

Don't hate the breed



By None

Magnus the Magnificent

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Telluride, Colo. -

Fortunately for me, Second Chance Humane Society does not feel that breed discrimination and breed banning is the solution to dealing with aggressive dog issues.

My name is Magnus the Magnificent Smooching Machine and, as a Shar Pei with some Bull mixed into my genes, I hold great concern for the growing tendency for breeds such as mine to be discriminated against.

Second Chance and I feel it is imperative to recognize that breeds developed for protective roles carry a greater owner responsibility toward proper training and socialization.

Unfortunately, because not all pet owners accept this responsibility, or even abuse it by encouraging or training their dogs to fight — the larger and more powerful dog breeds are collectively suffering. Beyond our breeds being altogether banned from entire cities (such as Denver where I read this morning that an innocent, loveable and harmless Bull puppy is currently facing a death sentence due to the ban on Bulls) we are also targeted by the insurance industry.

Breeds such as Rottweilers, German Shepherds, Doberman Pinschers, Akitas, Chow, and Bull breeds are being discriminated against by homeowner insurers that are refusing coverage for those sharing their living spaces with such breeds.

The consequences of breed bans stretch far beyond denied coverage and the insurance industry. The bans are also having a devastating effect on dog ownership in the United States, and are forcing shelters to deal with those who choose their insurance policy over their dog. An example of this is the Humane Society of Atchison, Kan. where the number of Rottweilers relinquished because of insurance coverage has jumped 40 percent within the past year.

“For a lot of people — myself, I have a Rottie — these aren't just dogs,” says Penny Virts-Bell, the executive director of the shelter. “They are an important part of the family. It's like giving up your child.”

Virts-Bell said that none of the relinquished dogs were aggressive or vicious, and the people gave up their animals only as a last resort. “We tried to go up against the insurance company on their behalf, but ran into a brick wall.”

With 3-4 million pets euthanized in shelters each year, the insurance industry breed bans are only adding to the problem. But insurance officials blame breed bans on the latest trends saying more dog-bite cases are going to court, and juries are awarding larger sums to victims.

Opponents of the breed ban agree that there is no simplified way to identify all the breeds that could pose a danger and that the ban on breeds is a very simplistic and reactionary to a much more complicated problem. A breed ban only addresses a minor portion of the problem, leaving the majority of components — training, socialization, health of dog, the victim's behavior — unaddressed. The alternative, say opponents of breed bans, is to look at the dog, not the breed. “The insurance companies are missing the boat,” says Stephanie Shain, Director of Companion Animal Outreach for The Humane Society of the United States. “Any dog can bite. The insurance industry needs to look at this issue on a case-by-case basis, and make judgments about a particular dog, not an entire breed. If the insurance industry is ready to properly evaluate dogs, which with 68 million dogs kept in the U.S. will also be a good thing for their business.”

Thus, as a Bull-mix who can look intimidating but am considered the most loving and playful dog at the Second Chance Shelter, I encourage all dog parents to do your part through practicing responsible dog care—including proper socialization, supervision, humane training, and spay/neutering of your dogs.

Also, consider adopting a lug of a lover like me who quickly eliminates Bull-breed prejudice and fear with one goofy wag of my tail and sloppy kiss from my tongue.

Call the Second Chance Helpline at 626-2273 to report a lost pet or learn about SCHS Spay/Neuter Vouchers, Volunteer & Foster Care and other Programs. Visit www.secondchancehumanesociety.org to see our adoptable pets. Responses to Pet Columns can be sent to Kelly@secondchancehumanesociety.org.

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