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Hounded unfairly, pit bulls deserve new leash on life



Courtesy Susanne Kogut

Zena, a rescued pit bull, and pooch pal Bryan McKenzie share a moment at the Charlottesville-Albemarle Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The organization is sponsoring a special education program to help pit bull owners be better dog parents.

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By [BRYAN MCKENZIE](#)

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This animal, so dangerous that in Denver it would be confiscated and killed upon discovery, sniffs my pant leg. It's a pit bull named Zena, like the warrior princess, but spelled with a Z because she's so much cooler. The breed is one of the most popular in Our Fair City with nigh unto as many pits as hounds awaiting adoption at the SPCA to prove it.

Macho, macho dogs

"They're very popular because, well, they're macho and people are frightened by them," explains Susanne Kogut, of the Charlottesville-Albemarle Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. "That's one reason why they're so discriminated against. In most shelters, they are euthanized as soon as they come through the door. If there's ever a fight between two dogs and one of them is a pit bull, it's always the pit bull's fault no

matter what the other dog did.”

Witness Denver. More than 1,100 pit bulls were confiscated from owners in the Mile High City and summarily slaughtered in only two years of the municipal dog ban. Here, SPCA workers try to rehabilitate them for adoption.

To that end, the shelter and Misunderstood Pit Bull Rescue of Richmond have set aside the third Sunday of every month to celebrate the dog and educate humans. They also offer a training course for owners called “Responsible Bull Parenting.”

Zena, whose history includes numerous litters and a backyard chain, gets closer to me and gently licks my fingers. I probably taste like chicken, except a bit gamey.

“We’re careful about what dogs we adopt out and who we adopt them to,” Ms. Kogut says. “It’s against its breeding for a pit bull to bite a person. If it does that, we’re certainly not going to place it. If the dog has attacked another animal, we won’t place it.”

Ms. Kogut knows her bull. She owns several and has fostered many of the breed so popular among gangsters, wangsters and those bolstering their street-cred credit reports.

“Owners need to know their breed, and a pit bull is no different. You wouldn’t take a border collie to a pasture full of sheep, let it loose and expect it not to herd, so don’t take the pit bull to the dog park. You don’t set a dog up for failure, no matter what the breed,” Ms. Kogut says.

Attention required

Zena nudges my hand so that it rests upon her nose and moves her head so that my hand rides up between her ears. She leans against me and looks expectantly into my eyes.

“These dogs were bred for determination, and they are determined to please their humans,” she says. “They want direction. They want attention and affection.”

Zena looks into my eyes. Then her tongue hits my nose and she snuggles her muzzle into my neck. In a few minutes she rolls over and licks my hand as I rub her belly.

For a moment I’m glad I no longer live in Denver.

I bet she feels the same way.