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America's Nanny Dog

Tyla Hafstrom/My Word/The Times-Standard

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Remember "Little House on the Prairie"? The trusted family pet "Jack the Brindle dog" was a pit bull. Jack was not the only pit bull famous for being a faithful family dog, as Helen Keller's beloved companion was also a pit bull. Then there was Petey, the dog from "The Little Rascals" who was indeed an American pit bull terrier.

It seems that many people have forgotten how America has loved this breed over time, and have forgotten that many choose this breed of dog today for a reliable and loving family dog. This was the breed that was affectionately known as "America's Nanny Dog."

Many celebrities have chosen this wonderful breed over time, including Fred Astaire, President Roosevelt, Mary Tyler Moore, Thomas Edison, Brad Pitt, Ann Bancroft, President Woodrow Wilson, Humphrey Bogart, John Stewart and Bernadette Peters, just to name a few.

Pit bulls are loyal, stable and intelligent dogs that are eager to please, and strive to take on the behaviors that their guardians instill in them. Their behavior is a reflection of the care, training, and socialization (or lack thereof) given by their owners.

The stigma associated with the breed has been caused by careless dog owners who do not socialize or properly train their dogs. Any breed of dog that is left tied in a backyard without experiencing the outside world is bound to have issues. It also seems that careless dog owners tend to choose the pit bull in particular, possibly due to it's "tough" reputation.

Therefore the majority of neglected, untrained dogs appear to be pit bulls. But even with all these neglected dogs, there are even more sweet, trained and well socialized pit bulls that belong to loving families. According to rigorous testing by The National Canine Temperament Testing Association, the golden retriever, poodle, border collie, English setter, German pointer and numerous other breeds are considered more likely to become aggressive than pit bulls.

The average score of the 122 breeds tested was a mere 77 percent. Pit bulls scored a 95.2 percent on these testings. (The higher the better.)

Not only have pit bulls scored extremely well on temperament tests, but they have been serving key roles in search and rescue efforts, excel in agility training and work nationwide as therapy and service dogs.

Pit bulls are highly trainable, which has been beneficial for anyone wanting a wonderful companion or service dog, but that same trait has also proven to be a downfall when the breed is exploited.

You might find this hard to believe when what is highlighted in the news regarding pit bulls seems to be negative, but there are many more positive stories concerning pit bulls than negative ones. By simply browsing the Internet, one can find an abundance of positive, reputable information about pit bulls.

Another aspect that needs to be mentioned is that most attacks by other dog breeds are misclassified as "pit bulls" by media reports. The fact is, there are far more stories of pit bulls helping, or saving lives, than endangering or ending them.

It seems that the term "pit bull" is only splashed across the headlines when the story is negative. Unfortunately, fear and negativity sells, and this breed is paying the price. If only we were to take the time to look beyond the negative hype, we would find the truth about pit bulls.

Tyla Hafstrom resides in Eureka.

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