

An Open Letter to Arianna Huffington Regarding the Promotion of Pit Bulls

Dear Ms Huffington,

This is in response to [“Pit Bull Week”](#) at the *Huffington Post* (July 28 to August 3, 2014). We, the undersigned, represent the bereaved family members and survivors of canine attacks and our mandate is to educate the public on the objective facts about dangerous dogs and the public safety risk they present. Foremost amongst all dogs at high risk to human and animal safety are pit bull type dogs.

Sadly, but not surprisingly, our support and advocacy network is expanding quickly. For, as the pit bull trend grows, humans as well as family pets are being maimed and killed at a [rapidly escalating rate](#) by these breeds. This is precisely why we are urgently voicing our concerns about your publication’s efforts to promote pit bulls as desirable family pets.

To the casual observer, *Huffington Post’s* “Pit Bull Week” might have seemed like a heart-warming diversion. However, to the pit bull advocacy movement, the week-long feature will, no doubt, have been regarded as a glorious triumph.

But, we can assure you, there is no triumph when your much-loved family pit bull [suddenly latches on to your young child’s skull](#), swiftly shaking that dear boy until he’s dead.

There is no triumph when your elderly mother is [brutally attacked and killed by her son’s pet pit bull](#) while simply enjoying a quiet evening babysitting her grandkids.

There is no triumph when the two pit bulls you tenderly raised from puppyhood [suddenly rip the baby you’re holding from your arms](#) and proceed to carry out a prolonged, savage attack ending in the death of that baby.

There is no triumph when your dear boy is [suddenly ambushed by your neighbor’s pit bull](#) and mauled to death in front of his big brother who desperately and heroically tried to save him.

There is no triumph when your beautiful son playfully chases a balloon into your neighbors’ yard and is [fatally mauled by their pit bull](#).

Indeed, there is no triumph when your [family pit bull suddenly attacks your darling girl on her 4th birthday](#), killing her, despite her grandmother’s valiant attempts to stop the frenzied attack.

These are all true stories. These were all real people who are now dearly missed. Our support and advocacy network speaks on behalf of those who can speak no longer. We will not be silenced, despite the efforts of the many [pit bull advocates who belittle our grief](#) in a desperate attempt to abuse and shame us.

We can tell you hundreds of real stories of suffering, death, disfigurement and long-term trauma, as our network of pit bull victims grows weekly. The ones who survive will carry their disfigurements for the

rest of their lives and many will struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder. These preventable tragedies occurred because of widely circulated myths—that pit bulls were once considered “nanny dogs” and that, when sufficiently loved and trained, any pit bull can be a suitable family pet. Both beliefs are demonstrably untrue.

LOVE IS NOT ENOUGH

Pit bull apologists invariably exclaim after a mauling, “There are no bad dogs, only bad owners.” Yet each of the pets in the incidents described was owned by a dog lover who could never imagine that such egregious acts could be carried out by his or her pit bull -- and yet the unimaginable did happen. These unfortunate owners believed the hype that pit bulls are “just like any other dog”. We see this pattern of canine betrayal over and over again: a stunned owner, in the wake of a tragedy, stating that the family pit bull had never shown aggression before.

These attacks are not isolated incidents. Maulings of family members by beloved pit bulls occur almost daily across the country. Many of these pit bulls are spayed or neutered and have never lived a “chained life”. Centuries of [selective breeding for violence and tenacity](#) in the fighting pit cannot be loved away through wishful thinking, or sweet photos, or fanciful stories of pit bull heroism. Yet the *Huffington Post*, in lending its influential voice to this issue, would have us believe that these inherent breed characteristics can be loved away, if only we would see it in our hearts to stop the “hating” and “get educated”.

We are educated, Ms Huffington. Most of us became educated the hard way. We now caution others to avoid the school of hard knocks which has been created by the pit bull lobby and, indeed, media outlets like yours which spread [myths about the pit bull](#) type dog.

ENABLING ELEVATED RISK TO CHILDREN IS UNETHICAL

It’s fair to say that the [pit bull lobby](#)’s highly coordinated, well-funded effort to push pit bulls and derivative fighting breed dogs into the homes of an unsuspecting public has created a national health and safety crisis. Despite what pit bull advocates claim, these dogs are simply far too unpredictable for anyone to be able to guarantee that they won’t suddenly and randomly attack a visitor, neighbor or family member.

As America’s foremost dog bite attorney Kenneth Phillips puts it, [“It’s time for a pit bull recall.”](#) Yet the pro-pit bull propaganda keeps coming and more horrific deaths ensue.

The *Huffington Post* has become a premier outlet for the rebranding of pit bulls. On “Pit Bull Awareness Day” last year (October 2013), your publication posted, [“Your Kids and Pit Bulls Love Each Other.”](#) Readers were invited to submit photos of their children hugging and kissing their pit bulls. Over a hundred photos appeared in the slideshow, but one in particular caught our eye—that of poor little Nephi Selu who’d been mauled to death by his “best friend,” a pit bull named Kava. In the photo, sweetly smiling Nephi hugs Kava around the neck. We were horrified to see that photo included in the slideshow and alerted your publication to this grievous error. Your photo editors quietly removed the picture, offering no apology. Such a misstep, however, did not deter *HuffPost*’s pit bull promotion team from boosting their efforts. With the creation of “Pit Bull Week,” the editorial team ramped up the propagandizing even further, devoting an [entire new section](#) of your website (“HuffPost Pit Bulls”) to the

pushing of this “misunderstood and maligned” [breed that kills more people](#) than *all other dog breeds combined*.

And yet here we are, confronted with [“Pit Bull Week,”](#) a *Huffington Post* special feature bursting with glowing accounts and photos of cuddly pit bulls, goofy pit bulls, pit bulls in tutus and tiaras, heroic pit bulls, wrongly accused pit bulls, handicapped pit bulls, celebrity pit bulls, and the most troubling of all, pit bulls obsessively licking vulnerable infants who’ve been draped over these dogs for the sole purpose of proving how sweet and “safe” these powerful canines can be.

So very seductive is this false concept that pit bulls and children belong together that novelist and *HuffPost* blogger Douglas Anthony Cooper felt compelled to write a children’s book (and accompanying essay for parents) called *Galunker*, which is due for release later this year, about the eponymous “misunderstood but lovable” pit bull. The *Huffington Post* serialized the storybook in May of this year in a post entitled [“Children Need Pit Bulls: A Picture Book”](#) which, no doubt, helped Mr. Cooper’s [Kickstarter campaign](#) to quickly earn \$62,000 (over double its original target). In an [opinion piece for *Animals 24-7*](#), *National Post* columnist Barbara Kay reviewed *HuffPost*’s advance copy of *Galunker* and concluded, “To imply that a real-life Galunker would be ‘about as dangerous as a marshmallow’ is a stunningly—one might reasonably say a *dangerously*—misleading statement.”

THE FACTS ABOUT PIT BULL-TYPE DOGS

Pit bulls currently make up approximately 6% of the dog population in the U.S. Yet, in 2013, pit bulls and their mixes caused [78% of all dog bite-related fatalities](#). This percentage shows no signs of slowing, as animal shelters frantically push surplus pit bulls into more and more American homes. It is clear that pit bulls present astronomically higher risk compared to other breeds and, accordingly, home insurance providers have assessed higher premiums for pit bulls compared to other canine breeds (with some providers refusing to insure pit bulls altogether).

Beyond the extremely troubling human fatalities, pit bulls also mauled to death [approximately 40,000 domestic animals](#) last year. Alone, pit bulls are responsible for over 95% of companion animal and livestock killings. As animal lovers, Ms Huffington, we also speak on behalf of all the domestic animals who’ve lost their lives to pit bull violence. The owners of victimized companion animals are now rapidly finding our advocacy movement and joining us in educating the public about this community threat.

ALL DOGS BITE, BUT ALL DOGS DON’T MAUL AND KILL

The standard response by most pit bull advocates is to normalize this carnage, simply shrugging it off with an illogical mantra: “All dogs bite.” This disingenuously misses the point—a “bite” is not a mauling. Dr. David Billmire, Director of the Division of Craniofacial and Plastic Surgery at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital, [recently had this to say](#) about the subject:

“When I started my career, the most common dog-bite injuries were from German shepherds and occasionally retrievers. These injuries were almost always provoked, such as food-related or stepping on the dog, and in almost every instance, the dog reacted with a single snap and release—essentially a warning shot. There were no pack attacks.

“Starting about 25 years ago, my colleagues and I started to see disturbingly

different types of injuries. Instead of a warning bite, we saw wounds where the flesh was torn from the victim. There were multiple bite wounds covering many different anatomical sites. The attacks were generally unprovoked, persistent and often involved more than one dog. In every instance the dog involved was a pit bull or a pit bull mix.”

Tellingly, The Dog Whisperer himself, Cesar Millan, [admitted this](#) about his beloved pit bull breed:

“But this is a different breed. The power that comes behind bull dog, pit bull, presa canario, the fighting breed, they have an extra boost, they can go into a zone, they don't feel the pain anymore. So if you are trying to create submission in a fighting breed, it's not going to happen. They would rather die than surrender. If you add pain, it only infuriates them. To them, pain is that adrenaline rush—they are looking forward to that, they are addicted to it. That's why they are such great fighters.”

IF YOU CAN ONLY LOVE A PIT BULL, YOU DON'T REALLY LOVE DOGS

With over 300 canine breeds never once implicated in a fatal mauling, we know that there are many family-friendly choices for companion animals other than pit bulls. For while it's true that not all pit bulls will “go pit,” when something goes wrong with a pit bull, it goes horribly wrong.

As Angela Rutledge, whose toddler son Beau was [fatally mauled by her pit bull of 8 years](#) named Kissy Face, has stated with heartbreaking candor:

“We are not saying not to love the dog that you have now. We are simply maintaining that despite tons of love and attention that our dog still snapped and killed our son in a matter of moments. We can't take that back. You still have a choice if you own a dog of this breed. Consider this, we as dog lovers, should ponder this one thing: If there was a one-in-a-million chance that your dog could turn on you or your child, would you get rid of it and grieve for a moment or lose a child and grieve for a lifetime?”

This wise advice has come at a terribly dear cost. Ignoring it has cost many others as well.

We've already lost [34 more Americans to canine attack](#) in the first ten months of 2014—25 of them to pit bulls and their mixes, and another three to pit bull derivatives, comprising 74% of all fatalities.

We urge you, Ms Huffington, as a professional journalist, as well as a mother and an animal lover, to reconsider your editorial decision to promote and encourage pit bulls as desirable companion animals. At the very least, we urge you to withdraw your overt support for the pit bull advocacy movement, and adopt a position of neutrality. From those to whom much influence has been given, greater responsibility is expected. Lives, literally, depend on you.

Sincerely,

BEREAVED FAMILIES

- **Richard Aguilar & Lisa Gonzales** (parents of Isaiah Aguilar, 2, fatally mauled by a neighbor's pit bull - Texas)
- **Gail Benford Sizemore and Betty Watkins** (mother and grandmother of Levi Watson, 4, fatally mauled by a relative's pit bull - Arkansas)
- **Jeff & Kim Borchardt** (parents of Daxton Borchardt, 14 months, fatally mauled by his caregiver's two pit bulls - Wisconsin)
- **Brian L. Claar** (uncle of Joel Chirieleison, 6, fatally mauled by a relative's pit bulls - Florida)
- **Serenia Clinton** (mother of Justin, 10, fatally mauled by a friend's pit bull - Texas)
- **Randi Beth Coulter & Christopher Peters** (mother & stepfather of Braelynn Coulter, 3, fatally mauled by the family pit bull - North Carolina)
- **Chris Derouen** (father of Mia, 4, fatally mauled by her mother's boyfriend's pit bull - Louisiana)
- **Janell Gormanous** (mother of Christian, 4, fatally mauled by a neighbor's pit bull - Texas)
- **Ruth Halleran** (daughter of Betty Todd, 65, fatally mauled by a relative's pit bull - South Carolina)
- **Norbert Kappen** (husband of Joan Kappen, 75, fatally mauled by a neighbor's bullmastiff-pit bull mix - Arkansas)
- **Tom Mead** (grandfather of Ryan Maxwell, 7, fatally mauled by a neighbor's pit bull - Illinois)
- **Roxanne Miller Hartrich** (mother of Kara, 4, fatally mauled by the family pit bull - Illinois)
- **Jeremy & Johnna Harvard, John Fernback & Terri Lynn Johnson**(parents & grandparents of John Harvard, 5, fatally mauled by a neighbor's pit bull - Alabama)
- **Angela Rutledge** (mother of Beau, 2, fatally mauled by the family pit bull - Georgia)
- **Michelle Ryan** (mother of Jordan Ryan, 5, fatally mauled by a family friend's pit bull - Oregon)
- **Brandy Wilhite** (mother of Tyler Jett, 7, fatally mauled by a neighbor's pit bulls- Florida)

SURVIVORS AND FAMILIES

- **Jennifer Arp** (mother of Konen, pit bull attack survivor)
- **Maggie Bain** (cousin of Gavin, pit bull attack survivor)
- **Dennis Baker** (grandfather of Kaylie, pit bull attack survivor)
- **Dawn Bohler** (mother of Madeleine, pit bull attack survivor)
- **Lisa Cintron McEwen** (pit bull attack survivor)
- **Jesse & Venishia Corbin** (parents of Azaleigha, pit bull attack survivor)
- **Kimberly Cowley** (mother of Aleah Glenn, pit bull attack survivor)
- **Tanya Edwards-Barnes** (pit bull attack survivor)
- **Brady Hudak** (pit bull attack survivor) and **Heather, Dustin & Jocelyn Hudak** (family of Brady)
- **Kara Huggins** (pit bull attack survivor) and **Stytch Hoskins** (Kara's boyfriend)
- **Susan Iwicki** (pit bull attack survivor, caregiver of Daxton Borchardt) and **Steve Curley** (fiance of Susan)
- **William & Annamaria Johnson** (parents of Adara, pit bull attack survivor)
- **Samson & Jennifer Martin Kim, Patricia & Robert Martin, Julie Martin-Warnick** (parents, grandparents and aunt of Sport Kim, pit bull attack survivor)
- **Colleen Lynn** (pit bull attack survivor)
- **Corry Macphee-Morrison** (pit bull attack survivor)
- **Aimee Majdoub** (pit bull attack survivor)
- **Stacey Martin** (pit bull attack survivor) and **Ben & Jack Martin** (family of Stacey)
- **Renee Rosati & Patti Panetta** (mother and grandmother of Chase, pit bull attack survivor) and **Dominic Lupica** (father of Chase)
- **Melody Ralls** (mother of Hunter Kilbourn, pit bull attack survivor)
- **Cindy Ryder** (pit bull attack survivor)
- **Rachel Simas** (pit bull attack survivor) and **Adam Simas** (brother of Rachel)
- **Tony Solesky** (father of Dominic, pit bull attack survivor)

- **Edy Tinch** (*mother of Candace, pit bull attack survivor*)
- **Marie Helene Tokar** (*pit bull attack survivor*)
- **Hal D. Wallace III** (*pit bull attack survivor*) **Johnathan Dejarnette**(*husband of Hal*)
- **Collage Warner** (*pit bull attack survivor*)

COMPANION ANIMAL VICTIMS

- **Pam Ashley** (*owner of pet dog, Bleu, fatally mauled by a neighbor's pit bulls*)
- **Jaime Brunkan** (*owner of pet dog, Quinn, fatally mauled by two pit bulls*)
- **Julie Edwards-Matanga** (*owner of pet dog, Rhett, fatally mauled by a pit bull*)
- **Carol Miller** (*owner of horse, Blue, both pit bull attack survivors*)
- **Jennifer Scott** (*owner of pet dog, Ruby, both pit bull attack survivors*)

ADVOCATE SUPPORTERS

J. & M. Killian | Liza Vespi | Heather Clemenceau | Kerry Vinkler | Brooke Robbins Freimut | Martha Retallick | J. & A. Curtis | A. Wilson | Annie Cowan Brown | Beth Clifton | Tana Brandt | Kim Matlock | Julia Lewis | Karen White | Randy Tousley | Jenny Ro | Lucy Muir | Chris Balduc | Brenda Grant | Herma Akers Shelton | AJ Ravinsky | Alexandra Semyonova | Mr. and Mrs S. Shyer | B. Beckstine | Diane Ehring-Powers | Kim Hoskins | Danielle Barnes | Rebecca Lanter | Anna Y. Johnson | Bradley Stuart | Lesley Karen Luscombe | Julia Dolan Green | Carmie & Jon Bednar | Dawn Lehr

VICTIMS' ADVOCATE ORGANIZATIONS

Daxton's Friends for Canine Education and Awareness

www.DaxtonsFriends.com

Awareness for Victims of Canine Attack - AVOCA

www.VoicesoftheVictims.org