

Mauling victim says pit bulls need to be fixed to fix problem

By Caress Garten of Indianapolis, the author of "On Behalf of Innocents."

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Fourteen years ago, I was walking in a quiet suburban park. Two dogs were running loose and came toward me. As I always did, I stopped and stood quietly. I didn't know anything about the dogs. I thought I would let them sniff my hand. Instead, with great strength, one dog's mouth clamped around my leg, lifting it sideways. As I protected by face with my hands, the other dog leapt around me, biting my head and tearing at my coat. Their owner--a strong man around 300 pounds--finally pried the dogs off me with a hammer handle. Then he left me.

I had been human prey to two pit bulls.

I lost part of one leg and almost died of blood loss.

Unlike many children, I survived.

After several surgeries, I returned home and fought for a vicious-dog law for Indiana. I was successful and wrote a book about my experiences.

While researching the book, I learned dogfighters are no longer culling pit bulls. Instead, due to the popularity of this human-aggressive breed, they were being sold to the public. I learned about pit bulls' bizarre behavioral traits. They are selectively bred for the fighting pit. They are able to tolerate great pain. They can appear calm or even playful before attacking. They have the ability to hang on to a victim and not release while slashing and tearing. They have an inbred disposition to kill other dogs.

The pit bull is now a part of a subculture throughout the United States.

Of course, there are some good pit bulls who are owned by responsible people. However, the more coveted vicious pits are quickly winning the procreation race. Through my work with mauling victims, I have found that there are pit bulls that have never been mistreated but suddenly turn and maul a family member. With this breed there is always a risk--you never know how far a pit bull is generationally from a fighter.

I hear from many mauling victims from across the country. Their injuries are routinely horrific. Recently, an Indianapolis toddler was severely mauled by a pit bull.

Without provocation, the dog burst unexpectedly from a doorway. The toddler's head went into the mouth of the dog. The dog would not let go until its jaw was broken by hammer blows. Breeders, trainers and Humane Societies need to join in finding a real solution to this dog that is often selectively bred for fighting and is all too often dangerous to humans.

This unique breed is dangerous with or without irresponsible owners. Spaying and neutering the pit bull is the best answer to this problem.