

On the Positive Side: Did you know...?

By JL Jones

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It will surprise many people that the first breed ban was against the German Shepherd. In 1929, the Australian Government imposed an import ban on the Alsatian (German Shepherd), which would stay in effect until 1974. The ban was based on a claim by the Graziers Federal Council of Australia and others that the Alsatian dog was vicious and had wolf blood in its veins. The Alsatian dog was branded as a sheep killer and the farmers believed the dogs would mate with the dingo and produce a new strain of powerful and intelligent livestock killers.

In the early 1900's the German Shepherd was a new import to the U.S. and by the 1920's had developed an unflattering reputation. The dog was seen as treacherous, deceitful, vicious, and had started to overshadow other breeds (i.e. the Bloodhounds) previously seen as a ferocious. By the early part of the 1920's there was constant debate over whether or not the German shepherd had any redeeming qualities. What changed - a heroic dog called Rin Tin Tin. In 1922, this German Shepherd would start a movie career starring in 25 films and later be re-invented in a television show, which ran from 1954-1959.

Rin Tin Tin, a fictional movie hero, was able to change public opinion. Despite all the actual good works that today's misunderstood breeds accomplish such as therapy or service dogs, search and research, drug detection, customs checking, or just being a loyal family dog, these breeds never seem to get a break from the press. Hopefully soon the equivalent of a modern day Rin Tin Tin will come along and change public opinion.

Because of recent incidents, some individuals support proposing a breed ban or Breed Specific Legislation (BSL), which mainly focuses on certain types dogs considered by some as inherently dangerous or vicious. BSL is the knee jerk reaction to the bigger problem of pet owner responsibility with the unintended dramatic and heart-breaking consequences to responsible families and their family dogs. The Center for Disease Control opposes BSL, the American Veterinary Medical Association opposes BSL, and the Humane Society of the United States opposes BSL.

I am pretty sure there are people who have lived in Las Cruces their whole lives and own a pit bull type dog or Rottweiler etc... What are they supposed to do if a breed ban is put in place? Sell their house (in this economy) and move? Should responsible people and innocent companion animals suffer for the choices/mistakes of the irresponsible? It is estimated that the population of the United States is 311 million people, the number of people who died from a dog incident/attack in 2011, was 31 (various breeds). Therefore the odds of an individual meeting their untimely end by the means of a dog are approximately 1 in 10 million. It is safe to say that death resulting from an encounter with a dog is rare. Positive and dedicated pet owner responsibility can and will make these incidents even more rare.

Guest author JL Jones is a member of Las Cruces Therapaws and volunteers with animal rescue groups. Interested guest authors can contact HSSNM at 575-523-8020.