

Misperceptions vs. Reality

By Barbara Axel

For many years after I was introduced to the dog game my peers advised me to keep away from a certain breed of dog. People who should have known better told me that breed started out just fine, but as it grew to adulthood the brain did not stop enlarging, and when it broke through the skull the dog "turned" and attacked the first person who approached. I had never seen this happen and asked all the informants whether they had witnessed such behavior themselves. They had not, but they told me that everyone knew it was true.

Haven't you heard similar unsubstantiated facts about other breeds too? Entire countries seem to catch the misperception disease since German Shepherd Dogs, for instance were renamed Alsatians in Britain during the world war. Different dog? No. It is just a different name for the same dog because the original name had a bad connotation. So too it is with any dog that currently has bull as part of its name. The dog that was the greatest family dog of the past is now the breed most feared. Because of this it is imperative to review some history.

And that is not all. Below is some information gleaned from my research on the web:

"Buster Brown, his sister Mary Jane, and his dog Tige, an American Pit Bull Terrier, were well known to the American public in the early 20th century. Tige is thought to be the first talking pet to appear in American comics, and, like that of many of his successors, his speech goes unnoticed by adults.



FORAGING.—[SEE "A BOY'S TOWN," ON PAGE 610.]

A series of live-action short subjects were produced in the mid-to-late 1920s by the Stern Bros. Pete the Pup (who played Tige) and director Gus Meins were both later associated with the popular Our Gang (Little Rascals) comedies. The original Pete (sired by Earl Tudor's "Black Jack") was an American Pit Bull Terrier named "Pal the Wonder Dog", and had a natural ring almost completely around his eye; dye was used to finish it off.

Trainer and owner Lt. Harry Lucenay used one of Pal's offspring as Pete in the series after Pal died. This dog, named "Lucenay's Peter", was registered as an AKC American Staffordshire Terrier.[2] Lucenay's Peter was born September 6, 1929 in New York City, bred by A. A. Keller. A few other dogs played Petey, but Lucenay's Peter was the best known.

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After being fired from the Our Gang series in 1932, Harry Lucenay retired Peter to Atlantic City, where he was photographed with children at the Steel Pier. Roach used a number of unrelated Pit Bulls to portray Pete in Our Gang until 1938. [2] Pete became as recognizable and popular as the kids in the gang. Pal the Wonder Dog appeared in Our Gang comedies until he died in 1930. Lucenay's Peter continued on and died of old age, not poison, on January 28, 1946 in Los Angeles, California at aged 16, two years after the Our Gang series ended. [3]

In the 1994 remake of The Little Rascals, the new Pete is an American Bulldog." Buster Brown and Pete's photos are readily available by clicking on the websites."

My group, Council on Pet Education sponsored C.O.P.E.'s Canine Capers to promote responsible ownership and training by demonstrating with our dogs prior to a question and answer period and petting session. The dogs attending had to be friendly, unflappable, experienced in crowds and eager to meet and greet audiences of all ages before they would be considered qualified to participate. Dogs of many breeds and some all-Americans worked with their owners.

One of the "Capers" dogs was a darling Bull Terrier named Bandit, who came in costume and introduced our program by encouraging the audience to guess her name. Subsequent to the correct guess she was disrobed and continued with the rest of our gang to enthuse and amuse the spectators with especially planned obedience routines.

So why has the dog who was the best family dog become the most feared in the nation? Misperception again.

But this time it is worse, because the past has been forgotten and misperception once again rules. The danger is that misperception has created ordinances that threaten the very life of special breeds of dogs. Not only bully breeds are involved. Across the United States multiple breeds are being identified as dangerous. They and cross breeds that might resemble them are being banned and killed because of rumors attached to their names.

Misperception is becoming an epidemic. We can stop this nonsense by challenging the rumors every time we hear or read them.

The statement, "It is the deed, not the breed," should become our mantra.

Barbara Axel, breeder/ trainer/exhibitor, Board Member of North Carolina Responsible Animal Owners Alliance (NCRAOA), has organized and participated in programs promoting responsible pet ownership since the late '60's. Positive interactions between dogs and children under the supervision of adults has been a primary goal.