



STOKING THE FIRES OF HATE:

How the Animal Protection Movement Is Failing Pit Bulls

“Teach Compassion.” It is perhaps the most important job we have as animal protectionists. In the mission statement of every animal welfare and animal rights group, every private and public shelter, and within the credo of every activist is a calling to raise awareness of animal suffering and to ultimately encourage more humane treatment. From the earliest days of our movement’s founding, we have heeded the call to change the hearts and minds of the public, knowing that doing so is a precursor to changes in laws and practices that result in animal suffering. But we have our blind spots.

There is no breed of dog in America more abused, maligned, and misrepresented than the American Pit Bull Terrier. There is no breed of dog more in need of our

compassion; in need of our call to arms on their behalf; and in need of what should be the full force of our enduring sanctuary. But we have determined that they are not worthy of it.

We have determined that they do not deserve to live. The more circumspect among us might not say so publicly. We may couch it in more benign terms, shifting the blame to others, claiming that no one will adopt them, convincing ourselves that only a ban will keep them out of harm’s way, but the end result is exactly the same. By our actions, by our words, by our policies, by our failure to speak out on their behalf, we stoke the fire that has at its core only one end for Pit Bulls: their mass killing.

To a breed abused for fighting, victimized by an undeserved reputation, relegated to certain death in shelters, add one more torment: those who should be their most ardent protectors have instead turned against them. We have joined the witch hunt.

The very agencies whose officers seek out dog fighters and abusers in order to “save” the poor creatures relegate Pit Bulls to locked and barren corridors away from public view. Ultimately, all of them—the healthy and friendly ones, side-by-side with the hopelessly sick or vicious—are uniformly put to death.

One of the nation’s leading humane newspapers lauds a city not only for outlawing Pit Bulls but for proactively enforcing the ban on them—a ban that leads to their execution. The editors, who have also called for consistency in ethical practices by encouraging shelters to serve only vegetarian food and who applaud other animal rights causes, apparently see no moral ambiguity when officers go door-to-door seizing happy and friendly pets sleeping on beds and couches, taken from their families upon threat of arrest, while animal control shelter workers wait, “euthanasia kits” at the ready. In an Oregon county, Pit Bulls are killed en masse in a shelter with an avowed No Kill goal by misusing temperament testing as a

de facto ban on the breed. In Denver, Colorado, they are simply outlawed and executed. And People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the nation’s most outspoken animal rights group, has joined the battle to exterminate these dogs—demanding that all cities ban the breed, and all Pit Bulls who enter shelters seeking sanctuary, should instead be killed.

Ending the tragic plight of the American Pit Bull Terrier should be among our most ardent goals. Our advocacy must remind people that at one time, the Pit Bull was the most popular pet in America because of their reputation as a

friendly, family dog. We must educate people that the Pit Bull’s misfortune is in finding themselves the favored breed of the dog fighter at this time in history—a distinction shared at one time by the German Shepherd, Doberman, and Rottweiler. And a distinction that will shift to another breed if we ban Pit Bulls but do not bring about an end to the scourge of dog fighting.

We must rally against the injustice of politics which condemn an entire breed of dog—in practical terms, literally hundreds of thousands of dogs a year—to death, because of the unfortunate characteristics of a few of them.

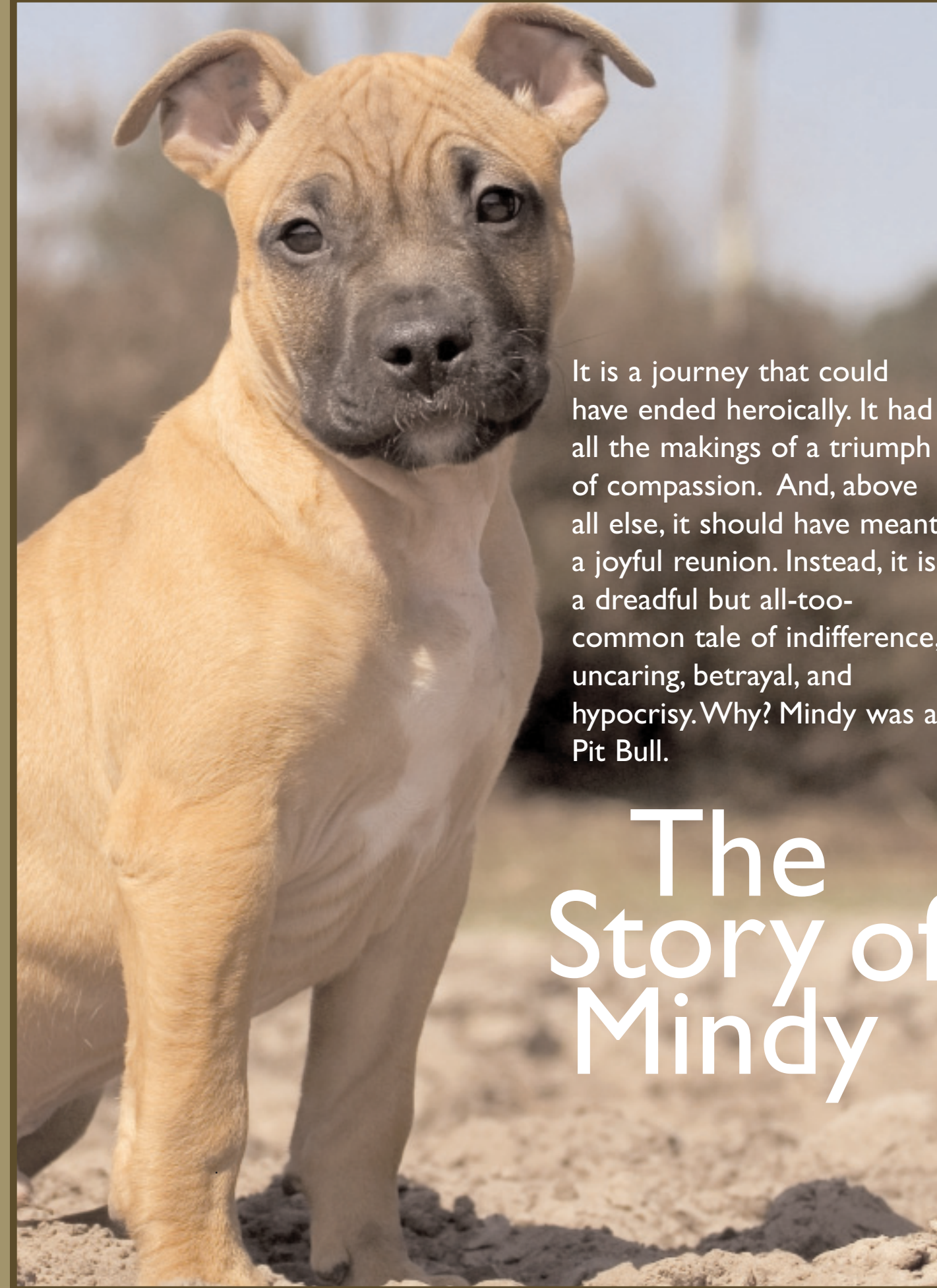
Where there is vilification, we should teach compassion. Where there are scare tactics, we should preach temperance. Where there are lies, we should speak the truth. Otherwise, the animal welfare movement will have failed the Pit Bull completely.

They fight for chickens and cows and other animals. But when it comes to dogs and cats in shelters, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has the biggest blind spot of them all. PETA not only kills thousands of dogs and cats themselves. They not only have a policy against No Kill. But they also support a ban on Pit Bulls, a position which condones the wholesale slaughter of hundreds of thousands of dogs in pounds across the country every year. It is an ugly fact that PETA does not hide. Here is what they had to say about Pit Bulls, in their own words:

“Most people have no idea that at many animal shelters across the country, any “pit bull” who comes through the front door goes out the back door—in a body bag. From San Jose to Schenectady, many shelters have enacted policies requiring the automatic destruction of the huge and ever-growing number of “pits” they encounter. This news shocks and outrages the compassionate dog-lover. Here’s another shocker: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the very people who are trying to get you to denounce the killing of chickens for the table, foxes for fur, or frogs for dissection, supports the pit bull policy...”

Ingrid Newkirk
President,

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals



It is a journey that could have ended heroically. It had all the makings of a triumph of compassion. And, above all else, it should have meant a joyful reunion. Instead, it is a dreadful but all-too-common tale of indifference, uncaring, betrayal, and hypocrisy. Why? Mindy was a Pit Bull.

The Story of Mindy

Mindy was born, like others before her, as part of a litter of puppies to a homeless stray. She was light brown in color, with a dark muzzle. She was taken in by a local family who found the mother and puppies near a local park. She was a friendly dog, the most outgoing of them all and quickly became a favorite of the neighborhood. One by one all the puppies were given away except Mindy. While the others looked like their mother, a Labrador Retriever, and therefore had no trouble finding homes, Mindy looked like the supposed father, the “dreaded” American Pit Bull Terrier. No one wanted her because they were afraid of Pit Bulls. In fact, an article in the local paper even quoted a staff member of the SPCA as saying Pit Bulls were a dangerous breed of dog. The family thought of taking Mindy to the shelter, but they knew she would be killed because of a “no adoption” rule for Pit Bulls. They decided to keep her.

But one day, the back door was accidentally left open by the youngest child and Mindy was gone when the family came home. They put up signs but could not find her. The family would later learn that a kindly and elderly neighbor three blocks away fed her. Every day Mindy would come and eat the scraps of food left out for her on the porch. Later when asked why she did not call the local shelter, the neighbor replied that she was afraid to call because Mindy was a Pit Bull and the shelter banned the breed. She thought Mindy would at least have a chance on the street. But one day Mindy did not come back for the scraps of food. She had been taken by some local thugs who used her as bait for dog fighting.

Ultimately, someone did call the shelter, because of a whining that sounded they said “like blood gurgling in a dog’s mouth.” In fact, that was exactly what it was. When the officers came, they found Mindy tied to a fence, covered in bite wounds. Afraid of Mindy, even though she had never so much as growled at anyone, they put a long pole with a metal noose on the end, the “catch-pole,” around her neck and tightened it. When she would not walk, they dragged her. In the process, she defecated on herself out of fear.

There was one witness to her abuse, but the officers did not follow-up. It was one more of over 300 “open” files that begged for attention.

The abusers were never sought. After a time, the file was marked “unresolved” and closed.

At the shelter, Mindy was not seen by the staff veterinarian. Her wounds were not dressed and healed. She was not treated kindly. They did not try to find her a loving home. No one searched the lost pet database because of the Pit Bull ban.

Instead, she was taken to a rear compound behind a door marked “staff only” where the glass window was covered in dark paper. To get there, officers took her past the children’s drawings of happy families with dogs and cats, through the overhang with large blue letters that read “Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals,” and into a room adjacent to a plaque commemorating the completion of the shelter with the inscription: “All Life is Precious.”

Mindy lay there for 72 hours while dogs came and went. All of them were Pit Bulls. Most of them were friendly, but that did not matter. This was the “Dangerous Dog” ward at the local SPCA and there were no beds, blankets, toys or treats. In here, volunteers did not walk the dogs like they did in the adoption kennels. Here no one got Kong toys, or rope tugs, an occasional brushing, a treat, or even a pat on the head. Once a day she was given a bowl of dry kibble and her water dish was refilled, but she did not have the strength to eat and she was in pain.

The end probably came like it did to countless others like her:

After three days, she was “catch-poled” again. As one employee held her down by the neck, another came in with a needle. She felt a pin prick. She tried to free herself, but the pole tightened around her neck. She tried to stand up, but her legs felt wobbly and she fell back down. Out of fear, she once again defecated on herself. Suddenly she felt nauseous and vomited. Then another person came in. She crawled into the corner and cowered, the pole still tight around her neck. They stood over her. She wanted to get away but she was too weak to move. Mindy was given poison from a bottle marked “Fatal-plus.” She went limp and let out a last breath. Urine spilled onto the kennel floor. Some time later, her body was thrown in an incinerator.