

# SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

## In defense of pit bulls

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Best New Year's wishes to all our loyal readers and dedicated advertisers.

For 2012, my 12th year writing a New Year's column, I decided to do something a little different.

As some of our readers know, in August we adopted a "rescue" puppy from CARE4Paws. Actually, it would be more accurate to say he adopted us.

His name is Mikey and on Dec. 10 he turned a year old. In spite of what he endured during his first four months — the crushed leg and shoulder injury from being hit by a car and having no veterinary care until he was abandoned by the breeder six weeks later in horrific pain — he is the most affectionate, happy, cheerful and friendly dog I have ever seen. He is also very, very smart.

Thanks to the kind donors who paid for his first operation in June, Isabelle Gullo, who fostered him for four months, and CARE4Paws, which put him up for adoption, for having the compassion, love and the belief that this puppy would somehow get a good life in the end after all.

You see, Mikey is an American Staffordshire Terrier, also known as a pit bull, and he doesn't have a mean or vicious bone in his body. He loves other dogs and in spite of all he's gone through, he's very friendly toward people. We do not think he's the exception to the breed; we think he's the rule.

His spirits have never sagged in spite of the injuries, the operations and now the twice-weekly physical therapy.

But for the kind people above, he might have been destroyed, not only because of the injuries, which will require special attention for his lameness throughout his life, but also because he's a pit bull, a breed that has an unfair bad reputation.



Mikey the pit bull.  
COURTESY PHOTO

And that's what needs to be rectified.

We really didn't know what breed Mikey was when we fell in love with him sitting in his crate in the parking lot outside The Ark pet supply shop in Carpinteria and we didn't care when we found out that he was a pit bull. We may be an exception.

The only concern I had was if he chewed. When I was told no, I thought we were good to go. Six cedar posts, two sofas and an ottoman later, I figured it must be a habit that comes along at a later stage in a dog's life.

Overbreeding aside, dogs are products of their environments. As has been wisely stated, "There are no bad dogs, only bad people." People are responsible for a dog's bad behavior. Behavioral problems are not endemic to a breed.

Pit bulls have had undeserved "bad press" and, as a result, people are often unwilling to adopt them, many are afraid of the breed and they are "put down" in shelters more frequently and in greater numbers than other breeds.

This has to stop.

It is our hope that with exposure and education, the pit bull will become the loved and appreciated breed it once was.

Called "nanny dogs" because they were so good with children (who can forget Petey in "The Little Rascals"?), it would be wonderful if the breed could once again be known as such.

Our hope is that others will adopt the many pit bulls that are overcrowding the shelters around the county.

In the years ahead with caring owners, this wonderful breed could regain the respect and love it so deserves.

We wish you a year filled with health and happiness for one another and for the animals that enrich our lives.

- Wendy McCaw



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