

A breed apart

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TheReporter.Com

Article Launched:02/18/2007 08:06:15 AM PST

On Dec. 30, my friend Kathleen Jones and I were enjoying a wonderful trail ride at Lagoon Valley Park in Vacaville. It was a beautiful day and we had enjoyed the park, as did families taking a bike ride, stroll or having a picnic, kids playing Frisbee golf and dog owners running their animals. Everyone was having a great day.

As we were loading the horses into the trailer to go home, two loose pit bull dogs slunk up to us, started sniffing around my horse and circling. They did not look aggressive, so we shooed them away and tried to get on with loading the horse. Then the dogs started to bite at my horse. To my horror, I realized they were attacking!

We started to whip the dogs with lead ropes to make them leave. Kathleen even used the buckle end of her lead rope, but we might as well have been whipping rocks. In sheer panic, the horse tried to escape, pulling me across the pavement and burning my hand with the rope. I let go and my horse ran off, with the dogs in pursuit.

I could not believe what was happening - it had all happened so fast.

I called Kathleen's husband and had him call 911 so Kathleen and I could chase after the horse. A family drove us the mile or so to where my horse was limping. The dogs were still there, too, having been separated from the horse by two good Samaritans. One man was holding a 2-by-4 to defend against the dogs.

I would like to specifically thank the two men who put themselves in harm's way to help my horse: David Barbosa and Randy Crew, both of Vacaville. I have no doubt that if those dogs had pulled my horse down, they would have killed him.

The behavior of the dogs was so ultimately creepy because they did not behave the way any person would expect any dog to behave. They attacked us in broad daylight, with more than 200 people nearby. They did not respect human authority at all in their pursuit of the kill. Their desire to kill was so strong that they did not run away from the scene after being separated from the horse, but hung around, hoping to get another chance at their prey.

As I've told this story to others, I have heard more and more stories of similar attacks by pit bulls. I've heard the argument that pit bulls are vicious only if raised to be. In the end, though, what does it matter? The damage is done, whether by a beloved family pet or vicious fighting dog.

Here in Winters within the last year Karen Neil's pets were attacked by a pair of loose pit bulls that had been family pets. The pit bulls killed one of her dogs and maimed the other. That attack was traumatic, and cost the family almost \$1,000 in vet bills.

Rachel Dunn's young daughter witnessed her little dog being torn apart by a pair of pit bulls, a neighbor's family pets that lived a few houses down the street. That attack cost almost \$5,000 in vet bills.

Of course we have all heard the stories of young children being mauled by pet pit bulls, and just this last Christmas, a 5-year-old girl in the United Kingdom was killed by her uncle's beloved pit bull.

How many more stories like this do we have to hear before we, as a community, take some action?

These dogs have a trigger bred into them by people and, once it's flipped, there is no stopping the attack. The damage they are capable of inflicting is horrific.

The dogs are not "bad" dogs, as they were bred to behave this way by people. However, they are not fit to live in a civilized society. We might as well give a 5-year-old a gun.

Insurance companies will no longer sell homeowners' insurance to people who choose to own these dogs. Those companies don't care how the dog is raised. They strictly make their decisions based on numbers, probability and risk.

I would like to see our community impose restrictions on pit bulls and other potentially dangerous breeds similar to those now in place in larger communities, such as Boston, Detroit and Denver. These restrictions include, but are not limited to:

- Registering each pit bull with the city, for a fee of \$150 per year.
- Requiring pit bulls to be neutered or spayed. (Owners may keep an intact dog for an extra \$150 per year.)
- Specifying that safety fencing containing the dog be 8 feet high and dug into the ground a foot deep.
- Requiring owners to prominently display a sign on their home declaring that there are pit bulls inside.
- Muzzling dogs in public at all times.

In my case, animal control did arrive that day and captured the dogs, which were never claimed and so were eventually destroyed.

My horse, badly bitten and suffering a leg injury, was put down last week. We are deeply saddened at losing our beloved Harley to such a senseless and careless act. Our loss is indescribable.

In the end, I believe the dogs were not responsible for their behavior, because they have been bred to behave that way. They are intended for a specific purpose: to fight.

However, this breed was never intended to live among civilized society. So those people who choose to own such a dog must take significant precautions to protect the rest of us from a potential disaster. If they choose to allow a potentially vicious animal to sleep in their own home next to their child's bed, well, that's their business.

- The author is a resident of Winters.