

Ban a Pit bull, Save a Life:

Why the Ontario Ban against Pit bull Terriers Should Remain in Place

By Art Lightstone

For the Students of CIA4U

April 20, 2011

“Mom! Mom! The dogs got Cody. The dogs got Cody” (Vancouver Sun, 2007). Just a few days after Christmas in 2004, these are the cries that awoke Sheri Fontaine. Fontaine raced from her bed into the living room to find her three-year old son, Cody Fontaine, savaged by the dogs that were staying temporarily in her house. Tragically, young Cody did not survive the attack. A young life taken, a mother’s life ruined. Sadly, this story is not as uncommon as one might like to believe. Despite the consistent number of tragic attacks associated with pit bull terriers, a number of dog lovers still resist bans against these dogs. The ban against pit bull terriers should remain in effect in Ontario because pit bulls have a long established track record of violence against people, they exhibit highly stubborn characteristics that make them difficult to control, and such bans have proven to be extremely effective.

In 2005, the Ontario Liberal government passed The Dog Owner’s Liability Act: a ban against pit bull terriers in the province. After the bill passed, Attorney General Michael Bryant said, “Mark my words, Ontario will be safer” (Ontario passes ban on pit bulls, 2005). The legislation prevented people from acquiring a number of breeds of dogs that would be classified as pit bulls. In addition, Ontario residents who already owned a pit bull terrier prior to the ban were required to neuter and muzzle their animals. Such policies against this breed of animal are not unprecedented. In fact, similar laws are already in place in Britain, France and Germany. In Canada, Winnipeg has had a ban against pit bull terriers in place for 20 years (Ontario passes ban on pit bulls, 2005). Ontario and other regions have imposed these sanctions because the evidence clearly indicates that pit bull terriers pose a much higher than average risk to people.

Pit bull terriers have a long track record of attacks against people and animals. A 1987 study of a particularly savage attack against a child was documented by four doctors in the hopes that “increased physician and public awareness will expedite the enactment and enforcement of

effective vicious-dog legislation” (Baack, Kucan, Demarest, & Smoot, 1989). Sadly, a large percentage of those attacked by pit bulls are in fact the most vulnerable of our citizens: babies, toddlers, and young children. A Canadian study performed by Dr. Malathi Raghavan of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Manitoba tracked dog attacks from January of 1990 to December of 2007 (Raghavan, 2008). This study found that, “In Canada, 1 to 2 human deaths a year, on average, can be attributed to dog attacks.” Furthermore, the study clearly indicated that children were by far the most frequent victims of dog attacks.

Twenty-four (85.7%) of the 28 victims were children under 12 y of age; 4 (14.3%) were adults over 21 y. The median age was 5 y. The youngest victim was aged 1 mo and the oldest 45 y. Seventeen (60.7%) victims were males. (Raghavan, 2008)

A more comprehensive study, tracking dog attacks throughout Canada and the United States, revealed that pit bull terriers were by far the most dangerous breed of dog when it comes to attacks against people. Editor of Animal People, Merrit Clifton, performed a study tracking dog attacks from 1998 to 2010. This study found that pit bull terriers were responsible for 1552 attacks out of the 2864 attacks that were documented (Clifton, 2010). Pit bulls and close pit mixes accounted for 57% of all the attacks. Even more compelling is the fact 166 out of 173 of all deaths resulting from the dog attacks studied were directly attributed to pit bull terriers. That is a stunning 96% of all deaths.

Apart from the clear statistical evidence linking pit bull terriers to attacks and deaths is the fact that these dogs possess a particularly violent and stubborn instinct. Thus, even if a given dog owner has never witnessed aggression from his pit bull terrier, the instinct to attack and kill still lies dormant within the animal. No amount of assurance or promises from a pit bull owner can truly protect the vulnerable citizens of Ontario from potential pit bull attacks.

A 1987 study by Lockwood and Rindy found that Pit bull Terriers really are different from other dogs in a number of fundamental ways. Namely, these dogs can demonstrate a sudden and dramatic change of disposition, becoming aggressive against individuals with whom they have previously enjoyed a long and peaceful relationship. In fact, this study found that pit bull terriers are far more disposed to attacking their owners than other breeds. “Out of the 143 pit bull attacks, 19 (13.3%) involved attacks on the owner; out of the 135 attacks by other breeds, only 3 (2.2%) involved the owner” (Lockwood & Rindy, 1987). In addition, pit bull terriers were found to be particularly stubborn and persistent in their attacks: especially in attacks against vulnerable victims. For example, in cases of attacks against older individuals, Lockwood and Rindy found that pit bull terriers were more likely than other breeds to inflict multiple injuries against their victims. In fact, 35% of older pit bull victims received multiple injuries compared to only 18.5% of older victims of other dog breeds (1987).

Despite the protestations of dog lovers – such as the pit bull lovers march held in Vancouver on April 12, 2009 (Smith, 2009) – the Ontario ban against Pit bull Terriers is not unfounded, and it has indeed been effective at curbing attacks. In 2008, Zen Ruryk, Toronto City Hall Bureau Chief, reported that pit bull attacks filed with Toronto’s Animal Services Department had declined markedly since the ban came into effect. “In 2004, there were 130 reports of pit bull bites. The numbers decreased greatly in subsequent years: 71 in 2005; 53 in 2006; and 44 in 2007” (Ruryk, 2008).

The Ontario ban against Pit bull Terriers should remain in effect because this particular breed of dog is associated with more attacks on humans than all other breeds of dogs put together. The pit bull is genetically predisposed toward becoming aggressive and attacking – even if the victim is someone who is well known to the animal and is not perceived to be a

threat. Finally, the ban against pit bulls in Ontario has proven to be extremely effective, saving dozens of Ontario citizens from grievous harm since its inception. The facts are inescapable, and they all add up to the same conclusion: the banning of pit bulls saves lives.

Key to introductory paragraph elements

Hook: blue

Issue: Pink

Thesis: Yellow

Supporting Arguments: Green

Bibliography

- Ontario passes ban on pit bulls.* (2005, March 2). Retrieved April 20, 2011, from CBC News: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2005/03/01/pit-bull-ban050301.html>
- Baack, B. R., Kucan, J. O., Demarest, G. M., & Smoot, E. C. (1989). Mauling by Pit bull Terriers: Case Report. *Journal of Trauma-Injury Infection & Critical Care.*
- Clifton, M. (2010, June 25). *Dog attack deaths and maimings, U.S. & Canada, September 1982 to June 25, 2010* . Retrieved April 20, 2011, from Dogsbite.org: <http://www.dogsbite.org/pdf/dog-attack-deaths-maimings-2010.pdf>
- Lockwood , R., & Rindy, K. (1987). Are "Pit bulls" Different? An Analysis of the Pit bull Terrier Controversy. *Anthrozoos*, 2-8.
- Raghavan, M. (2008). Fatal dog attacks in Canada, 1990–2007. *The Canadian Verterinary Journal*, 577–581.
- Ruryk, Z. (2008, March 2). *One endangered species: But pit bull attacks are down.* Retrieved April 20, 2011, from Toronto Sun: <http://www.torontosun.com/News/TorontoAndGTA/2008/03/02/4887415-sun.html>
- Smith, C. (2009, April 9). *Media coverage of Surrey pit bull attack prompts protest by Vancouver pit bull owners.* Retrieved April 20, 2011, from Straight.com: <http://www.straight.com/article-213929/media-coverage-surrey-pit-bull-attack-prompts-protest-vancouver-pit-bull-owners>
- Vancouver Sun. (2007, February 6). *Kids' cries woke mom of boy, 3, killed by dogs' bites.* Retrieved April 20, 2011, from Canada.com: <http://www.canada.com/vancouvernews/news/story.html?id=a79e501c-14a2-4964-aa02-f9a5ab25d2a5>