

Some breeds of dogs get undeserved reputations

While working for an animal shelter a few years ago, I saw many dogs that were victims of abuse, neglect and abandonment.

One such dog, named Angel, came to the shelter from a home in which she was mistreated. She would run to the back of her kennel and cower any time I entered holding a pooper-scooper. It was obvious to me that she had, in her past, been struck — probably with an object similar in shape or size.

Angel had also clearly not been given the love and affection a dog deserves. When I kneeled beside her, she would scoot as close as



Animal Matters

Lisa Rimmert

possible to me. If I sat down near her, she would make every effort to crawl into my lap.

One time in particular, at an off-site adoption event, Angel had made her way into my lap while I was sitting in a lawn chair. Passersby looked on with adoration. Many stopped to

say hello, to pet Angel and to ask me questions about her.

Since then I have met many other dogs, but Angel still holds the record for the sweetest dog I've ever known. Unfortunately, many people look upon dogs like Angel as naturally aggressive, mean-spirited and inappropriate — even unsafe — pets for families.

You see, Angel was a pit bull. Yes, the sweet, gentle dog that curled up in my lap every chance she got was a pit bull. "But wait a minute," you ask, "Aren't pit bulls always aggressive towards people

and other animals?" I answer that question with a resounding "No!"

Dogs are products of how they are raised. Pit bulls, just like every other breed, are just as capable of being sweet and friendly as they are of being mean and aggressive. The characteristic pit bulls possess that makes them so great — their desire to please their human — is too often used against them. People take advantage of this trait in order to create a guard dog or a dog that makes them money by fighting other dogs.

It is unfortunate that so

many irresponsible and cruel owners have given pit bulls such a bad name. But the blame for this overwhelmingly negative bias toward the breed cannot be placed entirely on bad owners. They may have created a bias, but it is the rest of us who have perpetuated it. We have failed to educate ourselves about animals, and we have allowed ourselves to stereotype an entire breed based on the actions of a few (actions which are of no fault to the animals, but to the owners).

Angel certainly did her part. She taught people that pit bulls can be sweet

— even despite a terrible upbringing. Everywhere Angel went, she shattered the stereotypes about her breed. I ask you to do your part, too.

Reject the stereotypes. Learn more about pit bulls and other misunderstood breeds by reading books, researching online or volunteering at your local shelter. And if you are the owner of a pit bull, recognize that you have a duty — to be a responsible owner and to educate others about the breed you've come to love.

Lisa Rimmert can be reached at lisarimmert@gmail.com.