

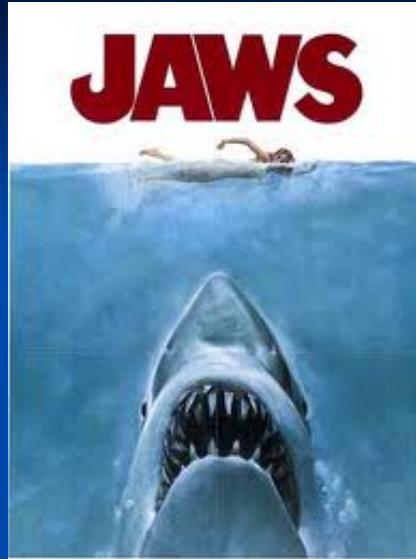


## Pit Bull Terriers: Preventing Bad Press from Hurting Good Dogs

by Cathy M. Rosenthal

## What do Halloween and Poinsettias have to do with Pit Bull Terriers?





**Which animal are we more  
afraid of?**



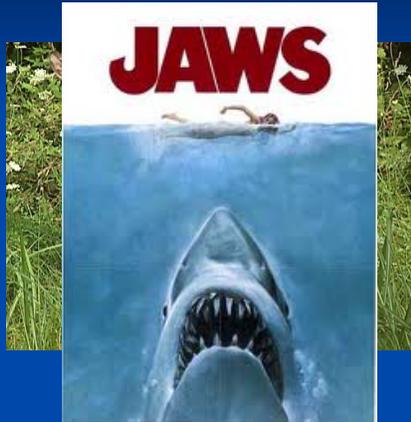
A deer is 300 times more likely  
to cause your death than a  
shark simply by running into  
the  
road and causing a  
motor vehicle accident.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the MailOnline news site. The article title is "Deer kills owner in horrific 'rag doll' attack with antlers and hooves as he tried to feed herd". The author is MARK DUELL, and it was last updated on 12th October 2011. A bulleted list of key points is circled in black:

- Donald Dube, 55, killed in New Brunswick, Canada
- Trying to feed his domesticated deer behind home
- Male deer reportedly turned on Dube and killed him

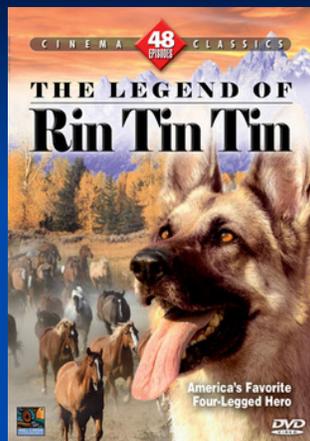
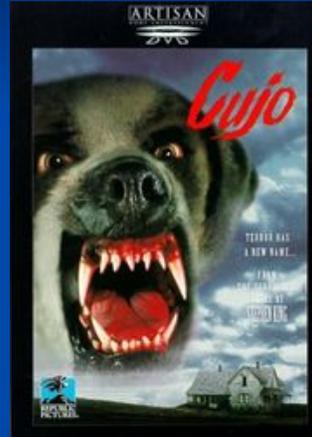
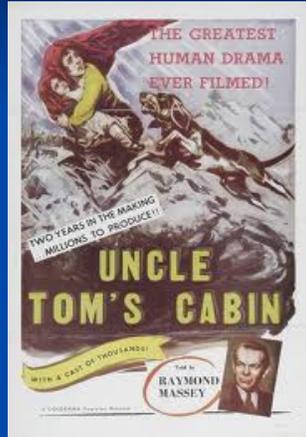
Below the list, a short paragraph reads: "A 55-year-old Canadian man died after a violent struggle with a male deer that attacked and killed him with its antlers and hooves, police said. Donald Dube was killed on Sunday evening as he tried to feed his herd of..."

## So why don't we fear deer?



**Factors that contribute to  
breeds being labeled as  
dangerous**

## #1 Creation of an image through entertainment



## **#2 Popularity among reckless owners**

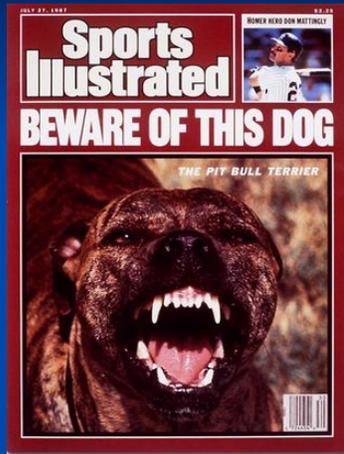


## **Who get them for negative reasons**

## **Here's what happens**

The breed popularity among reckless pet owners...increases the use of dogs in negative functions, such as guarding and protection...which increases the media reports about a particular breed...which creates fear in the public...which leads to more media reports in the media (now going national)...which is increases the likelihood that more reckless owners will want this breed.

## #3 Portrayal in the Media



“They are the fiercest of any brutes trained to be of service to mankind; they will attack anything they believe weaker than themselves, and they are only kept in the subjection by the unceasing use of the lash.” – The Dogs of Labrador, *The Chronicle*, January 29, 1903



Sled dog

Doberman Pinscher

Pit Bull Terrier

Labrador Retriever

Ending Breed Discrimination Against  
Pit-Bull-Terrier-Type Dogs – Cathy Rosenthal

“The Landers boy had often played with these dogs, as they have always been considered harmless. Taking for granted the gentle disposition of the dogs the child harnessed one of them, and, as he expressed it, began to “play horse.” In chasing the dogs he fell and one of the \_\_\_\_\_ bit his wrist...and when the child attempted to rise they turned upon him and began to tear him in a fearful manner. A man who passing was attracted by the boy’s outcry, and after some difficulty succeeded in driving the dogs away, but not until they had literally stripped the child of his clothing and almost killed him.” – *Mitchell Daily Republican*, November 7, 1886

\_\_\_ Alaskan Malamute



Collie

\_\_\_ Doberman Pinscher

\_\_\_ German Shepherd

“In 1925, a 12-year-old Colorado boy was credited with saving the life of his sister from an attack by \_\_\_\_\_. The boy and his baby sister were in a yard when the dog began attacking the little girl. The boy lifted his sister and held her up in the air as the dog tore at him, trying to reach the girl. The boy was bitten 12 times before help arrived.”

\_\_\_ a German Shepherd

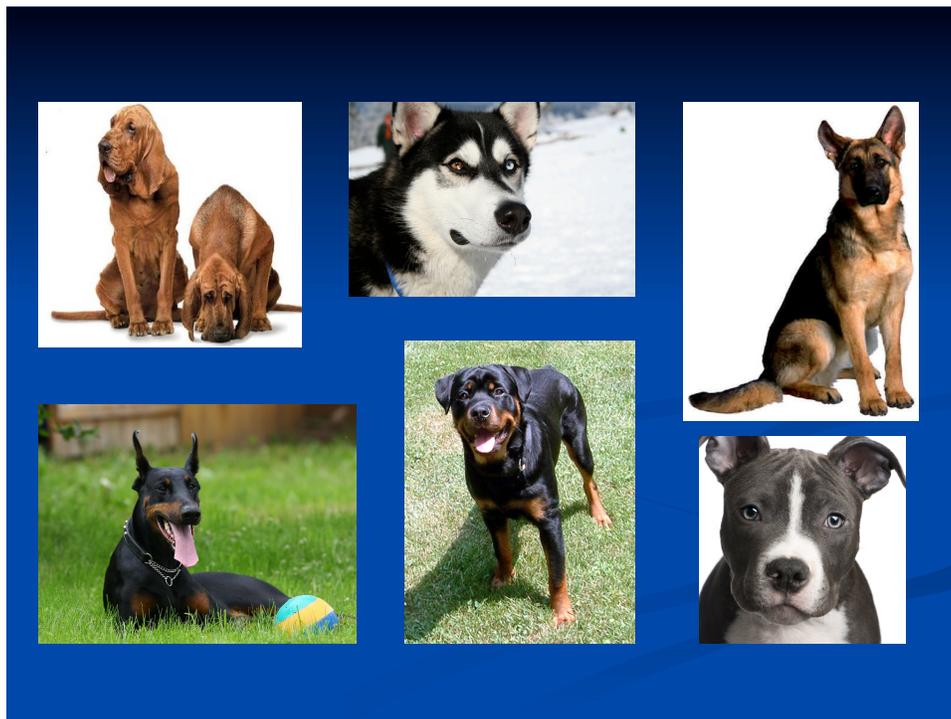
\_\_\_ a Bloodhound

\_\_\_ a Doberman Pinscher



an Airedale

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## MEDIA REPORTING 1850-1899



*All are not thieves that dogs bark at*

- Nearly half of all fatal dog attacks were not identified by breed
- Dogs identified by temperament/function
  - “Starving” dog
  - “Chained” dog
  - “Vicious” dog
  - “Coal-mine” dog
  - Mastiff “guard dog”
  - “Tramp” (Stray Newfoundland)

## Media Reporting Late 1800s – early 1900s



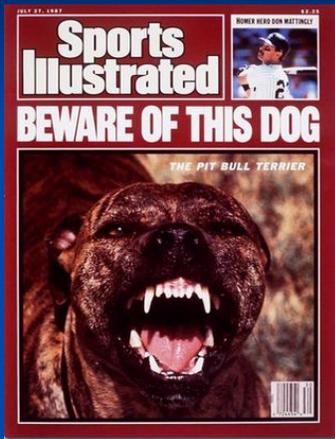
- Causes of dog attacks better understood
  - Excessive heat
  - Teasing
  - Chaining
  - Physical abuse
  - Provocation (territorial or dominance issues)
- Aggression expected
- Understood complex beings

## Media Reporting Early 20<sup>th</sup> century to 1970s



- Dogs were recognized to have limited tolerance
  - Children were known to provoke dogs
- Almost unanimous agreement that problem rested with owners
- 1966-1975 – only one case of fatal Pit Bull Terrier attack in 1971 newspaper story

## Media Reporting: 1980s to present



- By 1980s, events about what might have caused dog bites disappeared from the news
- Dogs reportedly now bite without provocation
- Media accounts began to become the source for “statistics”
- Rottweiler and Pit bull terriers increase in popularity; over reported negatively in media

## Dangerous dog vs. dangerous breed

“The formula for creating a dangerous dog has been demonstrated as use in negative functions, abuse, poor socialization, chaining, dogs maintained as a pack, etc. The formula for creating a dangerous breed is something entirely different. Since no breed of dog is inherently vicious, the creation of a “vicious breed” is in reality the creation of an image.”

(Source: *The Pit Pull Placebo: The Media, Myths, and Politics of Canine Aggression*, by Karen Delise)

## What factors contribute to the creation of an individual dangerous dog?

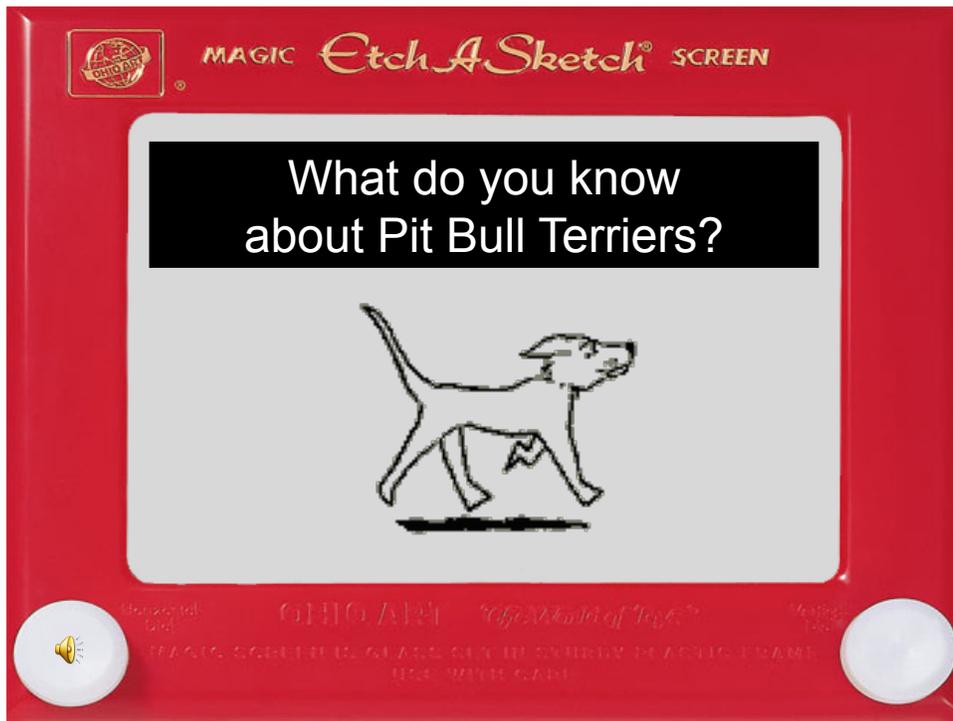
- Negative functions (guarding or protection)
- Neglected and abused
- Poorly socialized dogs
- Chained
- Unneutered
- Maintained as a pack
- Reckless owner
- Resident dog

**BREED IS NOT  
A FACTOR!**

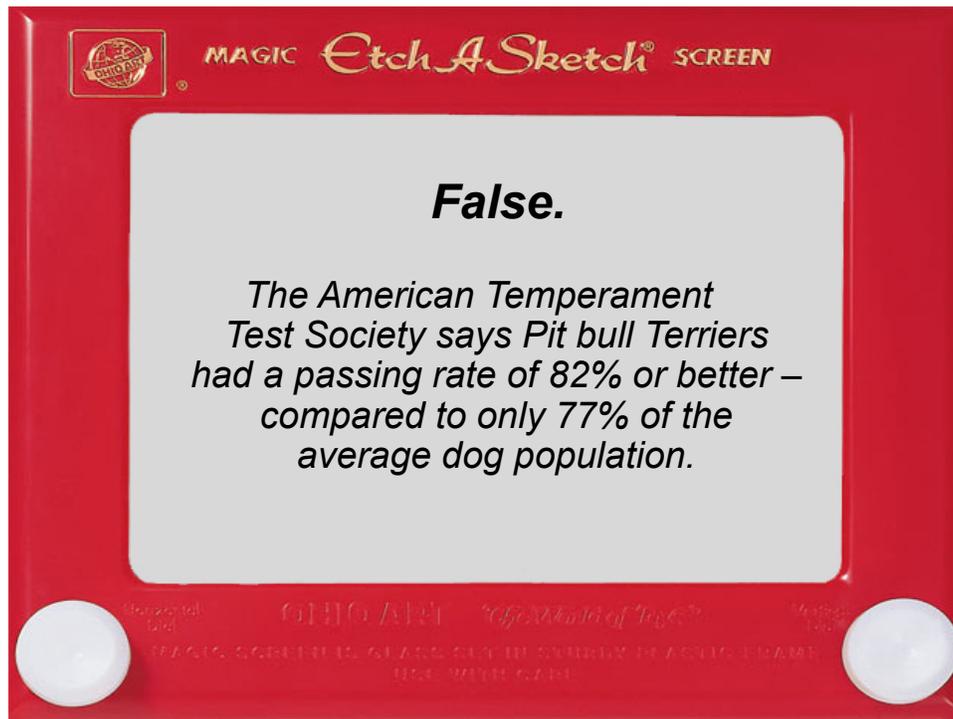
## 2006 Dog-Related Fatalities

- Reproductive status: **97%** intact dogs
- Reckless owners: **84%**
- Function of the dog: **78%** resident dogs

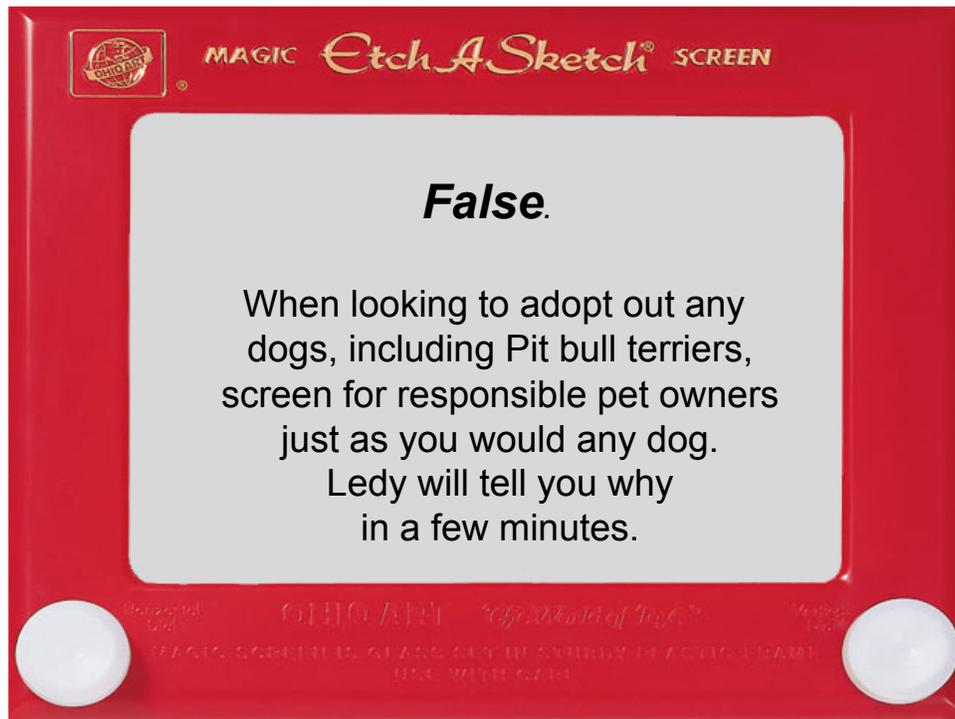
*Source: Karen Delise, National Canine Research Council*



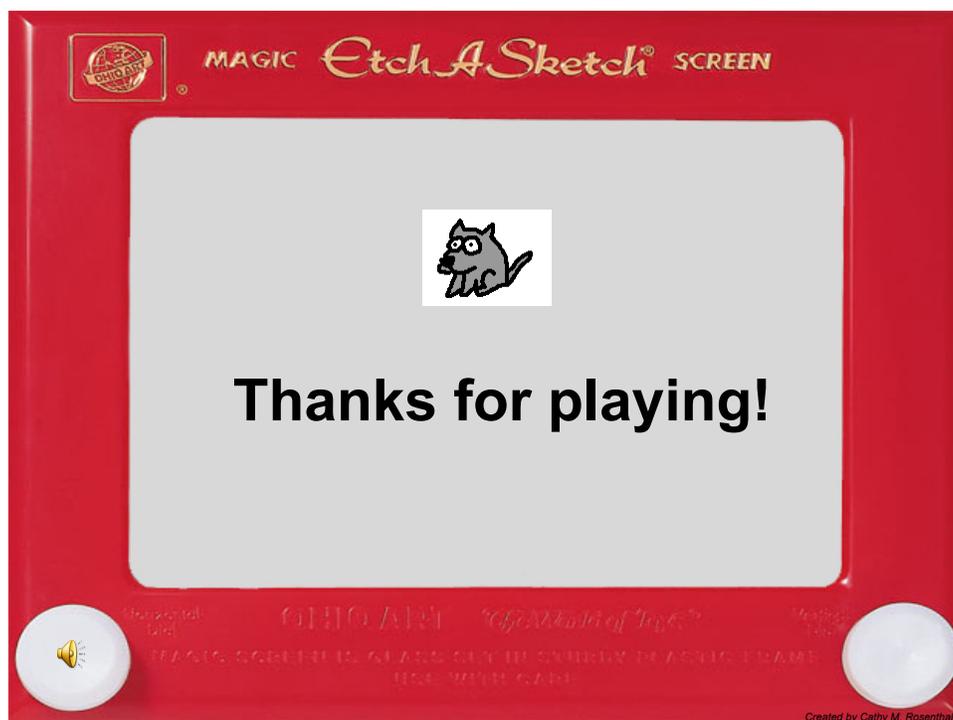
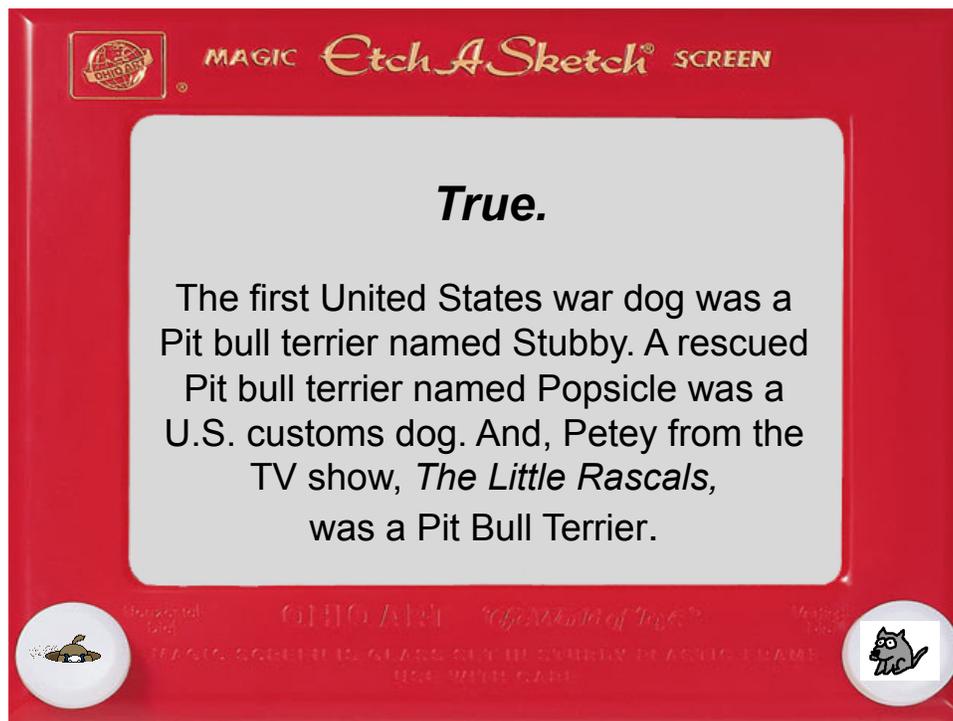






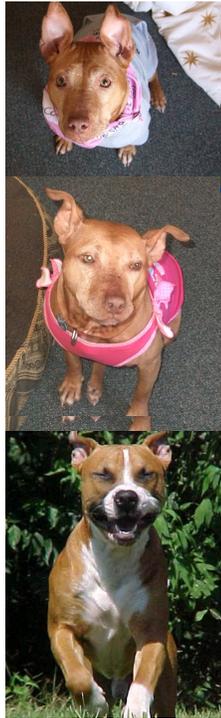


Ending Breed Discrimination Against  
Pit-Bull-Terrier-Type Dogs – Cathy Rosenthal



“Pit bull” is not a breed or breed mix, but an ever expanding group that includes whatever an animal control officer, shelter worker, dog trainer, politician, dog owner, police officer, or newspaper says it is.”  
– Animal Farm Foundation

**How do we help good Pit Bull  
Terriers from getting bad press?**



## Understanding the Media

- Understanding the media
  - What does the media want?
  - Why does the media report sensational stories?
  - What can you do?
    - Change your attitude
    - Change your stories
    - Change your language

## What's wrong with today's news?

- Faster news cycle
  - Poorly fact checked
  - Lack depth
  - Only partially told
- Limited
  - Accident
  - Weather
  - Crime
  - Politics
  - Info-tainment
- Salacious & controversial



## Facts about “News”

- Bad news is “good” news.
- The worse the news, the better – and the longer – the coverage.
- We get very little actual news.

In 2008, Pew/ Columbia Journalism school analyzed  
**14,000** stories that appeared on Google in one day.

**Essentially it was variations of  
the same 24 stores.**

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://www.cbs19.tv/story/14040210/pit-bull-child-minor-injuries?redirected=true>. The article title is "Pit bull knocks down 5-year-old; Child has minor injuries". It includes a "Recommend" button with 114 recommendations, a "story courtesy of the Tyler Morning Telegraph" note, and several paragraphs of text describing the incident. The article mentions that a 5-year-old boy was riding with his mother on a bicycle at 10:15 a.m. on the trail behind Lowes when a pit bull "came out of nowhere" and knocked him off the bicycle. Police officers at the scene believed the dog was not being aggressive and was being playful with the child. Paramedics with East Texas Emergency Medical Services attended to the child, according to a news release. The dog scratched the boy but did not bite him. The boy also received minor scratches from being knocked off the bicycle, the news release states. The child was not transported to a hospital for medical treatment and was released to his mother. According to police, the pit bull, which was wearing a collar with the name "Titan" on it, was taken into custody by Animal Control.

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- Consumer Corner: Peanut Butter prices expected to increase

DIAMOND JACK

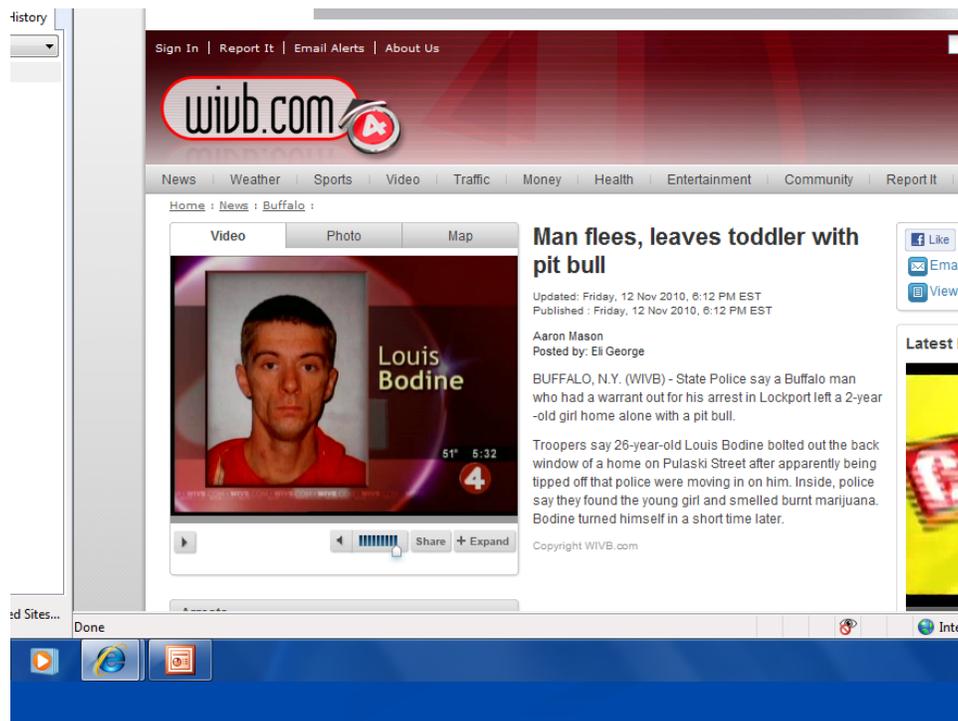
From the Lifest

- What's Today'
- Today'
- Top En
- Watch

All Laser LASIK

Voted "Best Place to have LASIK in East Texas" by the readers of the Tyler Morning Telegraph

## Ending Breed Discrimination Against Pit-Bull-Terrier-Type Dogs – Cathy Rosenthal



**Take advantage of the words  
“Pit Bull” to get the media’s  
attention**



## Create positive stories about Pit Bulls

- Could a cat or pit be your perfect pet?
- Halloween Pittie party hopes to change perceptions
- Pit Bulls spread holiday cheer
- Valentine's treats for shelter's Pit Bull Terrier types
- Special "muscular mutt" needs loving (and slightly boring) new home

## Pit Bull Awareness Parade



Hillsborough County Animal Shelter, Tampa, Florida

## Create storytellers



## Online News and Social Media

- 75% get news from online news sources, email, or friends
- Friends are becoming disseminators of news through blogs and social media
  - Facebook – 80 minutes
  - Twitter - 60 minute



## What we say, does matter.

- *“They are all terrible with children.”*
- *“I would just assume euthanize them all.”*
- *“They are vicious. We can’t adopt them out.”*
- *“They will turn on you without warning.”*
- *“Only gangbangers want these dogs.”*
- *“These dogs were bred to fight.”*
- *“These dogs can not be rehabilitated.”*
- *“If you have children, don’t adopt a Pit Bull.*
- *They can’t be trusted.”*

NEGATIVE	POSITIVE
Vicious	Friendly
Turns on you	Loyal
Can't be trusted	Trustworthy
Snick-like	Affectionate
Aggressive	Companion
Will maul you	Nanny dog
Unfriendly	Good with people
Uncontrollable	Therapy dogs
Dangerous	Family pets
Fighting dog	Adoptable

## Changing how we speak about dog fight victims



- Dogs involved in fighting need to be rescued from their abusers.
- Dog fighters are animal abusers.
- Dogs involved in dog fighting rings are victims of animal cruelty.
- We are behaviorally-assessing all the dog fighting victims and determining what resources are needed to help them recover from this abuse.
- Just like with any dog, our goal is to evaluate and place them into new homes or as service pets.

## Resident versus Family Dog



Source: Karen Delise,  
National Canine  
Research Council

## How to handle negative questions?



- Never repeat negative statements
- Don't defend when nothing to defend
- Don't combine "Pit Bull Terrier" with negative descriptors. i.e. Never say, "Pit bull terriers are not vicious," say, "We need to address the issue of aggressive dogs."
- Promote the definition of resident dog versus family dog, when applicable
- Address the dog's intent, the lack of socialization
- Acknowledge tragedy, always
- When you don't know the answer, it's okay to say you don't know something
- Know your talking points before the interview so you can stay on message



## What do you do if dog attack occurs?

- Don't be afraid to talk to the media
- Begin interviews/press releases by acknowledging the tragedy/ showing concern for the victim(s)
- Never accuse pet owners of irresponsibility during first interview, especially if child is victim
- Admit when you don't know all the facts of the case so it's difficult to comment
- Don't be defensive; act with compassion or concern

## Use language patterns (persuasive language techniques) to make your point.

Simply put, language patterns means combining certain word patterns and phrases so that you can say exactly what you want in order to influence and change minds.

Would you like to know to more?

## Use language patterns. What are language patterns?

Simply put, language patterns mean combining certain word patterns and phrases to say exactly what you want in order to influence and change minds.

Would you like to know to more?

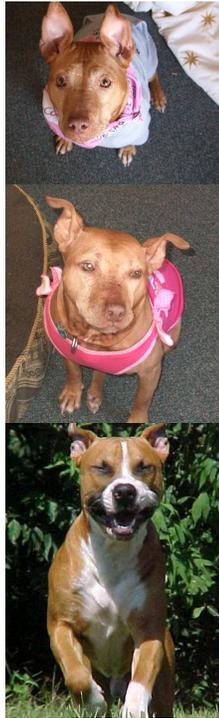


## #1 - Transitional Phrasing

Change the direction of a person's thought and allows you to answer the question you want to answer.

*Examples:*

- *The issue is not Pit Bull Terriers, but how as a community do we address the many factors that lead to bites and dangerous dog issues.*
- *Dog aggression has nothing to do with breed. The real issue is, what common factors lead dogs, any dogs, to develop anti-social behaviors.*
- *I don't the answer to that, but what I can say is...*



## #2 - Rephrasing

Change a few words to make the listener more open, willing and ready to listen.

*Examples:*

- Understanding this concept is hard.

*Restrictive: Implies difficult for people to understand.*

- Understanding this concept is not easy.

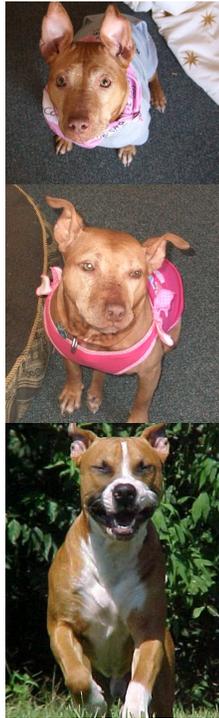
*More open: Implies understanding of concept requires work, but totally attainable.*



## #3 - Direct Commands

Implanting directional thoughts that cause the reporter to reflect on an issue for themselves.

- Consider if everyone knew that all dogs can bite and that dog bites have nothing to do with breed of the dog.
- Simply put, breed is not a factor in dog aggression.
- The simple truth is, breed is not a factor in dog aggression.



## #4 - Agreement Frames

Agree with one thing they say to get them to listen and Then make the factual statement so you build potential agreement. Best to do with print media and not with television or radio.

Isn't it true that the reason for this aggression is because it's a Pit bull?

Aggression is an issue we should address, but the simple truth is, breed is not a factor in behavior, so we're trying to educate...



## #5 - Conjunction Junction

Use simple words to add or delete thoughts.

**But:** It's not easy for people to understand that breed is not a factor in defining a dangerous dog, but once people hear the factors that lead to aggressive behavior, they learn not to judge a dog by breed.

**So:** It's not easy for people to understand that breed is not a factor in defining a dangerous dog, so we are working to educate people that there are factors, such as chaining, leaving the dog alone outside all the time, getting the dog for negative reasons, such as guarding and protection, that actually are indicators that a dog could bite.

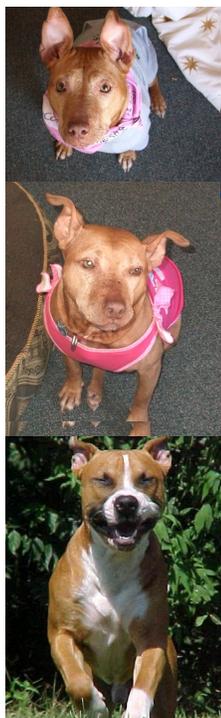


## #5 - Conjunction Junction

Use simple words to add or delete thoughts.

And: It's not easy to understand that breed is not a factor in defining a dangerous dog and that other factors, like chaining, leaving the dog alone outside all the time...

Because: It's not easy to understand that breed is not a factor in defining a dangerous dog because most people haven't been informed yet of the specific factors that do contribute to bites and dangerous dog encounters...



## #6 - Transitional Phrases

"And that means" ... is the most effective phrase for pacing/leading conversations.

### Examples

Since you asked about aggressive dogs that means you probably know breed is not a factor and you want to know the real factors that lead to aggression.

In a recent story, your station (newspaper) made it sound like breed might be a factor with dog bites and that means you may not be aware that breed is not factor in dog bite cases...



## #7 - Questions are the Answer

Sometimes asking a reporter a question can help them see things in a different perspective.

When I see a dog chained up, I feel angry and upset that this dog lives in such a small, hopeless world with little to no interaction with people. In fact, I think this would upset most people, don't you?

Don't you think it's a little unfair to expect our canine friends to now how to behave around people if they haven't been taught? We want to get the right information out to people, so let me begin by saying breed is not a factor in aggression...

Answers to  
Common  
Questions  
Using  
Language  
Tips



## **Isn't it true that Pit Bulls were bred to fight?**

No. It's true that some people have bred various dogs to fight, but that doesn't apply to a specific breed. In fact, there are millions of friendly, loving, and intelligent dogs Pit Bull terrier-type dogs living in homes across the country.

## **If they're such good dogs, why are they filling up the shelters and their length of stay is longer?**

Sadly, many people believe the myths they hear about Pit Bull terrier-type dogs and won't adopt them, so until we can rehabilitate their reputation, we will likely continue to see these wonderful dogs fill up our shelters and die in record numbers.

**Why does it seem that it's only the Pit Bulls that are turning on their owners or killing babies left unattended?**

It only seems that way because media reports about these cases tend to mention a dog's breed only if it's a Pit Bull terrier-type dog.

That's a good question. In our field, we see lots of media reports about dog bites and ironically, the breed is usually almost always misidentified.

**People are afraid of Pit Bulls. Why can't we just enact BSL to keep our neighborhoods safe?**

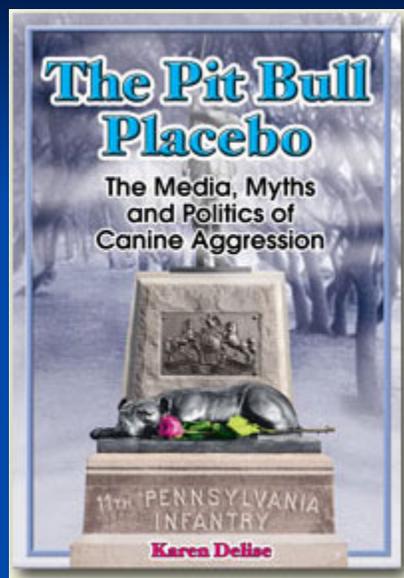
I understand people want to do everything they can to keep neighborhoods safe, but Breed Discriminatory Legislation does not address the real issues concerning dangerous dogs. Every dog, regardless of breed, is an individual and has the potential to bite or act aggressively. That's the problem we need to address.

## Help the press understand what factors really do lead to dangerous dogs

- Negative functions (guarding or protection)
- Neglected and abused
- Poor socialization
- Chained
- Unneutered
- Maintained as a pack
- Reckless owners

Dangerous  
breed is the  
creation of  
an image  
and not fact!

<http://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com>





**Every dog is an individual.  
Every dog has a story.**