

Pit bull victim has no doubts over ban

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[Murphy-Smith], a victim of dogs, supports a ban on pit bulls. "What do you say about the children who are being attacked by these dogs?" she asked. "[Anna Cieslewicz] did not have to die. I can't imagine other dogs would be this vicious. I mean, would you allow a grizzly bear or a jaguar to be a family pet? Pit bulls are the same thing. They're going to snap and attack."

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I've written that it is a bad idea to ban any particular breed of dog, like pit bulls, since the human barbarians who breed for viciousness and aggression will only find another breed to ruin.

It's easy to write that, since I have the use of both hands. Mary Murphy-Smith, 49, of Chicago, is an associate professor of nursing at St. Xavier University. She had been a midwife, delivering babies. But that ended on Jan. 12, 2003.

That's when she went for her morning jog in the Dan Ryan Woods. A running acquaintance, Anna Cieslewicz, 48, had gone out running in the woods an hour earlier.

"I left my house at 9:30. I saw a body laying on the trail when I was running, I thought to myself, what is down there? Before I could even think any more, the dogs came out and attacked me," Murphy-Smith said.

They were pit bulls, mongrels likely. They'd already attacked Cieslewicz, who would later die. "It was a 20-minute struggle to try to get these dogs off of me," she said, describing how they took her down. "One dog, once he devoured my one leg, he started on the other leg. The other one made a mess of my arm, he tore up my biceps and triceps, and then he tore the muscle from my forearm. It was avulsed. That just means it was torn to shreds.

"I had a very thick scarf wrapped around my neck. When they finally got me down to the ground, I couldn't fight them anymore. The one dog was trying to rip off the scarf, and he finally got it off. The dog on my leg, he tried to rip off the glove on my left hand. The other went for my neck. I reached down and there was a stick in front of me, and as he came at my neck, I shoved the stick in his mouth.

"He kind of backed off. I felt like two arms picked me up, but no one was there. It was a miracle. I certainly believe the Good Lord was there with me, because I could not do it on my own."

She slid down a hill and, using the stick as a weapon and a cane, stumbled out of the woods, the dogs biting her heels. She made it to 83rd Street covered in blood.

"Nobody would stop," she said. "I couldn't stand anymore, so I lay down on the yellow line in the middle of the road."

Finally, two nurses driving by stopped to help and called paramedics. The dogs were hunted down and shot.

After five surgeries in almost three years, she can move her right arm. She can make a claw with her right hand. But she can't clap her hands together.

And since the nerves and tendons were ripped apart, she can no longer work as a midwife. In her current job, she's limited in her ability to demonstrate techniques to her students.

"Even when I try to do some of the assessment skills to show them how to examine a particular area, because

of the limitations I have with my fingers, it's difficult.

"My legs are OK. I mean, they look awful because of all the scars on them, but they're functional. I can run."

Murphy-Smith, a victim of dogs, supports a ban on pit bulls. "What do you say about the children who are being attacked by these dogs?" she asked. "Anna did not have to die. I can't imagine other dogs would be this vicious. I mean, would you allow a grizzly bear or a jaguar to be a family pet? Pit bulls are the same thing. They're going to snap and attack."

"What are they waiting for? Is it going to take someone else dying to say, 'Oh, we've got to do something about these dogs?'"

There have been other packs in the woods, and in her neighborhood. About a year after the attack, in a different part of town, she saw a woman, her arms full of groceries, being attacked by two large mutts. She hustled the woman into her car, took her home, then found a police officer.

"I told her that I saw these dogs and they attacked this lady, and they needed to call someone about them," Murphy-Smith said. "[The officer] said she'd look into it. I saw her drive down the street and then turn the opposite way of where I told her to go."

Three days later, her neighbor, a Chicago police officer, came home to let his puppy out in the back yard. He was inside the house when he heard the growling.

"He saw these two pit bulls rip apart his puppy," she said. "They were beige and we don't know where they came from." That's when she decided to get counseling for post-traumatic stress syndrome. "I just couldn't sleep at night. I kept thinking that everywhere I was going, there were pit bulls. I lost 10 pounds, couldn't eat or sleep. It was an awful scenario, so that's when I had to go for help."

The debate over breed bans and dangerous dogs and their much more dangerous and irresponsible owners and breeders will grind along. Newspaper columns and aldermanic resolutions typed with both hands will outline the struggle between competing interests.

But all you have to do is look at Murphy-Smith's right hand--the one she used to deliver babies--to know that things cannot remain as they are.

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