Atlanta—like, for instance, Rockdale County's, where every dog vies for cage space with piles of its own excrement, and every pit bull is deemed unadoptable and routinely euthanized. Cobb is not like that; it's merely heartbreaking. Row upon row of cage upon cage and dog upon dog—and 80 percent of them pits and pit mixes. In two rows, there is nothing *but* pits and pit mixes, some wagging and wiggling, some barking and glaring, some slumped in resignation, and all of them, all of them, with a doctoral study of the human species in their eyes. "I have three myself," Lieutenant Shepard says. "I took one home—I had to—and I was unprepared for how emotional they are, how sensitive. It's why they don't do well in shelters."


EMERALD

TWO-YEAR-OLD FEMALE TERRIER-AMERICAN-PIT-BULL MIX, 32 LBS

Picked up as a stray by an animal-control officer, April 11, 2014. Adopted.

This is where Dexter came from. He has his own story and perhaps his own apocrypha: His first home was in DeKalb County, where his owners let him roam and where he often went to the house of a woman down the block, who returned him in the evening. One day, she brought him back, and his owners were gone. They'd moved away. They hadn't taken their dog with them. She brought him to the county animal shelter, another place where 80 percent of the dogs are pit bulls. He was taken in by a rescue organization, which found him a home. His new owner moved in with his girlfriend, and then left behind both his girlfriend and his dog. The girlfriend turned Dexter in to Cobb County, where a rescue organization found him, and then he found us. Lieutenant Shepard remembered him. We had been told when we adopted him that he had been the dog shelter workers kept at the front desk, and she confirmed this was true. He was a good boy when he was at the shelter, and that was one of the reasons he survived. He had also gotten lucky. In 2013, Cobb County took in ten thousand animals, domestic and wild. Five thousand of them were dogs. By conservative estimates, between a quarter and a third of the dogs were pit bulls or pit-bull mixes. But pits and pit mixes accounted for at least three quarters of the shelter population, and a preponderance of the dogs who were unrescued, unadopted, and unclaimed. Last year, the Cobb shelter took in 1,351 dogs identified as pit bulls. It had to euthanize 876 of them—more than 2 a day, 15 a week, 70 a month, in a place run by an animal-control officer sympathetic to their cause.

The numbers can be extrapolated to the rest of the country, and they are unconscionable. America is two countries now—the country of its narrative and the country of its numbers, with the latter sitting in judgment of the former. In the stories we tell ourselves, we are nearly always too good: too soft on criminals, too easy on terrorists, too lenient with immigrants, too kind to animals. In the stories told by our numbers, we imprison, we drone, we deport, and we euthanize with an easy conscience and an avenging zeal. We have become schizophrenic in that way, and pit bulls hold up the same mirror as the 2.2 million souls in our prisons and jails and the more than 350,000 people we deport every year. Every year, American shelters have to kill about 1.2 million dogs. But both pro- and anti-pit-bull organizations estimate that of these, anywhere from 800,000 to nearly 1 million are pit bulls. We kill anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000 pit bulls a *day.* They are rising simultaneously in popularity and disposability, becoming something truly American, a popular dog forever poised on the brink of extermination. There is endless argument over the reliability of bite statistics and breed identification and over the question of whether aggression in dogs is associated with specific genes or environmental triggers common to all dogs: that is, whether pit bulls who bite do so because they are pit bulls or because they are more likely to be intact male dogs at the end of a chain. But even if you concede the worst of the statistics—even if you concede the authority of a fourteen-year-old CDC report that implicated pit bulls and rottweilers in a majority of fatal dog attacks—one thing is certain about pit bulls in America: They are more sinned against than sinning.

My daughter is an only child who has found her sibling in her dog, Dexter. She feeds him; he allows her to take his food. She rides her bike when I walk him; he cries and whimpers and moans when she strays from his side. He has been, from the start, the most obedient dog we've ever had, the quickest to learn and most eager to please; and so when she had to write an essay for school, she wrote one extolling his intelligence. When she had to write a poem, she wrote a cycle of four with him as her muse, including one that contemplated his difficult passage to our home: *"trying/sighing/crying/not dying—Dexter."* She calls him Bro and writes him letters; and when her school asked her to do her spring project on the subject of change, she decided to raise money for an advocacy group called StubbyDog.

StubbyDog is dedicated to changing how people think about pit bulls. It offers online education and resources; its leaders also join the debate when states and cities contemplate breed-specific legislation. When Cedar City, Utah, contemplated banning pit bulls, StubbyDog's chairman, Russ Mead, began his presentation to the city council this way: "In looking at your dog-bite statistics, you don't have a pit-bull problem, you have a cocker-spaniel problem." When my daughter found StubbyDog, she found an ally for her own cause, and so one

afternoon in March she perfected a spiel, rigged a cardboard box for the purpose of taking donations, and went door-to-door in our neighborhood. My wife went with her. So did Dexter.

One of the first houses they visited was owned by a couple in their sixties, with an expansive front porch and a seven-year-old male shih tzu. My daughter climbed the ten steps to the porch and knocked on the front door; my wife stayed back with Dexter on a leash. The owner came outside, a kind and genial man delighted by my daughter's initiative; he brought his shih tzu with him, and when he saw my wife standing on the lawn with Dexter, he invited them up the steps. His dog loved other dogs, he said. He would love to meet Dexter.

My daughter told my wife not to. She had seen what happened four months earlier, when Dexter was attacked by the cocker spaniel, and she knew that ever since, we had been extremely careful when introducing Dexter to other dogs. We made sure he was always under our control, and we tried to walk the two dogs side by side before we allowed them to meet face-to-face. She said, "Mom, that's not a good idea."

There are two temptations to which people fall prey with dogs. The first is to think that biology counts for everything. The second is to think it counts for nothing. My wife wanted to be a good neighbor. She was used to Carson, who wouldn't fight. She wanted to help my daughter change how people thought about pit bulls. So she let our pit bull climb the stairs at the end of a six-foot leash. She was five steps behind him when, upon reaching the top, he encountered a shih tzu standing between him and my daughter.

Dexter attacked him. He bit the shih tzu's leg and broke it, and when the homeowner tried breaking them up, he did what dogs often do to peacemakers—he bit his hand. My wife reached into her pocket and found the can of citronella spray we'd purchased after Dexter's fight with the cocker spaniel and sprayed it in Dexter's face. He stopped. She stopped him, but not before she experienced the feeling of not knowing if she could stop him—not before she understood, in her bones, that Dexter had the power to kill another dog.


GALLERY

We paid for the surgery that mended the shih tzu's broken leg. We waited to see if his owner would report Dexter to animal control and were awed by the power of his charity and forbearance when he didn't. But mostly, we did what people involved in a traumatic incident often do, which is to go over it again and again, the better to imagine what might not have happened and did and what might have happened and didn't.

In the space of four months, our dog had put two dogs in the hospital. There was human error both times: The cocker spaniel's owner made the mistake of letting him get outside; my wife made the mistake of letting Dexter meet another dog without keeping him under her control. Indeed, when I talked to trainers and behaviorists, they told me that when Dexter went up those stairs, he went into a situation in which some kind of fight was almost inevitable ... that he probably thought he was protecting my daughter ... that any time a sixty-pound dog goes after a fifteen-pound dog, the fifteen-pound dog is going to get hurt ... that anybody who tries to break up a dogfight is going to get bit ... and that there is not necessarily a correlation between aggression toward dogs and aggression toward humans. But human error wasn't what concerned me. What concerned me was the loss of our *margin* of error with Dexter. What concerned me was the question of whether Dexter did what he did as a dog or as a pit bull.

And so I called a professor of comparative genomics from the College of Veterinary Medicine at Western University of Health Sciences named Kris Irizarry. "You look at a pit bull's DNA," he said, "and the only thing you can really tell is that it's a dog. That's why the tests don't work. There's no boundary between what genes may or may not be in the breed, and that's why it's not a breed. It's just a general dog and there's no way to predict its behavior from its appearance. I'm not saying it's not biology that caused your dog to attack another dog. It's biology. But it's dog biology rather than pit-bull biology. And so I'm respectfully asking you: However your dog acts, keep it to your dog. Don't extrapolate and think that all pit bulls do this. Or that all dogs from shelters do this. Or that all short-haired dogs do this. Look at your dog as an individual. That's the challenge."

And then I called Jason Flatt, who lives in Dallas, Georgia, and runs a rescue organization called Friends to the Forlorn. He has a hundred pit bulls on his property. He has pit bulls that have attacked other dogs, pit bulls

that have killed other dogs in fighting rings, pit bulls that have bitten people, pit bulls that have bitten him. He has last-chance dogs, dogs deemed dangerous, and a large paw print tattooed on his face as a sign that he will never give up on them, no matter what. And when I told him about Dexter, he said, "Just because a dog doesn't like other dogs doesn't make him a bad dog. But that's the downside to these dogs. A lot of advocates for the breed get mad at me for saying that. But not everybody should have a dog, and not everybody should have a pit bull. I get a lot of dogs out of shelters, and each time I do I expect four things: that he's going to have an upper respiratory infection; that he's going to be heartworm positive; that he's going to have worms; and that he's going to be dog aggressive. If he's not, great. But if he is, well, that's not the point. The point is that we've decided these dogs are *expendable*. The point is that so many of them are owned by assholes. The point is that people buy and sell them for bags of weed. There are so many out there—I get fifteen hundred e-mails a day from people asking me to take their dogs. And if I took a thousand today, there would be another thousand tomorrow. And they don't deserve that. So you have to take total responsibility for your dog. You have to make sure you don't set him up to fail. You have to save his life, man. Because he'll save yours."
We are not a pure country or a country that values purity. We are a country of adoption, a country of rescues, a country of mutts. At least that's how we like to think of ourselves. But we are also a country that likes to create idylls of its own good intentions and then penalize what doesn't fit. Pit bulls don't fit. They don't fit in the idyll of the dog park or sometimes even in the idyll of rescue, in which dogs that demand total responsibility are instead expected to rise above what they really are. They have upped the ante on American dog ownership by narrowing the margin of error to the point of nonexistence. Their detractors say they are more likely to kill; their advocates say the only thing they are more likely to do is die. We make a habit of asking dogs about their own goodness without expecting or getting an answer. But go to an animal shelter and before they are euthanized, ask the dogs you see there—the pit bulls you see there—about our goodness. You will get all the answer you need.

From: jahonadel@hotmail.com
To: bbogaard@cityofpasadena.net; jacquerobinson@cityofpasadena.net; mmcaustin@cityofpasadena.net; johnjkennedy@cityofpasadena.net; gmasuda@cityofpasadena.net; vgordo@cityofpasadena.net; smadison@cityofpasadena.net; ttornek@cityofpasadena.net; mbeck@cityofpasadena.net; jgutierrez@cityofpasadena.net; smermell@cityofpasadena.net; mbagneris@cityofpasadena.net; cityclerk@cityofpasadena.net; sfoster@cityofpasadena.net; ewalsh@cityofpasadena.net; lesaenz@cityofpasadena.net; krecchia@cityofpasadena.net
CC: jahonadel@hotmail.com
Subject: NO BSL (NO Breed Specific Legislation)
Date: Mon, 14 Jul 2014 15:07:19 -0700

Dear Pasadena City Council Members,

Please be clear on your agendas. Please fully understand consequences. Being elected to be a voice for the people includes being a voice for the voiceless members of their families. Children that have yet learned to speak are considered in the aftermath of your votes. Why not animals that also become our "children"?

Rules and laws are to benefit the greater good. Breed specific legislation does NOT. It is cruel, unjust punishment that tears apart families. It discriminates and targets the removal of a pure source of unconditional love and support.

"Bully" breeds are incorrectly defined. As an owner of an incredibly gentle, sweet, loving Boxer/American Staffordshire terrier mix there are zero signs of bullying. She is nearly 4 years old and surrenders to bubbles,

puppies, children, and adults alike. She has the full body and head of a boxer but the gorgeous color of a blue pit-bull. Uneducated humans bully and discriminate against her simply because of the color of her fur. They have a preconceived notion of what a pit-bull is but can not clearly identify one. They directly shout abusive comments at us while she wags her tail. She is no threat. She's done no harm. She still offers these rude individuals love but the people have insulted and saddened me and perpetuate a sickness that needs to end. Her color alone makes these people act unprovoked with fear based on a false presumption her physicality is more "fierce". She is far from the perpetuated, ugly stereotype.

There is no more significant damage done by these dogs than other breeds. Some on the council state a false claim that "pit-bull" bites are more apt to result in fatal attacks so BSL is required. With this logic applied to humans, and blindly subscribing to studies with significant fundamental limitations, then statistically African Americans are deemed a demographic with higher fatal attacks. Does this mean African Americans are not welcomed in Pasadena as well? Discrimination is discrimination, regardless of the subject it is forced upon, and it is wrong.

What are the statistics of fatal dog attacks vs fatal human attacks (homicides/murders)? It doesn't take a statistician to recognize humans are the greatest threat....to each other, environment, and our precious animals. Instead of being a society that chooses to deliberately harm something that loves freely be a society that reminds each other of empathy and compassion. Nurture education based on real facts not simply confirmation bias and promote understanding of how these animals strengthen our lives. Educate citizens on how to understand an animals physical ques of communication and when and how to approach or walk away for their own safety and the safety of the animal. The responsibility lies with us. ***Breed specific legislation is NOT the answer.***

There are a multitude of charitable organizations that train pit-bulls for rehabilitation of veterans, children, grief support, on and on and on. Even a group of nuns adopted a loving pit-bull. These animals are NOT innately evil. They are just like all dogs and cats seeking companionship, love and care. I, for one, am thankful my little girl came into my world. With her kind and gentle ways, she jolted me out of the stereotype I was holding onto...the one fed through media..the same one members on your council are trying to propagate. It took being an owner to understand the truth. She has already taught me many things and now I hope to teach others the truth of this breed. She enlightens my life on a daily basis with her sloppy kisses and playfulness. I couldn't imagine a world where she would be taken away. I will always fight for her. I am her voice. And I will be a voice for the breed. Join me.

Please **vote NO BSL.**

"Compassion for animals is intimately associated with goodness of character, and it may be confidently asserted that he who is cruel to animals cannot be a good man" ~ Arthur Schopenhauer, The Basis of Morality

Sincerely,
Julie Honadel