

DANGEROUS BY DEFAULT

Extreme Breeds

By Anthony Solesky



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*"Instinct guides the animal better than man. In the animal it is pure, in man it is lead astray by his reason and intelligence."
-Denis Diderot*

Preface

Thursday, February 4, 2010 at 01:17AM

Because they could seem unnecessarily autobiographical, some readers can elect to skip the first two chapters. However, these chapters are intended to identify the background from which our conclusions are based. They serve as an ethnology of our family to display our community-based approach to life. Essentially, we challenge the idea that common sense solutions require one to hold a degree in Animal Behavior. The consensus any dog can bite; establishes the entire issue as a simple matter of inevitability vs. suitability.

Common sense alone reveals that some breeds reach the point of diminishing return as "Domestic Pets". Many breed experts and advocates tout a belief that training and treatment can usurp this fact. Sadly their math is the formula behind these unfortunate incidents recurring as repeating decimals of fate.

Ultimately a public health and safety issue, our story explores the reality that responsibility does not lie solely in the way we train and treat our pets but equally in the type of pets we introduce into the community setting in the first place.

Please view the [Dangerous by Default](http://www.dangerousbydefault.com/) website to learn more:

<http://www.dangerousbydefault.com/>

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Attached: Collection of news articles from the Towson Times following the attack.

Attached: Study: When We Need a Human: Motivational Determinants of Anthropomorphism

This powerfully insightful piece has been formatted and presented by DogsBite.org on behalf of Anthony Solesky.



About Us - DogsBite.org is a national dog bite victims' group dedicated to reducing serious dog attacks. Through our work, we hope to protect both people and pets from future attacks. Our website contains a wide collection of data to help policymakers and citizens learn about dangerous dogs. Our research focuses on pit bull type dogs. Due to selective breeding practices that emphasize aggression and tenacity, this class of dogs negatively impacts communities the most.

Working Breed

My wife Irene and I met when we were both 17 years old. She is the older of two girls. Her parents were both born in Greece and immigrated to America and became citizens of the United States after World War II. Irene's father would eventually serve in the U.S. Military.

Her parents came to America with strong moral and ethnic roots, and a labor-force approach to financial prosperity. Essentially, they would take the best-paying work-force jobs they could find, work their way as high as their education would allow, and then make up the difference in sheer numbers of hours worked. If they made three thousand dollars a year in a six thousand dollar a year world, they would just have to work 80 hours a week to make up the difference.

Irene's parents pretty much expected her to find a Greek husband; one who could be head of the household and provide for her while she stayed home and raised the children. They were wrong on two counts. Irene makes better money than I do, and I am not Greek. I do, however, have the head of the household thing down as well as any man of Italian descent I know. Neither her parents, Irene, or I see traditional roles as anything but the pinnacle of achievement when it is done with mutual respect for what both sexes have to offer a marriage with children.

The Greek women of her mother's time were quite independent. They took greater pride in raising a family, rather than the certainly far easier task of holding down a job as cherished by some women. Irene's Mom felt anybody could have a job so she worked part time, as well as being a full-time homemaker. Basically, she expected the man to provide a roof and an income and she would take care of turning them into a healthy, happy family.

My parents were born in the United States, in Baltimore, Maryland. My Mom is the daughter of first generation Italians. She is the middle child of two girls and a boy. Her family was extremely poor and at one point, my mother and her two siblings were in an orphanage. The biggest day of their lives was finding a home in the projects. Later they would be reunited with my grandfather. He was released from prison to the U.S. military, on a judge's order with a simple signature from my grandmother. When his service obligation was over, he qualified for a Veteran's Administration loan and purchased the first house he had ever owned. Shortly after, my Mom would meet my Dad and move to an apartment and finally they would buy a row house on a VA loan when my Dad finished his obligation to the U.S. military.

My Dad's father was a first-generation Pole. His mother was the daughter of first-generation Irish and German immigrants who had settled in the hills of Pennsylvania and Western Maryland. They immigrated to Baltimore to find work, raising my Dad and his siblings on the belief that you find a job with security. My Dad got such a job when he left the military and joined The Baltimore City Fire Department.

My parents had four children. I am the second of two boys followed by two girls. They raised us with the beliefs and many myths of working-class America.

When Irene and I met we had a lot in common in terms of our outlook on life, both being from working class backgrounds. I was a little more corrupted by golf than her, as far as wanting a life outside of working so hard, but I was in total agreement in wanting the same family life from which she and I both came. I had taken up golf as a teenager. I was certain that being a golf pro was a better life than being a firefighter, a construction worker, or a cop like just about all of my Dad's friends.

Eventually, Irene and I married at the age of 22 and she still 21. I am six months older than she. She was the type who would stay with a job long after she could have moved up the ladder. I was the one that didn't care for any kind of work so I would take all kinds of jobs just as an adventure. The two most adventurous jobs that I ever had were driving a cab and working as a structural ironworker's apprentice out of Local #16 in Baltimore. I would quit or get fired from just about all my jobs except the Iron Workers. That was a union job and if you quit one company, you could go to the union hall and get sent to another company -- sometimes on the same job site. This provided me the freedom to quit or get fired, which appealed to my adventurous side and, having the guarantee of a steady career, appealed to my ingrained sense of working-class job security.

During all this time, I worked on my skills as a golfer, my ultimate goal, and the one thing I unfailingly stayed with. Eventually, I would realize that I needed the freedom of my own business to work on my golfing career, while having the adventure the union provided in changing work sites, and the income of a steady job. What better way to do that with only a high school diploma and no investment capital? I went into a business of doing what nobody else wanted to do, including me. I started my own painting business.

By the time I turned 42, Irene and I had a row home in Towson and our two boys. I realized I probably was not going to become a golf professional. Besides, Tiger Woods was not helping to make my quest any easier. Even though Irene never complained about me playing golf every weekend, she did mention that our oldest, Jimmy, was starting to ask for me a little more. I thought about it that day on the golf course but then forgot about it until reminded the following weekend while watching a Saturday morning fishing show. I was getting dressed to go golfing and I remember the program said, "We are on Maryland's Chesapeake Bay." That was the day I moved my focus from golf to boating, something the whole family could do together.

Water Dogs

I began to actively look for a boat and became very involved with my oldest son's football league as a way for us to spend more time together. They started practice in August and it was held between six and 8:30 in the evening. Before football, this time of evening was spent practicing my golf. I enjoyed being a Dad more, so I would sit through each football practice with the other dedicated parents as we watched over our children. I liked the football parents because it was about the only activity I had done with my son where the parents and the kids had real mental toughness and respect for the authority of the coach. Football parents really are a throwback to old Baltimore...almost. I mean, you don't see coaches with cigarettes hanging from their mouths, or Dads on the sideline drinking and smoking like in my day. Still, it has the same in-the-trenches atmosphere.

One day while baking in the sun on the aluminum bleachers we affectionately called the hot seat, one of the Dads, a construction type, dirty from work and in his county work clothes, struck up a conversation with me. He asked which kid was mine. Then he got around to asking what I did for a living. I told him I was a boat captain. In truth, I am a contractor painter. He said, "A boat captain? What kind of a boat do you have?"

I told him that I was just kidding, but I had been thinking of getting a boat. I enjoyed spinning a yarn when I meet somebody new just because I could. He laughed and we hit it right off.

His name was Rick Rickerds. He had two boys in the football program, one on my son's team. By the time the practice was over, I discovered that Rick was a devoted boat owner. Rick invited my wife and our two boys to join him, his wife, and two boys for a boat ride the following Saturday. He gave me his mobile number and that Friday afternoon, I called to confirm he was still hoping we would accompany them on Saturday. His only request was that we bring a bag of ice and what ever we liked to drink. He would provide the rest.

Long story short, we had a great time and right in our very own back yard, The Chesapeake Bay. By the end of the day, I was convinced I was quitting golf and that we would have a boat by the next season. At the end of our trip, I told Rick to look me in the eyes. I said, "Rick, believe me when I tell you I am getting a boat." We did just that by February and in April of that boating season we were on the water. I still remember coming up the bay from just south of Annapolis with Rick running the new boat for me. I was standing next to him and I turned to him and said, "Rick, I told you I was getting a boat." He shook his head and said, "You damn sure did."

As a young boy, my Dad had only taken us out on the bay a few times. Most of our fishing was done from the shore and on the Gunpowder River. I had not been fishing more then six or seven times since I was 18 and now I was 42. Dad was also an avid hunter and fisherman and did take me hunting once or twice a year from age 13 to 18. All of these trips were with his older brother Kenny, another fire fighter and his two boys, my cousins, my older brother Phillip, and me. I only recently had come to realize that even though Dad was an avid outdoorsman, the responsibility of taking kids along was just too much for him. He was so concerned that one of the terrible things he had seen in his job would be our fate. He never discouraged our going, he just didn't push it and he was always tense when we where near the water or hunting.

I saw this same trait in myself when I became adventurous and bought a 24-foot boat. Then with only 1 year of experience, I took the whole family from Middle River, Maryland to Roanoke Island, North Carolina by water. We arrived 16 hours before hurricane Alex. As exciting as it was, I know I made my wife and kids tense looking out for and worrying about their welfare. There is a fine line

between informing your kids of potential danger and traumatizing them into listening. Unfortunately, I came from a generation where trauma was the tool most often used by parents to achieve discipline. I guess I had become somewhat of a traditionalist.

On the return trip, Irene became ill and had to be rushed by ambulance from a small fishing village on Virginia's western shore to a hospital 25 miles away. The lady that owned the marina loaned us her car. Another boater in our fleet, Nancy Codori (a doctor) followed the ambulance. Once we had my wife admitted, she was stabilized for what was thought to be a tubular pregnancy. Nancy and I returned to the marina, rejoined our fleet, and proceeded back north up the bay another 22 miles to Deltaville, Virginia for the night.

I was grateful that there were other kids and about 4 boats on our cruise for the return trip. Our kids were too busy being entertained by the fisherman to be too worried about their Mom. I was so rattled by the whole episode, knowing my wife was safe in the hospital was a strange relief from all of the responsibility of such an adventurous cruise. When we tied up at the marina that evening, it all hit me. Irene was released and joined us very late that night by cab. She didn't even wish to stay overnight once they said she was clear for discharge.

While everyone was asleep that night, I sat in the cockpit in the July heat drinking beer and thinking. I would drift off and wake up every time my beer can fell from my hanging arms. I was slouched in my chair, feet propped on the gunwale staring up at the stars and drifting off from exhaustion and adrenaline. I was thinking about how lucky I was that things weren't worse. To that point in our marriage, Irene had had two miscarriages, one at 10 weeks and one at four months. At the same time, I was starting to understand why my Dad was tense all of the time. These kinds of episodes wear on you like too many punches to the head. His way of dealing was to just flat out avoid it. Clearly the idea of taking us all on any adventures was too much physiologically for him to relax.

I remembered a neighbor asking Dad how he could look at some of the terrible things he saw in his job. Dad said because most of the things people do were so inconsiderate, stupid, and with disregard for their fellow man that he couldn't relate to them. He said it was the victims, the innocent, the ones who were victims of circumstance and another's irresponsibility that took their toll on him. I'm not saying I agree with his approach to dealing with it all, I'm just saying, I understood him better that night.

The Attack

It was Saturday, April 28 2007, a beautiful spring day. The weather had gotten a little warm and the kids were shaking off the cabin fever of winter. I had bought my second boat the preceding October. All of the ideals I had about boating were a little short sighted. For the boys and me, accommodations were fine on the 24-footer but Irene was starting to accompany us less frequently and this was supposed to be a family adventure. Much like my parents, moving from a tiny upstairs apartment in Hamilton when us kids came along, I needed a bigger boat in terms of privacy for Irene to feel comfortable with two boys.

Not being one who makes big money and at the time of this writing, a guy who still lives in a row home in Towson, I knew a bigger boat meant an older fixer-upper. This leads us to that day in April. Rick and I were working on putting the new 31-foot boat back together. I had painted it three weeks earlier.

Let's just say, I paid less for this boat than the 2001 model 24-footer. It was a bigger 31-footer but was 16 years older, a 1985 model. Like I said, I am a labor-class guy and sweat equity was the only way I was going to afford a bigger boat. Rick and I had discovered a yacht club that was cheaper than the boatel where I kept the first boat. You guessed right, it was a workingman's club. The only thing yacht about it is the name.

Things were just falling into place for a summer of family fun. Here we are, two dedicated fathers fixing up a boat on a small budget, raising our kids, and all for the purpose of spending time with our families. We just wanted to get away from the madness to which children today are exposed. For all the water's potential danger, if you are sensible, it can be a refuge and a vacation destination every weekend. I remember how pumped and proud I was that day. Our accomplishments to that point promised adventures lay ahead.

Just as when I golfed, my wife never bothered me much about my whereabouts. I could leave the house at 4 a.m. to go golfing and not return until 11 p.m. that evening and never hear from her. My golfing buddies, and now my new boating buddy Rick, would always marvel at that. I would always become a little unraveled when somebody's wife would call in the middle of a round of golf or a guy project. I realize now that that had to do with the fact Irene and I had been together since we were 17, so she was quite happy to get me out of the house. This was probably another learned behavior in which I took comfort. I remember calling my Mom one time, asking to speak to my father and my Mom said, "Let me check and see if he is here." After about three minutes, she returned to the phone and said, "He must have gone out. I don't see his car in the driveway." When I hung up, I turned to Rick and started laughing. He said, "What is so funny?" I said, "I guess I married a girl just like my Mom."

It was 5:30 that Saturday evening and there were several calls on my cell phone. They were very close together but I didn't recognize the numbers. On about the fourth call, I recognized my wife's cell number. I had immediate dread that something was wrong.

The last time I had received several calls in a row like that was the time Dominic had choked on a hard candy. I was at the boat yard preparing the 24-footer for the previously mentioned adventure. That was an all around rough month. Two days earlier, we had to put down our Brittany, Honeynut because of old age. When I returned her call I said, "Irene what's wrong?" She said, "I just want you to know that Dominic is okay but I had to call 911. He was choking on a piece of hard candy." She also said that Jimmy (our oldest) told her that he knew what to do because he had learned it in cub scouts. Jimmy took charge and performed the Heimlich maneuver dislodging the candy. By then, a fire engine,

an ambulance, and the police had responded. This is always quite a spectacle in row home communities. Irene said, "I just didn't want you to turn down our street, see the commotion in front of our house, and have a panic attack."

When I answered her call this April evening, I knew in my heart and could feel through the phone that something really bad had happened. I didn't speak. I opened the phone and placed it next to my ear. I could hear Irene breathing. She was nervous but composed. She said, "Tony, Dominic is alive but he has had a terrible accident. We are at John Hopkins and they are taking him into the operating room right now."

It is hard to explain, but it is a feeling kind of like *déjà vu*. I felt as if I knew that that was what she was going to tell me. I believe that it is probably because of adrenaline. A person under stress can experience the "now" in both parts of their mind that experience memory and real time simultaneously. You are stunned and the ordeal is only just beginning.

I said only two words, "What happened." She said, "He was attacked by a Pit Bull."

Again I felt as if I knew she was going to say that. How could that be possible? I supposed it is the racing in my mind confusing memory with the present all at once. I know for sure, I was hyper-aware and was able to process things very rapidly. I remember telling her, "I better get back to the neighborhood and find out what happened." I said, "I love you," which is how we always end our calls. I closed the phone.

I walked down the pier where Rick had wedged himself under the steering column on the flying bridge trying to relocate some electrical wires. I said, "Rick we have got to go. Dominic has been attacked by a Pit Bull and he is at Hopkins." Rick said, "Come on man, tell me your kidding," even though he feared I wasn't. I said, "I'm not kidding Rick, look me in the eyes, I am dead serious." He got a flushed look and then went right into action.

The phone rang again and it was Andrea, who went by Andi, the Mom of my son's playmate, Scotty. Andi asked if I had spoken to Irene. I said, "Yes, and I am on my way back to the neighborhood." She implored me to go to the hospital to which I replied, "I'm not a doctor. What can I do for Dominic? I need to find out what the hell is going on and who owns this fucking dog." I hung up. By now we had made it to my Jeep and I asked Rick if he would drive because I was really jacked up. As we made our way toward Towson, Andi called again. She said, "I really think you need to be with your wife right now," to which I made some chauvinist comment. She paused, and then said, "Tony I don't have time to argue with you. Scotty's getting ready to go into the operating room and you need to get to Hopkins."

I said, "Andi, I thought Dominic got attacked?" She said, "He did and so did Scotty. We're at Saint Joseph's and Dominic's at Hopkins."

This was the first time I realized that I needed to be at the hospital for life and death reasons. A flush of adrenaline burned up and down my back and finger tips.

All at once it dawned on me. I live in Towson, not more then 2 minutes from Greater Baltimore Medical Center and Saint Josephs and they have taken my son to Johns Hopkins. Being the son of a firefighter, I could take no refuge in ignorance. I knew it was bad and this was the longest ride of my life. With that, I turned to Rick. He said, "Which is it -- the neighborhood or the hospital?" I said, "Rick it's really bad, we don't have a choice. It's the hospital."

We had just about reached U.S. 40 when Rick turned toward Hopkins. Just then, the phone rang again and it was Irene. She said, "There's a police officer here and he wants to know if you are coming to the hospital or going to the neighborhood?" I said, "Tell him I am on my way to the hospital."

Rick was incredibly hyped up and very intense driving through traffic. Suddenly the fuel light went on and I realized we needed gas. Below a quarter of a tank is a no-no that I rarely violate and here we are low on gas at the worst possible time. We stopped quickly, put in a couple of gallons, and made for Hopkins. We didn't talk much, yet we read each other's expressions. We were on the same page and it wasn't a good read. He located the emergency entrance and dropped me at the door. He said, "I'll park the Jeep. Don't worry, I'll find you."

Critical Care Emergency

I remember working very hard to keep calm and feeling like I was grateful that at least Dominic was being attended to. I told the nurse at the desk who I was and what happened. She said, "Hold on. I will summon security." I seem to remember the guard coming to escort me up to the 9th floor and Rick just appearing behind me and up we went.

Anytime you go into a hospital as a patient or to visit a friend, there is that ill-at-ease feeling. You compare the way you wish life was and the way it is at the Moment and you just cannot wait to get the hell out of there. The thing is, most of that is in your mind. You see the nurses and doctors looking less anxious and you think, "Well maybe it isn't so bad or they would look more frantic." This wasn't that kind of visit. When the elevator door opened, it had a whole different feel. There were no joking nurses at the desk and no doctors looking for something to do. Everybody you looked at spoke with their eyes.

I walked into the waiting area to see my wife sitting in a chair with a plastic bag at her feet. It contained some red socks and tennis shoes that were so completely covered, it didn't register that it was blood. She looked up and all I said was, "Hi Irene." One chair over was a Baltimore County Police officer sitting on the armrest of the chair. We just stared at each other and then he said, "Mr. Solesky, do you have any questions?" For about 15 seconds, it seemed we were counter-interrogating each other. I realized he was genuinely concerned for us and our son. Within minutes, he had my wife's, Rick's and my confidence.

Now it was awaiting game. We would sit in silence and then somebody would just start thinking out loud what the others were all thinking. Minutes later, somebody else would do the same thing. Irene was playing it back in her head and would recite different things as they came to her. I remember saying, "Irene, I feel like a coward." They all thought it was because I was scared about our son and tried to comfort me from that thought. I said, "No, a real man should be thinking I wish I was there instead of you having to go through this. Instead I keep thinking it would have been worse if I was there." I was haunted by the fact that it was not my first instinct to go to the hospital but rather to investigate the dog owner. I kept thinking what if I did not know how severely Dominic was injured and had run to confront the dog owner; my neglect causing our son to die. What if I panicked and couldn't help him properly? The image weakened me if I dwelled on it too long. Additionally, it was critical to me to find out how the dog owner was reacting to his responsibility in all of this. That should have been the last thing on my mind, but until the officer assured me the dog owner seemed upset I couldn't let up. Rick got up and walked over to the bag of sock, shoes, and blood-soaked clothing. He said, "Irene you're not saving this and I cannot look at it anymore." He threw it in the trashcan.

Three hours into the surgery all the waiting was taking its toll. The phone used for updates in the operating room was not working. I was going to have to start informing people soon of what was happening and still no word came from the trauma room. Using my cell phone, the first call I made was to Irene's sister's Shirley. I told her what happened and asked if she could call her mother and tell her what we knew so far. About 10 minutes later, she called back en route to the hospital in hysterics saying she just couldn't do it. Her mother had already left three messages on Irene's phone about having Sunday dinner and was wondering why she had not called back to confirm. My parents were much easier. I only checked in with them every week or so. They were "no news is good news" type of people.

I couldn't stand it anymore and I asked the Police officer if he could do something to find out what was taking so long in the operating room. He said he was growing weary as well from waiting and he would get me some kind of word. He was gone for about 15 minutes. Irene, Rick and I started to think the worst. I stared at the double doors and suddenly I saw him in a hospital gown and mask. The very second his eyes met mine, he gave me the thumbs up. I was grateful that he didn't wait to get up close before he let me know. It seems like such a small detail, but I don't know that if he made me wait the full three seconds it would have taken to walk over to us, if I would have been able to keep from passing out.

Finally, I had to call my mother-in-law. I told her where we were and what we knew. It seemed like only minutes before my sister-in-law Shirley and her youngest daughter, Jessica, arrived shortly followed by my in-laws. The officer told us the doctors were wrapping things up, that Dom looked good, considering, and we should be seeing him come out in the next 10 minutes. With that he said he was going to return to Patrol. We hugged him before he left. Then we turned our attention to the double doors. It had been three-and-a-half hours since Dominic first went into surgery.

After another 45 minutes passed and still no Dominic, we began to feel panic and dread again. I always think of the families of coal miners or lost children -- how they endure is beyond my ability to comprehend. The phone used to get updates from the operating room was not working all night. Finally, I walked around the hospital floor and pleaded with the first person I found. He was in housekeeping. I told him, "Look, I cannot stand the not knowing. Could you please check on the welfare of my son? I can take anything but the not knowing." He summoned a nurse and I explained my anxiety to her. She said she would investigate. After an emotional eternity, the nurse appeared and explained the delay to me. She told me that right after they had planned to bring Dom out the first time, they had lost resuscitation of his leg and that they had finally gotten things back under control. Five hours and 19 grueling minutes from when he first went in a mass of doctors, nurses, tubes and one very swollen child appeared through the double doors.

The doctors gave us the laymen's version of what had transpired, informed us of their hopes and concerns and told us Dom was heading to Pediatric Intensive Care Unit. Their eyes spoke of something that had been a close call, even by their standards. Finally, I could call my parents. Dad had been diagnosed with cancer, so I didn't want to give them any extra worries until I knew what was up. I felt bad remembering my sister-in-law Shirley. She was taking chemotherapy for breast cancer and this episode didn't help make her life any easier.

Eye See You (ICU)

The little cubby waiting area just outside of Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) was a place where everyone who had a loved one inside gathered. They all had the same look of fatigue, terror and hopeful longing and most of all few words were spoken. When they brought Dom out of surgery and were wheeling him to PICU 30 minutes earlier, the doctors briefly described his injuries, what transpired in surgery, their hopes, and concerns.

He had a bite to the face just missing his left eye that had torn away and left his cheek and the tip of his nose hanging. He had claw marks and puncture wounds, bites to the arms, chest and back. The flesh had been torn away from his upper left thigh and a life threatening injury, a 2-cm tear to his femoral artery.

I would later learn from Dom that the dog had clamped onto his left leg, picked him up, and shook him violently and repeatedly like a rag doll while dragging him in circles.

He had various other scrapes, road rash, bruises, and contusions as a result.

The doctors said that he had suffered severe blood loss and required multiple transfusions. They had to remove a vein from his right upper thigh and graft it to his damaged artery in his left leg. They had to perform a procedure called a fasciotomy. This was explained as making an incision on both sides of the length of his calf and letting the calf muscle hang out of the skin. They did this so that the swelling from all his injuries would not restrict blood flow to the lower leg and his foot. The doctors were confident that he was stable in terms of being out of life threatening jeopardy, but cautioned us that we needed to be prepared for potential irreversible damage due to blood loss to his leg beneath the knee and to his foot. We also had to worry about complications of infection. Still we had a lot to cling onto and the thought of people without that kind of hope is unimaginable.

As cavalier as it sounds, the idea that he could lose a leg below the knee or at the least his foot seemed like a reasonable trade off. It didn't even faze me as a problem. All we wanted was his life. Infection or life-threatening complications were our biggest concerns. Easy for me to say I guess, it wasn't my leg.

By now it was 11:30 p.m. and a few of our neighbors were stopping by to assess the situation. I say assess because they didn't ask if we needed anything. They came to figure out for themselves, what we needed without involving us. The representative to take on the information gathering on behalf of the neighborhood was Mary Jo Watson.

Pastor Greg Garriott and his wife Marie stopped by to pray for us. When they entered the PICU and saw Dom, they were visibly shaken. They have a daughter, who is one of Dominic's playmates, and it could have just as easily been her.

One of the few details I had found out about the incident was that while my wife and our neighbor, Eric Rasmussen, worked to stop the bleeding, Pastor Greg had run to the scene to assist them. Pastor Greg laid his hands on their shoulders and began to pray for them. At that point I knew little else of the events at the scene and was only now getting around to piecing what an emotional horror it was for those who witnessed it.

Around 1 a.m. my mother-in-law, Irene, and I decided that we would stay the night. My mother-in-law is a Greek immigrant and I tend to fit the image of my Mom's Italian heritage. I have no issue feeling stereo-typed and we both fit the imagery. My mother-in-law, Irene, and I would stay the night and keep vigil in rotations. We are all high strung and we weren't likely to sleep if any of us went home anyway. The PICU had just two rules. No more than two visitors at a time at his bedside and no sleeping. Throughout the night my mother-in-law and I would switch about every 20 minutes, cat napping in the waiting area and rotating turns in the PICU. Irene had collapsed and slept sitting up in a chair. Irene still had blood on her clothing.

The way the Pediatric ICU works is very reassuring. They watch over a patient like hawks. They are the eyes that see to you. Whenever anybody has a loved one in peril, you want non-stop, on-demand attention and you want it now. It is impossible to imagine that any one person or group could meet that parental demand, much less exceed it. Wrong. They know everything you're thinking and everything you don't even know to think and they take care of both. It is quite humbling to have someone take care of your most precious gift better than you could even if you knew how to.

As best as I can remember, it was an open floor with a tiny nurse's station. There were several patients -- all pediatric -- which is even more gut wrenching. The beds all seemed very close to each other. It had an "everything and everyone at arms length from each other feel" and that was an extreme comfort. There is no going down the hall looking for assistance here. It seemed they had a nurse for every patient and more floating as backup.

We never had to wonder what his condition was. They were at his bedside the whole time and they seemed to take his vital signs every 10 minutes. His leg was cold and pale white below the knee. Dom was very swollen both from the injuries caused in the attack and the collateral damage of the surgeries. Both eyes were terribly swollen and almost shut.

The nurse checked constantly for a pulse in his foot with a Doppler microphone. It was very faint and I never did learn to hear what she heard. It was just a constant non-stop work shift of IV bags, blood transfusions, and monitors. It was the work pace of a beehive and with the same brilliant orchestration. When the next shift came in, the change was as precisely monitored and as focused as the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace. I remember at shift change there was the original nurse and the relief nurse working together for a while and then the relief nurse would slowly take the controls. I know one thing for certain. Nobody was standing by a time clock. Believe me, this is an elite core. I was witness to what a day's work for a days pay means even if it is priceless. No disrespect to Johnny U, but these people know what real pressure is.

If you wanted to know something or what was going on you just looked across the bed and asked. They tell you everything and absorb you into the team. Of course your only job is to comfort an unconscious child and stay the hell out of the way. I say we were members of the team but, for all I know I was likely one more obstacle that they were completely prepared and highly equipped to handle.

When Dom was moved from PICU two days later, I felt scared to leave the intense monitoring, and was sad to think that some kids were staying behind, and still other children and families would take our place. Sure enough, my quiet reflection would be overwhelmed by the screaming rotor of another life flight. It was becoming uncanny how every time I would think the whole world was right I would experience that jolt back into reality. At the same time, I also had a confidence in my eyes when I talked to different parents in the waiting room. If it was going to happen, you couldn't pick a better state to live in, or hospital in the world to give your child a chance at life. Also, I remember most parents thinking everybody else had it worse than them.

Dominic's First Words

It had been since early Saturday morning when I left to work on the boat until the second night in PICU that I'd heard Dom speak. He was heavily sedated and mostly nodded his head up or down when the nurses would rouse him. He really couldn't even open his eyes they were so swollen. Friends and family started showing up around 9 a.m. and I spent Sunday morning bringing people back one at a time to see Dominic. I was grateful for the support. I also could empathize with how scared they were and was able to give them confidence, not false hope, that what I was seeing in his care level was actually quite a comfort and for them to look at it that way as well. It really was just the truth of the matter. Irene and her mother felt comfortable enough to go home and shower and get some new clothes. Most visitors were shaken, not only by the environment and the sight of Dominic, but by seeing the other children in the PICU. I felt that by time Dom's visitors left, they had the same sort of confidence I felt about his care level.

When Irene and my mother in-law returned, I left for home; it was around 3 p.m. I took a shower and changed into fresh clothes, then returned by 6 p.m.

At some point, Rick returned with his wife, Debbie, and when she went in to see Dominic I said, "Hey Dom, look who's here." He peered through slits in his swollen eyes and struggled to sit up further from his already elevated bed. He looked at her and waved. There must have been a half dozen tubes and IVs dangling off his tiny arms. Just as quickly, he shut his eyes, sat back and fell asleep. As pathetic as he looked, I thought he looked great. Later that night, he would sit up and recite some of the events about the attack to a nurse.

As I said earlier, everybody was at arm's length and earshot and full view. The first time I heard Dominic speak at all was about the attack. One of the nurses was walking by Dominic's bed and the nurse attending to Dominic said to her, "Hey Jessica," and then requested something I cannot recall. In hearing the name Jessica, Dominic sat up and looked across the room through the slits of his closed swollen eyes. He began talking to nurse, Jessica, in a very loud voice, as he perceived her to be further away. Dominic said, "Hey Jess, did you hear what happened to me?" I turned to Dominic's attending nurse and told her he has a cousin named Jessica. With that, nurse 'Jessica' said, "No Dominic, what happened?" He replied, "I got attacked by a Pit Bull. I was down by Owen's guarding my base and Kyle came running up from between the houses yelling, 'Time out! Time out! Scotty's been attacked by a dog!' When we went to rescue Scotty, the dog jumped the fence and attacked me." With that, the nurse said something about him being brave and he lay back down. I was extremely encouraged with how much he seemed himself and how clearly he spoke. I was finally starting to see the light at the top of the well.

Dom stayed in PICU two nights and-a-half day. Originally, they did not have a bed for him on the pediatric wing when he was released from PICU. He spent one day on the 9th floor for older kids and then spent the remaining days, 17 in all, on the fourth floor in pediatrics. He was heavily sedated but would awake about 10 minutes every hour and talk to us. All his conversations were upbeat and he seemed not to have any ill effects or fears to that point. He still had to be tested for nerve damage and had to have the fasciotomy closed, along with some cosmetic surgery issues and other loose ends.

In the trauma unit, they kept him alive and made every effort to advance his chances of the most complete recovery possible. Their task was by no means complete. After four days, they were ready to go back in and close some wounds, assess others and address anything else that was of concern.

They had performed a very painful electromyogram to assess for nerve damage. It was too painful for Dom to complete and what results they could get, showed much damage and foretold a long and painful recovery with the complications of permanent nerve damage, the loss of mobility and a good portion of the feeling in his left leg.

An EMG is a device that sends electrical impulses down the nerve and measures the neuromuscular response. The electric impulse causes your muscles to move involuntarily and the technician, with their equipment, can chart the responses or the lack thereof. Besides many numb spots up and down his leg and foot, there were a couple of areas where the nerve was completely detached and the signal just came to a dead end. The worst part is it is extremely painful to have these electrical impulses sent down intact nerves while damaged nerves present a whole new threshold of pain. Besides the EMG, the nerve regeneration and healing process have the same type of pain and will appear inexplicably. It is extremely hard and maddening to see a child in such pain. Still gratitude and hope kept us moving forward. I also found out that it is no treat to have an EMG performed. I had requested the technician let me see how it works and he sure did.

The doctors came often. They kept exacting notes and always gave us a thorough appraisal of what they expected to find and what we were up against. The thing that amazed me the most was how each doctor would greet us, make their examination, then break it all down in layman's terms. The doctors make entries into two large ring binders filled with medical information and kept a station at the door outside the room. The binders held all tracking reports by all the doctors and nurses who had handled Dominic from the emergency room to that present time.

In time, Dominic would stay up for-and-a-half hour at a clip with maybe 10 minutes rest in between. He was talking quite a bit. He didn't talk much about the attack and most all of the visitors focused on encouraging him to get better and just shared conversation and time with him. I also believe that all the attention and intense care giving the nurses provided gave him the same level of confidence that he was in the best possible place. Besides, there wasn't any one to miss as he had a constant barrage of much-appreciated and welcome visitors. He was talking up a storm and, except when the pain medicine kicked in, he didn't look too depressed about his plight.



Neighborhood Militia

While I had returned home briefly on Sunday afternoon to shower and get a bite to eat, I hadn't had a chance to focus or process how it all happened. I really did not have a complete picture. All I knew was that one minute I am working on my boat and the next I am clutching my head trying to keep my sanity from pouring out between my fingers. On Monday, while Irene was keeping vigil at Johns Hopkins, I returned home again in the morning and began to try and get answers. This was my first real chance to make heads or tails of the incident. What I had heard about the events at the scene that day weakened me as if someone was pushing on the back of my knees. I would, in due time, find out I was still not being told everything.

Scotty's Dad, Baron, saw me pull up out front and came over to ask about Dominic's condition. He and I had not spoken yet. I had last spoken to Andi, Baron's wife, the night of the incident. That was so I could assure her that Dominic was out of surgery and alive and she gave me comfort that Scotty was treated and released. Andi had also stopped by the hospital when I was on a return trip home so I missed her, but she spoke to Irene. Baron was deeply upset and tormented by what he had heard.

We are very close and I wanted to know what was tormenting him. It was about the dog owner. I figured the dog owner was waiting to hear I was home and then would come to express his concern for the entire matter and Dominic's condition. Not only was this not the case, but Baron told me that the dog owner had threatened his son, Scotty. Instantly I was back in the same hyper-aware mode as the day of the incident. It came over me in a wave. It was like when you are embarrassed except it had nothing to do with embarrassment. It was just pure adrenaline. The story he told me, along with the few bits and pieces Irene had told me, and the conspicuous absence of contact from the dog owner began to sicken and stun me with each sentence Baron spoke.

Often people have said to me, "I cannot imagine what you and your wife are going through." I was always able to say, "Yes you can. It is exactly what you imagine it would be like." The idea that someone couldn't imagine how we felt is far too lonely a place for me to find comfort. I love the safety of numbers.

The resulting emotions from this type of incident with its ever-growing drama have a life of their own and what those emotions need is an outlet. Seeing Baron and I out front talking, more neighbors gathered and I was able to develop a better understanding of what happened that day.

Baron's and Andi's involvement with their children is exemplary. On the Saturday of the attack they were to attend a wedding, but they really like to have one or the other parent supervising their children. It was decided that Baron would attend the wedding and Andi would watch the children. My children had rehearsal for a church talent show, and since my wife and I parent pretty much the way Baron and Andi do, Irene spent the day with the kids while I worked on the boat. When the children returned from rehearsal, they joined the neighborhood kids who were already running around the neighborhood enjoying the warm spring day. They all decided to go over to Towson High School for a game of baseball. After the game, different kids went in different directions. That left Scotty, Dominic, Kyle, and Chris to decide how to spend the rest of the day. They decided to play a game of Nerf tag in the front and back of the houses.

The house with the Pit Bull terriers was in a yard across the shared alley and was not a part of the boys' field of play but the children were visible to the dogs from across the alley. The boys were completely focused on their game and had no sense that they were in any danger. It turned out that the house with the Pit Bulls had an unfenced backyard and the renter had installed a 5x5x4-and-a-half feet tall portable pen for the dogs when they were outside.

The dogs and their house were far enough down the street and on the opposite side of the alley for me to not have had them in my radar previous to the attack. As I generally exit down the alley from my rear driveway and return by the top alley entrance, I was further hampered by the fact that a garage blocked my view from noticing the dogs as I passed the house.

During the course of the Nerf game, the four boys split into two teams; Dominic and Scotty were on one team and the other two boys made up the other. Dominic was to guard his base on our front lawn. At some point Scotty, was walking up the alley shared by the back of our homes and the property with the Pit Bulls. Scotty's focus was on the game and so he was looking toward our side of the alley where the game was taking place. From his right side he was suddenly tackled and mauled by a male Pit Bull. Fortunately, the dog owner saw the attack through his back door and came out and got the dog off of Scotty. He put the dog back in the very same enclosure with a female Pit Bull that had not attempted to escape. He took Scotty into his house, and at this point the dog owner threatened Scotty not to tell because he said they could take his dogs away. He told Scotty to tell his parents he fell off a bike. He gave Scotty water and a sponge to wipe the blood away and then he lead Scotty out of the front door of his house. The front faced busy Burke Avenue, a side of the street the 9-year old was not allowed to be alone. There is no sidewalk and it is too busy and far from his home.

Panicked, he made his way up that side of the street and home to his mother. He never was able to see or warn the other boys who were coming down the alley to his rescue to turn them back. When Scotty was initially attacked, the other two boys witnessed the tail end of the attack and ran up the alley and to the front of our home where they told Dominic that Scotty was attacked by a dog. The three of them made their way back down the alley to search for Scotty not knowing he was let out of the front of the house and was returning home. When they got to the back of the house, the dog spotted Dominic, the smallest of the boys. The dog then jumped out of the pen, chased, tackled, and mauled Dominic. The dog owner, after letting Scotty out the front door, returned to find the male dog was missing again from the enclosure. He heard screaming and that is when he saw the male Pit Bull mauling Dominic. The other two boys ran to get help from my wife and Scotty's Mom. Frantic Kyle knocked on our door to get Irene.

While there was more to the story, I had heard enough and told the neighbors who were gathered that I needed to shower and make some phone calls. This composite was the catalyst for contacting anyone and everyone who could help me resolve this incident.

Taking Action

My first instinct was to call my congressman. I had met him many years ago when I was the president of the neighborhood and he was the Baltimore County Executive. I had also worked at his personal residence as a painting contractor. I still had his home number on file and called it in a frantic attempt to get his office number. To my surprise his wife answered the phone. I was apologetic for the intrusion and told her I had worked at her house as a painter in the past. She remembered me and then I just went into my story. She was so kind and did not treat me as if I was intruding. I was so frantic and distraught, I don't even know if I had the presence of mind to care. Sensing and understanding my plight, she offered to call the office for me and have the congressman return my call. She shared her heart-felt concern, took my number, and told me to be patient. She would see to it that he called me back. I was looking for guidance from a public official and it was my hope that he may have been able to help or guide me in how to deal with this matter. Each time the phone rang I hoped it was he.

By now, a reporter from the Towson Times had called and I was unsure whether or not to talk about the incident until I heard back from the Congressmen. Finally he called. It was not necessary to recount the story to him. It was obvious by the way he inquired immediately about the welfare of my son, my wife, and our oldest boy. I found his demeanor to be quite a calming influence as he explained what my options were as a citizen. He told me that it was most definitely a County matter and that I needed to contact my Councilman. He was not brushing me off. He was deeply concerned and wanted me to know that. He wanted me to get in touch with the correct person, to call him and tell him exactly what happened. I apologized for the intrusion to his personal home number and that I had the number on file when I had worked at his home. He was polite and said, "Let me give you my office number if you need to reach me in the future." I wrote it down and thanked him profusely for returning my call and steering me in the right direction

I followed his advice and in short order I was able to speak directly to my Councilman Vince Gardina. I could hear concern in his voice and I knew I was on the correct track. The next morning I returned the phone call to the Towson Times reporter and he interviewed me by phone. I was also wondering why the dog owner had not been charged with a crime. Based on the concern of my Councilman, and the fact that the Towson times had called, I started to believe that it might be best to get the word out about this incident. It may simply be that the general public and the neighbors outside of our community were not aware of the incident. I had hoped that by telling my story, it would garner the support and some type of action from the community. It was obvious we had to take action against this irresponsible threat.

My wife's cousin is married to Rob Roblin from WBAL, Channel 11. I thought, I should call his office and see if he could direct me as to whom to contact to see if there was interest in our story. When I called him, he showed stunned concern for Dominic and our family. He told me he could not be assigned to anything that could be considered a conflict of interest. Rob said that it was his obligation to run all potential stories brought to his attention by the news director. He said they make the decisions and assign the reporters. Rob went on to say that he felt certain that the news director would have interest in the story. He also told me that the other channels would likely want it as well and that I better be prepared to deal with that. I said, "Rob, after what happened Saturday, I don't see that as a big problem." He then added that he was surprised to hear that it hadn't already been reported on the news. I remember as if it was yesterday. I gave him my contact information and just before I hung up he asked, "Hey Tone, when did you say this happened again?" I told him it was Saturday at around

5:30 in the evening. He paused and said, "Bad news day." With that, he assured me that he would see to it that my request got to the news director's desk. He cautioned that he had no control over whether they would do a story. Then added, "But I cannot imagine WBAL and all the others won't."

I decided to call Mike Hill, the Baltimore County Police Spokesman, and ask if there was an investigation into the attack or would my contact with the media would interfere with any investigation. I was hopeful that they were doing something more about the issue. Mike told me that the dog owner had broken no laws, that the Police were aware of the situation and that it was an Animal Control Enforcement matter. I didn't argue the point. I figured he new the law. I hung up stunned but not surprised. Within seconds of hanging up, my cell phone rang and it was a reporter from WBAL, Channel 11 who wanted to tell the story.

After the news reporter arrived and broadcast our story, we were contacted by all of the other local TV news stations. In addition to the Towson Times, both the Sun and the Examiner contacted us. The effect of the story was getting the Towson community to ask how this could happen. People wanted to know why this dog owner was living among us and not being legally pursued?

It turned out that the dog owner had lied to the Police and while the Police were sickened by the incident, at the time they did not know that any criminal laws had been broken. They said from what the Police interviews had revealed it fell under the control of the Health Department's Animal Control Division. The news reports brought to light the allegations of threats to Scotty, and because of the demands from the community, the Police then interviewed Scotty. After taking his statement, the Police interviewed the dog owner again and he admitted he left some things out of the first report. When asked why, he said that he was panicked by the events and forgot all the details. When confronted with the Scotty's version and the failure to mention any of these events to the Police originally, the dog owner began to contradict himself. Additionally, for a guy so panicked and concerned, the Police thought it was odd he never called or took Scotty to his parents. He never called 911 for Dominic or returned to check on either of the boys' welfare.

Taking this into account, it did not take any monumental detective work or dedication as a parent, to ferret this individual out, once he opened his mouth. He was conspicuous already in his not taking Scotty to his parents, not returning to the scene or calling 911 to help Dominic or attempting to contact my wife and me. This was topped off by the fact, in the following days; he never tried to contact Scotty's parents or us. He was conspicuous by his absence. If there was ever a case of an opponent being the best player on our team, along with the adage of give a fool enough rope, I would say that this guy was manna from heaven.

Sometimes, when I look back and relive or reread the Police reports, I remember the people who asked, after knowing and finding out what really happened, "How did you maintain the self control not to confront this man yourself." In my mind, this approach was confronting him and I wanted the most effective result possible. There were so many people mobilizing, wanting to do something about the ordeal because it could have been any one of their children. The emotional support we were receiving allowed us to keep things in perspective, as long as we were seeing results. The key for me was support because, support or not, my wife and I were not going to concede to this sick individual. We happened to be more fortunate then most victims and we didn't want to diminish the outcome or our responsibility to the situation. In short, it was bigger than just Dominic and us. It was a community issue and that is how it has stayed.

Ruff Night

Dominic was going to be operated on for the second time in 5 days. It was Tuesday evening and the doctors had come in all through the day and informed us of what their hopes were for a successful outcome. Every time they would use the word success, I kept thinking that what they meant was in terms of life or death. I was so traumatized by the events of Saturday, lack of sleep, and the whirlwind around us, that I wasn't able to gather that when the doctors spoke in terms of success, what they meant was as it pertained to the operation, not Dominic's life being in danger. I keep thinking that Dominic was at risk of dying on the table and my anxiety kept growing.

Different doctors who were to be involved in the surgery the next day stopped by periodically and familiarized themselves with Dominic and us. Then, just as every doctor before, they would sit at the little built-in desk top outside the room and make entries into Dominic's medical journal.

There was one doctor who used the word "success" again during a consultation with some family members and me. I had to stop him outside in the hall and ask him how life-threatening these procedures were. He looked at me somewhat quizzically, and said, "Mr. Solesky, are you interpreting the meaning of the word success with Dominic living or dying?" I starting to quiver a little and said, "Yes." He grabbed me firmly by the left bicep and said, "No sir that is not what we are talking about here. We want your son to have the best chance for a full and healthy recovery. Any surgeries from now on are going to be to that end. We are past the life and death part of his condition when he arrived Saturday." He continued, "It is true that anyone can perish from just about any procedure, however, Dominic is not at any higher level of risk then anybody else at this point. Dominic is strong and in the best possible hospital with the best possible care. He is recovering better and faster than expected, and tomorrow's surgery will help that along."

With that, my mind opened up from the vice grip of dread I was feeling, I suddenly noticed even though he had introduced himself initially, he had some type of Greek name on his white coat. I asked him if he spoke Greek, to which he replied, "Yes." I grabbed my mother-in-law and father-in-law and said I have a doctor out here that speaks Greek. If you have any questions, he might be your man. My wife's parents speak perfect English, as did the doctor, but anytime you can develop an even stronger rapport with a doctor who will be operating on your grandchild, you have to seize it. The relief that came over me after talking to this Doc was the proverbial world off my shoulders. After what I gathered was a wonderful and informative conversation between them in Greek, we all were at our most confident point in four days.

We decided that Irene would stay the night and I would go home and keep everyone in the neighborhood updated. I made it home by about 11:30 p.m., and after a shower and a bite to eat, I checked my e-mail for the first time since Saturday morning. To that point, I had only had time to check the answering machine and it was filled with messages of encouragement.

As I suspected my mailbox was swamped. I was reading and responding to key people, so they could get the word out to larger groups. I was reading an e-mail from one of the parents whose child played football with my son. There was nothing out of the ordinary about the e-mail. Yes, it was about the incident but it was by no means out of the ordinary. I suppose it was just the cumulative effect of the whole ordeal. All of the sudden I started to cry this really deep, convulsive cry. It was the kind you see little kids doing when they are so upset they cannot talk. It was strange because, even as it was happening, I didn't feel as bad in my mind or at least I was unaware of how bad I felt to understand why I couldn't control it. I just had this wave come over me and I shook like somebody who was

freezing their ass off at a winter football game, except I was in the warmth of my own home. My mind felt fairly normal but my body felt something else.

I have many friends who even under normal circumstances, I can call any time of the day or night without hesitation. In the past couple of days, I had an even larger list of friends than a man could hope for. I called my cousin's husband. Rick Nazelrod and believe it or not his wife, my cousin, is named Debbie, just like my boat buddy Rick who drove me to the hospital, and his wife Debbie.

I dialed Cousin Rick's number, all the time shaking and my vision blurred by tears. As soon as he answered the phone, I was able to collect myself, stopping the shaking and crying, and speak clearly. I had awakened him. He immediately said, "Tony, do you need anything? Is everything all right?" I hated like hell to panic him, but I told him I must have had some kind of fit and I thought I better call somebody since I was alone. I didn't want to alarm my oldest boy, Jimmy, who was upstairs asleep. Naturally, he asked if I wanted him to drive over and bring a coffee. I said whatever happened was over and I'd be fine. I just knew I needed to call someone to help me snap out of it. In minutes, I was as good as if it hadn't happened.

I went up stairs and played a few remaining messages on the answering machine. One caught my ear. It was suggested that I call a lawyer about a civil action and I had all kinds of recommendations. Just as in the paint business, someone can be pleased with a paint job that is lousy because they don't know any better. That makes their recommendation sincere but flawed. I knew I needed to find out who a lawyer would recommend, a lawyer's lawyer.

The man leaving the message, expressing his deepest concern and prayers for Dominic was a guy from a family who everybody respected and he had great kids in the football program. I knew that John Wolfe was someone who would unselfishly steer me in the right direction. With that comfort and exhaustion, I went to bed and fell right to sleep after a very rough night.

Smooth Operation

It had now been 5 days and today was the day of another operation. They wanted to close any open incisions, check for healing progress on other injuries do some of the cosmetic surgery to his face, and deal with reattaching the severed nerves on his left leg. It was a long day and Dominic could not eat or drink before the surgery. The surgery was scheduled for noon but didn't happen until 4:30p.m. Since Dominic could not eat or drink, we decided that we would not eat or drink. Although it turns out that the others cheated, but only a little. I wasn't let in on the truth of their snacking and drinking until after the surgery.

We all felt reassured by the conversation with the doctors the evening before and then again that morning. Once it was time for the operation to begin, there was no apprehension from Dominic or from anyone else. We were tired, thirsty, and hungry and couldn't wait for the operation to start.

I would like to give you a sense of how professional and meticulous the care was and why we were so confident. The first thing I noticed about the doctors was the redundancy. Each doctor would stop by and before they would speak to us, they would stop at the little desk at the doorway and review their own notes and all those of the nurses and other doctors since their last rounds. They would then greet us, update us on where they thought Dominic was in the process, and ask if we had any questions.

When they were done, they would make any new entries in the medical log and move down the hall to the next patient. The morning of the operation was no different. They all went through the same ritual and then reiterated the conversation from the night before.

I decided to adopt what they did best as a guide for Dominic's physiological recovery. They never asked if he felt fear. I was always afraid one of my relatives would say "Dominic, don't be scared," or ask if he was afraid. I was happy there were no leading questions. The doctor would just observe his demeanor and with a big friendly smile, ask if he had any questions. If he had a question, they always had the answer that reassured him. No questions, so much the better. Also, they would tell him what they were going to fix and how well it was going to turn out. They would always say, "Ok Dominic, we're going to go down there make you better and get you back to this room so you can get back home." That seemed like a great plan to Dominic and so that was the model we followed.

Finally at 4:30 PM, an infectiously upbeat team of nurses came to cart Dominic and one parent, down the elevator to the operating room. This was my kind of staff infection and that has remained our experience even on follow-up visits. When we arrived at the OR we were in a little staging area just out side of the actual operating room. I looked inside the O.R. and there was this whole assembly of doctors. There must have been 12 people, including nurses, sitting, standing, and reviewing Dominic's records in preparation for his surgery. I was particularly interested when Dominic had two admission bracelets on. One bracelet from when he first arrived with his name spelled incorrectly, and a second with the correct spelling. Rather than discard the first, they followed the same meticulous rules of success. The nurse asked Dominic, "How do you spell your name?" After he recited that, the nurse said, "And when you first came in, how did we spell your name?" Dominic recited the correct incorrect spelling to her and as he recited, she verified that both bracelets reflected his account. They were the best and they knew exactly how to manage and redirect his focus to the upbeat. Again, primarily because they had genuine confidence in their skill, it wasn't at all like the show I had been trying to put on for my friends and family.

The anesthesiologist said, "Dominic, we are going to let you take a nap." I believe he may have tried to conceal the needle but Dom saw it and with the curiosity of a 10 year- old, looked at the clear

liquid coming down the tube and said calmly, "Is that water?" The Doc said, "Yep," and off to sleep he went. He told me to wait until they moved him into the operating room. Then he would motion for me to come in. He told me to say something of encouragement in his ear and give him a kiss, then exit to the waiting area where the rest of the family was gathered. We were told to expect anywhere from and 1 ½ to two ½ hours of waiting, but that they would send someone to keep us updated.

They wheeled him into the OR, made a few minor adjustments, and the anesthesiologist signaled me. I walked in and whispered in his ear how much we all loved him, told him he was in good hands, and that we would all see him in his room in a little bit. I kissed him and left the room. For maybe 1/8th of a second, I could feel anxiety trying to get in but I was able to push it right back out and focus on the fact that he was getting phenomenal care.

Instead of waiting outside of the OR in the surgery waiting room, we returned to Dominic's room on the 4th floor. We all felt more secure there. It had been converted to a home away from home and was filled with all kinds of baskets, flowers, and cards. I had never really looked through any of the baskets beyond the cards and this was the perfect time to fill the void of anxiety with something more productive. We had been through the worst and so, after speaking to the doctor who told us that this surgery wasn't a life or death situation, we were very confident. I have to laugh about everything being relative because if he had been going into a surgery this serious without the first trauma surgery to compare it with, I am sure with time to think and our ethnic backgrounds, it would have added up to quite a chaotic scene.

As it was, we had been tactfully and compassionately reprimanded twice for having too many visitors in the room in the two short days Dominic had been on the floor. We returned to the room and Irene and I sat in the middle of the floor with all of these baskets to open. It looked and sounded like a baby shower. Irene or I would remove all of the contents and show the family, collect the sounds of approval and then find nooks and crannies to place them in. On top of that, we were all eating like pigs because we were starving from fasting to support Dominic, who could not eat or drink before surgery.

You have to imagine the doctor's perspective when they came to update us on the progress of the operation. The night before the operation we were nervous wrecks asking a million questions. Then, the next morning when they came in to do the rounds, we were all nervous with anticipation.

The operation was pushed back so many times from the original start time and we were all so hungry and thirsty that we were on an emotional swing. We went from feeling scared out of our minds to wanting to go walking down the hall and demand that they operate on our child this minute. Even Dominic was saying, "Jesus God, what are they doing? I am hungry and thirsty. When are they going to operate on me?"

All I could picture was this doctor in the operating room saying to the other doctors, "Look these people are high-strung Euros. They're probably going to sacrifice a goat in the waiting area if I don't keep them posted. I am going to go out in the waiting area and give them an up date, you know, to keep them calm." He goes to the waiting area and there is no panicked family. He probably figures we are down in the chapel making a Novena. He stops by the room and here we are: my wife and me, sitting in the middle of the room with family sitting around us conducting what looked like a baby shower, complete with food, gifts, and drink. He said that he was looking all over for us, we told him the whole story and we all, including the doctor, had a tension-relieving laugh.

The doctor told us that everything had gone well and even better than they expected. He said that there would still be the constant changing of bandages and the dressing of wounds, and that it would continue to be painful. In addition, he said that they decided to close only one incision on each side of his calf and let the other shrink and close around the muscle naturally. He also said that he was going to start physical therapy and it was going to be painful. He said he wasn't sure about how the nerve

was going to repair, the degree of feeling that would return, or if the limited range of motion in his ankle would require additional surgery. With that, he escorted us to the recovery area where one parent at a time could go in and give him the words of encouragement he needed to keep a positive attitude.

There he was with multiple IV trees, tubes, catheter and all lying in the recovery room with nurses at arms length. It was such a relief to say, "Hey Dom, are you doing ok?" He didn't speak or open his eyes but he shook his head up and down in a very reassuring way. I always wondered if he was taking better care of me then I was taking care of him. In short order, he was wheeled back to his home away from home on the 4th floor and we started our daily routine to recovery.

Matter of Time

Irene returned to work now that she knew Dominic was stable and there weren't going to be any operations for a while. She had already taken an unpaid leave and we were spending other money besides the medical expenses. Until I was in a situation like this, I would have never thought to consider these expenses. We had now moved into the recovery mode and recovery was all about time. Dominic's first challenge would be wound care, medication adjustment, eventually coming off IVs and having enough success at daily physical therapy to go home. If he was not doing well enough in therapy but no longer required a medical nurse, he would be moved to Kennedy Krieger or Mt. Washington for in-patient rehabilitation.

I would return to work on weekends and any nights that someone else stayed with Dominic. For the 17 days, Dominic was in the hospital, he was never alone, day or night. I don't know how long we could have gone on like that, but we were lucky to have a support network to be able to work it that way. Sadly, we saw many children who didn't have it so good and that reality puts you on your ass.

Besides the regular visitors, Dominic would have a different group of well wishers each day. He was visited by the young priest and his wife from the Greek Orthodox Church several times. He prayed for us and with Dominic and he blessed a wooden cross left by Dominic's Sunday school teacher. She is the lady who directed the church talent show Dominic was rehearsing for on the day of the attack. Dominic likes to keep it on the bed above his head. Many visitors worked downtown and would visit on their break time. Dominic's head football coach vowed Dominic would play again and later he would happily bear the dilemma of that vow. Other parents came as point people to update the others by e-mail as to his progress.

In the evening, Dominic's room was more of a social gathering place than a hospital room. It was my job to work the hall and recognize people and direct them to the gathering. Other than that, my mother-in-law would take care of feeding everybody.

The room was decorated with all of the wonderful gifts and get-well wishes people would bring. I could be standing outside of the room at anytime with a crowd of six guys giving them the real story and you could peer in Dominic's room and it looked like a dinner party with people standing holding a plate under their chin with one hand and a fork in the other engrossed in conversation about the latest news. If it were Christmas time it would have passed for one of those living manger scenes. Here is this kid in the bed, adorned with a wooden cross above his pillow and a couple of religious icons at the foot of his bed. He looks like the Christ child and the nurses were the Wiseman bringing their gifts of medication and care. It was an atmosphere of English, broken English, and pure Greek. I had not mastered the Greek language to this point although I had become quite proficient at converting broken English to English for my friends who were interested in what Irene's family said to them.

It was a nightly routine for the nurses to remind us of the visitors policy and that we may be a little in the overkill mode. I got to the point that when they came to check on Dominic, I would say, "Are we too loud again." I would forget that they also had a medical job to do along with crowd control. There also was a sad contrast because you could walk down the hall and see children with one, maybe two visitors in a room and sometimes with none. I thought, man, we have to do something about that. It was even sadder when we were told we couldn't visit or inquire about other children without the parent's permission. I just knew that someday I would have to find a way to show my gratitude for how lucky I was even if it was to write a book and give the money directly to those parents in need. I was thinking not so much medical expense money but maybe gift money or parking money even cell phone

money and gas money, the things that you don't think about and that add up very quickly. I couldn't imagine sleeping by myself in a hospital at such a young age in spite of the caring nurses Dominic had.

During the week I would spend most nights. When I didn't, either my mother-in-law or my mother would stay. We had no shortage of people willing to spend the night if we couldn't, but it worked out that we never needed to take anybody up on their offer. Irene would stay on the weekend nights. We always had somebody there and even more than we needed if we didn't. The same held true during the day. Most of the time we had some one stay if we had to step out or attend to the business of the outside world.

Dom and I would watch whatever he wanted on the television. When Dom thought it was a boring show, I would just threaten to leave him there alone if he didn't let me watch what I wanted. It may have been cruel, but he already had a good head start on knowing about the really big bad world.

In the background, there was always a series of different noises coming from various monitors. They have a mind of their own and always seemed to need attention right after I would get into a good sleep, a good sleep meaning two solid hours. There was always a mental downer each night. I tried to stay as many nights as possible. I figured everybody else was probably going to have the same withdrawal. It went back to being so much more of a hospital after everybody left for the night. Just when you forgot where you were, here came those screaming rotor blades and your heart poured out again.

We went from this manic social hour like at a reception to this dead silence except for the background music of monitors, and a kind of depression after everyone left. Still, it was one great place to be going through any of these emotions and there was always light at the top of the well.

At the same time, we were dealing with the legal aspects of the situation and following it in the news. We always let Dominic watch the news. It was our belief that he would be more traumatized if he saw no action. I was afraid he would think, wow, this can happen and that's it. My old man is going to let it go. I was concerned that would paralyze him physiologically. Instead, I would tell him, "You know Dom, Mommy and Daddy aren't going to let this go without seeing to it that it cannot happen again." I was so grateful and relieved that I had the options available to me that I did. The first night in the trauma room, I made that pact with myself that this may be my stepping off point and I met it. I met it so much that I saw the options available as a way out only as long as they applied with the same commitment. When he watched the news, I could see Dominic was on the offensive, not in the defense mode on the whole episode. We were certain it would, and it did play a key role in his approach in fighting to get better. I also believe that if you asked doubters at the time of my approach, they would agree with me now. With a solid routine now being established, we could focus on getting our life back and resolving this matter to its least common denominator.

Truman Show

While we were focused on the care taking of Dominic, the neighbors had gotten together and decided on how they were going to take care of us. Further, any organizations we belonged to, from social, recreational councils, and his school, mobilized after seeing the news. In the first frantic days after the attack, I had a lot more of what I would call normal contact with my neighbors. The furious and painful inquiries and recounts of what they witnessed; that I was spared from witnessing. I was beginning to notice that different groups had narrowed it down to different point people. They, I later realized were taking care of the caretakers. Of all that I have written about, including what you will read later on Dominic's, Irene's, and neighbor's accounts at the first hearing for dangerous dog, this is by far the most emotional for me. It is a more vivid emotional reaction like the smell of salt water and fries when you cross the First Street Bridge after being away from the ocean for a year.

I would come home and there were notes, gifts, and cards at the front door for Dominic. The mailbox was full with get well cards from local people as well as people out of state. We would receive cards that said things like, "You are probably going to have a high cell phone bill," and there would be a check enclosed. Another might say, "Put this towards the parking garage," and it would have cash enclosed. Still others had gift cards to local stores and movies, all with the most beautiful and cherished notes. I saved them all but I cannot open them. I tried once, and it was like tearing open a scab. If I don't read them but just look at them, the thought makes me happy. The thing that struck me most was that the senders had to have been through something similar to be so thoughtful. Plus there were those who were kind, just plain, caring people. There was food for the four of us in the refrigerator. Only one person had the key and that was Mary Jo Watson. Mary Jo would come by, stay all of two minutes, make the most inconspicuous casual conversation, and the next day she and the neighbors had taken care of things.

One father, from Dominic's football team, sent over a full gourmet service for 20 people. We were treated so well that at one point I joked to Irene, "I guess I am going to have to get attacked by a Pit Bull once Dominic gets better. I can't afford this life style on our money." One day when Irene came home from work, she looked through the mail and quipped, "What, no big screen TV?" We were laughing again for the first time. It was this very awkward, yet exceedingly appropriate, get-over-yourself type of feeling and we had no business to stand in its way. As my Cousin Kenny Solesky had told me early on when I said some off the wall things about giving it back, "It's not about you, it's about Dominic. You'll get your chance to do what's right." Further, only if I was in denial, could I not admit to myself that we could use the help.

It got to the point where my biggest concern was how to thank everybody. True to form, that was not even their faintest concern. It seemed like whenever I would come and go no one would be out. It was if I was being watched, but for all the right reasons. E-mails seemed to be narrowed down to point people as well. It was, without doubt, one of the finest acts of kindness I have ever witnessed, much less been a part of. Further, I was being steered in different directions without knowing it. There was some fear that all of the pressure could lead to an incident between the dog owner and me. I was not about to change my travel route but I didn't look for trouble either and it never came. Plus I didn't like standing in lines and there was a big one ahead of me. This treatment kept up until Dominic returned home from the hospital. Then, it was modified directly to his needs until he was able to walk without crutches. From there it continued until he could return to school and finally when he returned to football, unable to play but still a member of the team.

Dominic would return in 2008 to play and participate as a full-contact player restricted only by his talent and maybe some slight trepidation on the part of Coach Phil McClusky. Coach Phil promised me, when he came to visit Dom in the hospital, he was going to stay with him until he was back playing. As it turned out, we were thinking more in terms of Dominic's goals. Neither Phil nor I ever imagined the pressure we would feel when he sent Dominic into a game. There are different kinds of pressure and it really tested his metal to put Dominic in a game. Dominic is not the kind of kid that moves away from the play and that trait, and his small size, made for much squinting, looking down, and head turning. You know you're a little gun shy when, on a defensive fumble caused by Dominic, the coach is looking to see if Dominic gets up all right before he reacts to the excitement of a fumble recovery. Anytime Dominic was in the game or involved in a collision, watching Coach Phil was like watching somebody get a joke 10 seconds after the punch line.

As time went by and I talked to different people who came up and inquired about Dominic's progress, I hope I remembered to thank them for their support. I began to realize their side of the issue even better than I had first thought. For Irene and me, it was the idea that people could imagine what we were going through that brought us such comfort. We believed they understood because we had been on their side of unfortunate incidents in the past.

When you hear these things have happened to someone else, it is knee weakening and you become flush with anxiety. For us, we felt it then as we had imagined it. The only difference was we could not take refuge from the anguish the same as everybody else felt because now it was ours. Whenever anyone said to me, "I cannot imagine what you are going through." I would always tell them, "Yes you can and it is exactly what you imagine." Then I would tell them, "That is what keeps us from feeling alone."

In many instances in life, I think it would be better for psychologists to remind people they are like everybody else and maybe, just maybe, there are tons of people who know how you feel. Sometimes I think there may be a little too much support for the "you don't know what I'm going through" approach to gain the needed comfort that comes through feeling more like everybody else.

One caseworker spoke to me briefly about counseling. I remember she hinted around with words to the effect that a trauma could catch you off guard much further down the road. She hinted that it sometimes could interfere with communication and marital relations. One the best laughs I had was when I told her there was nothing that this incident could do to harm our marriage that 28 years together hadn't already done. As far as post-traumatic stress, if we weren't procrastinators we would have already been divorced. I was laughing so hard when I told her that my wife and I have a completely different interpretation of what saving yourself for marriage means that I was almost crying.

I hope that if people get anything out of this book in the way of advice, it is that they recognize as my support structure did, that certain things could not be done alone and be effective. The most similar experience I have had since this event is making funeral arrangements for my Dad. Had it not been for this experience and the guidance of my Aunt Gloria and her daughter, Beverly, my family would have been lost. So whatever role you play in someone's life in a wedding or a funeral, play the same role in a crisis. If you do, you will have played an important and cherished role. I found out that the fundamentals of caring are universal no matter the situation. Thank you all.

Breed Apart

As a result of contacting Councilman Vince Gardina, he decided that the best course of action was to form a task force to assist in the research and development of some type of legislation. This legislation could be anything from banning specific dog breeds to simply limiting or restricting the way in which pets are contained, maintained, and handled in public. His goal was to address what happened to the boys, as well as to pets, by menacing dogs. Just as automobile accidents are a part of driving, so are frays between animals with each other and bites to humans. The minor encounters go unnoticed because they are just that, minor. The Councilman and I, along with other concerned citizens, were focused on the extremes. It was his hope that through a task force, he could formulate a sensible solution. We both shared the view that the extreme injury resulting in dog assaults can be constantly traced to extreme breeds and breed mixes. As well, there will be some anomalies of unexpected breeds, showing that any dog can be potentially dangerous. Dominic's incident was only one of many of these extremes.

As Dominic's story found more and more coverage in the local TV, radio and print media, so did growing interest on both sides of the issue for and against breed-specific legislation. It may seem as if we are jumping around, however the bulk of these intense events were taking place simultaneously over a three-week period. It was about four days after the attack on the boys that the councilman made a public announcement that he intended to form a task force to investigate, guide, and suggest advice to help form a breed-specific law in Baltimore County.

I was at the hospital sitting bedside with Dominic and some family members watching the local news. I had been interviewed that day and we were looking forward to seeing how the story was portrayed. I have to say, we were blessed. Even though we did not get any legislation passed, the reporting was comprehensive and objective in all media forms. I don't think either side could have asked for more opportunity to have their message heard.

My portion of the report is much like this story, in that it only required recalling specific events as I experienced them. There was only one question for my opinion. The passing of opinion was left to those who would play the larger role in advancing or repealing a law. Dominic was encouraged to see his story on TV because he got to see his Dad trying to get something done. As much as I agreed with the Councilman's attempt at legislation, I am most grateful that he helped to give us a sense of healing by fighting the good fight.

I know for a fact this proactive approach was critical to Dominic's returning to being psychologically healthy, as well as his physical recovery. After showing my portion of the interview first, they cut over to a statement from the Councilman. His determined words made Dominic perk up. The Councilman essentially said that any time a child is attacked so viscerously in his own neighborhood we have an obligation to do something about it. I was comforted by the knowledge that regardless of what the Task Force came up with, they realized this was a problem that needed to be addressed.

I was not at all encouraged by the comments made by the Director of the Health Department, which followed the Councilmen's portion of the news report. Fortunately, Dominic didn't really understand what he said. He was just getting the much-needed proactive attention leading to a confident rather than fearful, anxiety-ridden recovery.

Animal Control comes under the umbrella of the Health Department. I always thought the Health Department's responsibility was, as its first concern, the health, welfare, and safety of the public. I would have expected to hear a comment specific to that template, especially from the top dog. Instead,

the director essentially stated that he had concerns that a breed specific law or ban may not be warranted because it could unfairly stereotype certain breeds of dogs and breed owners.

The first thought in my head was, “Are you fucking kidding me?” That is like saying you have concern about researching a helmet law for motorcyclists because a helmet law may unfairly stereotype certain types of vehicles and vehicle owners. I was burning up inside listening to this off-the-issue response while having to sit there and look at my son, IV trees, tubes, catheter, and bruised and swollen body. The Director didn’t prioritize the human victims from these extreme encounters as his primary focus. I thought to myself, “Why don’t you come down here and interview Dominic at his bedside, while you express concerns for stereo-typing the dog owning public rather than their victims.” I didn’t care what the Director felt personally or how he could even connect a common-sense response with stereotyping. I wanted him to do his job and be unbiased in his research and establishment of advisement policy. He needed to state and make clear, that his first concern and responsibility was to protect the human population.

He needed to state and make clear, that his first concern and responsibility was to protect the human population.

He should have said that in light of the attack on these children in our community, I will convene a comprehensive Task Force from animal advisory, law enforcement, and medical advisory, or from any other groups and individuals who have expertise to assist in carrying out that objective.

I understood that news reporters shoot more footage than they have time to show. I took into account that they may not have used all of his statements. Because of time constraints, objective TV news requires reporters who are trained in extracting your overall sentiment from your total interview. They generally frame which side of an issue you stand on accurately. Again, this was all the more reason for a public comment to stay with the appropriate Health Department template of public safety.

There is no denying that over the next several months, the director had ample opportunity to create and convene the proper advisors and public image in all of the media forms. The actual specific-breed workshop didn’t take place until six months later in October 2007. It was my understanding that when the task force was confronted by the Councilman with concern about this seeming mistake and possible intentional obstruction the Director dug his heels in deeper and defended his position on the matter.

Without anytime to research the matter, I was still able to make determinations through life experience and practical judgments. I was quite confident to go on the public airwaves with common-sense statements. When asked by the reporter if I thought this type of attack could be specific to certain breeds, I said, “It is obvious by this incident that some dogs cross the line of suitability as “Domestic Pets.” This would be confirmed weeks later when I was told directly by doctors I spoke with. Months later, on WJZ Channel 13, they played an interview with the head of surgery at the time for Johns Hopkins. He made a statement to the effect that, without exception in his six years as head of surgery, all of the dog attacks they treated involving extreme injury and trauma, could be attributed to Pit Bull-type dogs. In my interview, I stated words to the effect that a lion is in the cat family but I don’t want it in my neighborhood.

Understand, I came from a background and time, unfortunately, where most people were much worse dog owners but at the same time tended to own much more innocuous breeds. I don’t know that I knew too many kids, including my wife and myself, who hadn’t been bitten by a dog. It was more of a right-of-passage growing up, like falling off your bike, breaking a window, or denting a car playing

street ball, even ending up in a scuffle. That is how we perceived a dog bite. That day, my wife fully expected to go down the alley and find a child crying while being consoled by an apologetic dog owner. Instead, she and other neighbors rushed headlong into what could have been a life-threatening situation for them as well.

The common thread that all sides agreed upon is that any dog can bite. From there we have the responsibility to determine when that common thread of reality crosses the line of acceptable risk. For me it is simple, biting is the nature of animals. The biggest deterrent would be recognizing where that fact of nature becomes extreme and excessive to the norms of pet ownership. I did not and do not think it wise to rationalize a solution that is expected to prevail over nature. I wanted a solution that addressed the problem on its terms, using the same fundamentals as any risk assessment criteria: Establish an intended purpose or use, then isolate the specific down sides from the up side characteristics all breeds have in common. Anyone who has access to a dictionary could establish this common sense risk assessment. I simply opened the dictionary and looked up the words; DOG: a domesticated canine. DOMESTIC: of the family, household, or community of man. EXTREME: outermost, furthest, its edge, and SUITABLE: appropriate to a purpose. The definition of these four words was dead on with what I had already innately known. Except institutionally, 99% of all dogs serve as companions and non-aggressive sentinels. I would use long established, functioning neighborhood codes and covenants to define suitability.

If an animal cannot be properly contained or they possess extreme agility to overcome containment measures found in neighborhood covenants and codes, then that pet is not suitable.

I cannot overstate this point; it is pivotal to the mistake the director of health made in his comments. It is the hinge pin, either by intention or rationalization that pulls the debate out of its proper context. You cannot stereotype an animal. You can develop its reputation, however, by exposing it to scenarios where the breed characteristics under stress will illustrate its lack of suitability for certain environments. With animals, the only focus is suitability. That reality lies firmly in the bosom of nature and is what all reason at the primal level will prevail to. Most all unfortunate incidents are a result of this seemingly innocent oversight. They create what I would term the predictably unexpected.

Any breed of dog that is capable of exacting extreme harm while on the loose is an excessive pet and a dangerous breed. This same correlation, when compared to a motorcyclist being more exposed and having no restraints, being why they are required by law to wear a helmet. While it is true that we would all be safer in our cars if drivers also wore helmets, a line of acceptable risk is established by the suitability of the passenger car to the task of transportation. A motorcycle exposes riders to extreme accident characteristics that all else being equal, do not exist with an automobile. Because accidents are part of the nature of transportation, a helmet must be worn by motorcyclists to minimize what will surely be a serious accident. I wanted to establish a line that, when crossed, reached the pet's point of diminishing return for suitability as a "Domestic Pet". This line does not account for temperament or training. Those are, as with driver education, the bare minimum standards demanded by common sense for any pet or breed brought into a community. This same reality is why being an excellent driver is not a substitute for wearing seat belts, helmets or holding liability insurance. Temperament and training do not eliminate the severity of an attack. They bring its likelihood of bite potential for all breeds down to the acceptable risk level in a suitable pet.

The line of demarcation for suitability is in whether the nature and particular characteristics of a breed's attack capabilities exposes us to unnecessary and undue risk. This is where the task force should have focused, as that is the sum total of the hazard difference, breed to breed. In the end, we expect people to bring their very best to the roads we share, in both vehicle and driver just as the pet and owner. Safeguards are perceived by those with that focus in common as responsible boundaries, not restrictive limits. This approach is the completion of the balance needed when exercising any right or pursuit with equal responsibility taking. Safety is not measured against the ideal that all breeds can boast. Nor is safety measured by the elite individual dogs that any breed can claim. Risk is measured by the law of averages that includes the good, the bad, and the indifferent that make up, without exception, all breeds. Just as vehicles are measured against their suitability as highway transportation, I wanted these breeds measured against the reality of a community scenario.

I have lived in high density housing all my life. It is the eclectic reality of any large gathering of people or residential community that exposes us to multiple hazards. Disconnects from pursuits that aren't considering a responsibility to the community in the first place are the primary contributor to these types of extreme incidents. An individual, who smokes, living in multi-dwelling housing, can and has displaced entire families from their homes and apartments. In a rural setting, only their own home may be affected. In the end, it is those who understand and are naturally connected to the neighborhood dynamic that will take choices that do not push the boundaries of these realities. Denial of these facts, once they reveal themselves, is classic social disconnecting. I still muse when new neighbors who have spent their lives in suburban communities, try to comprehend the more minimalist nature of high-density living. When these factors are not considered or worse yet, people don't even know what to consider, the inevitability of these shortcomings happens as the predictably unexpected. The fact is, unless a problem is addressed on its own terms, it will continue to be a problem. When I reminisce about older people sitting on the porches back in the summer's evenings when most homes had no air conditioning, the predictably unexpected rings clear. If you did something foolish and were crying while making your way home, you had to run a gauntlet of people sitting on porches asking what happened. When you said you were stung by a bee while tampering with their nest, they would laugh and say, "Well that's the nature of the beast, what did you expect?"

Densely-populated residential neighborhoods are the places where dogs bolt out of doors, letter carriers are on foot, strangers pass within feet of your front or back door, and children run and scream, ride bikes, play tag and skate board on streets, sidewalks, and alleys. It is their domain solely. Pets reside there at the pleasure of the neighborhood, not the reverse. Dogs can, will, and do break their leashes, escape the confines of their yard and are exposed to immediate opportunities to default to their basic canine instincts. Sometimes these defaults end with no result, sometimes with only minor results, and sometimes with extreme results. This is a given with a canine pet. No one person, educational program, temperament test, or single measure can ensure total control over any pet at all times, nor should this proposition's highly reliable approach be allowed to promote a false sense of security. We must use hazard potential, absent the dog's master as a real world gauge. This absence of supervision by the master scenario is when there is the most danger. It is where we find the least common denominator in risk assessment.

Clearly some dogs are innocuous, almost no matter the situation. Some are borderline and others are extreme. I do not support that animals should be afforded judgment on an individual basis. That is a fundamental reserved to a human society.

To elevate an animal to that stature is anthropomorphic and shows a very specific, shockingly common and unabashed social disconnect.

Further, the all-to-often use of animals as surrogates for human children is dangerous to real children should we, unassuming, passively overlook this behavior as eccentric and harmless. This is where I see the biggest failing. These behaviors skew the implementation of common-sense controls that should be endorsed by animal advocates who have the highly motivated people, will, time and money to do the most good. By not supporting laws that would relegate these breeds to specific settings, they impede creating more continuity among their owners. This in turn would create the doggedly sought after positive reputation of esteem, prized by both the owner and extreme-breed fanciers. While rescue shelters provide training and temperament tests before placement, as well as screening for potential bad owners, not all dogs are obtained through rescues or shelters. The position of not supporting or assisting in the drafting of specific-breed laws has a much greater counter-productive effect than they seem to understand. If all breeds are viewed the same as domestic pets, than this means everybody can have access to them. This results in a pathetic fact, the down side that anybody does have that access. There is a consistent demographic associated with these extreme breeds, both in terms of abusers and rescuers with whom I take issue, no matter how honorable their intentions.

Pets reside in our community as guests, not equals, of man, and under the law, they are property. I do not support the concept that they are to be extended the same standard of citizenship or rights as some advocates expect. This is especially true when many of these same folks can't seem to master the far-higher standard required of human relationships. Somehow they have determined that the pets giving them unconditional love makes them worthy of understanding from the community at large. It is no great testament to any individual that they receive this unconditional love from their pets. This was brought to light in the sick 2009 act of setting a innocent Pit Bull on fire in Baltimore City. The dog never made one aggressive motion toward even its tormentors. This happened because these breeds are accessible to everybody and sadly they can end up with anybody. Just as the old timers on the porches used to say, "Well what did you expect?" The fact is the majority of dog owners are good dog owners, primarily by choosing innocuous, more suitable breeds as pets. It is not by education or training, but by default that most people are good pet owners. In my youth, I was taught to form a sense of relationship to all things by being my brother's keeper. Somehow we have become infected with a belief that we will connect more deeply as humans once we are all trained as residential zoo keepers. Those engaged in this anthropomorphic behavior, are themselves A Breed Apart.

Anthropomorphic: *Ascribing human characteristics to nonhuman things (aka, dogs) also referred to as "dog-ownership-worship." Learn more in a recent study published by the University of Chicago (When We Need a Human: Motivational Determinants of Anthropomorphism).*

Dominic's Account

Getting around to asking Dominic what happened was not too difficult. He seemed to feel safe in the hospital and very reassured. It was the night before his second operation, or the day after it that I decided to ask Dom what happened. I know that the attack had been on the news, but reports had only spoken of their injuries as a result of the attack. I knew I needed to get Dominic's story because I may have to testify on his behalf at the dangerous-dog hearing.

I said to Dominic, "Daddy feels really dumb, but I told the newspaper that you were playing Nerf tag and I don't even know how you play that game." I asked Dominic to explain the game and I would ask questions about locations of the other boys and what they were doing to gain an understanding of what happened without him feeling as if he was being directly questioned about the attack. During the course of the conversation, Dominic told me that he was on the front sidewalk at the house where the lady has pretty flowers. This is four doors down from our house. Dominic said he was walking up the sidewalk toward our house when Kyle and Chris came running through Mr. Mike's yard yelling, "Time out! Time out! Scotty's been attacked by a dog!" Mr. Mike is my next-door neighbor. Our homes are both end-of-group so we have access to the alley between our homes. Dominic said he thought it was some kind of a tactic in the Nerf tag game and he didn't believe them at first. Dominic said they said, "Come on, come on, follow us!" They went from the front of our home, through the yard, and into the alley. Dominic said that he was in the middle and out in front and one boy was to his left and one was to his right. At some point, one of the other boys noticed the toy Nerf gun lying in the alley and they began to move toward it. Dominic said, as they got a little closer, the other boys kind of hung back. Dominic said, "Dad, you know those cracks in the alley?" I said, "Yeah, they are called expansion joints." He said, "Yeah, well I was near one of those and the gun was near the other one and they said don't touch it, but Dad I knew not to touch it." Dominic said, "I stopped and I looked to my left and I could see the dogs. I asked, "What were they doing?" Dominic said, "One was sitting down and panting real heavy and the other one was running around like a nut." I asked, "What did you do?" He said, "I froze and just looked at them. All of the sudden the other dog saw me and it stopped running around and stared at me."

I asked, "How long do you think it was staring?"

"About 5 seconds." Dominic said, "I stared at him and he stared at me and then it just lunged and started to jump the fence." He said he turned to the other boys (who were a little bit back and had no view of the dogs) and said, "Oh crap, he jumped the fence!" and he began to run up the alley toward home. Dominic said he looked back and as the dog got closer he tried to throw his gun at the dog, but he missed and the dog jumped up and tackled him to the ground. He said the dog bit him in the face and its mouth slid off. He said he got to his knees and the dog bit him in the thigh and began to drag him around the alley. He said he tried to choke the dog and it let go of his leg and bit him on the arm. Dominic said, "Then I couldn't fight and at some point the dog let go."

He said he lay there and the dog kept coming up and pouncing on him and nudging him and then he saw a man come up. He said the man was screaming, "Oh my God, Oh my God!" and grabbed the dog out of the alley.

I asked, "Did he say anything to you?" and Dominic said, "No." "Come on Dominic, not even 'are you all right'?" "No" he said. "Not even 'I will be back'?" I asked. "No!" Dominic said. "Come on Dominic," I said, "Not even 'I am getting help'?" "No Dad. I already told you he was just screaming." I then said, "What did you do after he grabbed the dog?" Dominic said, "I tried to get up and run home but I kept falling down. So then I tried to walk home but I kept falling so then I started to crawl home but some lady just kept yelling, "Lay down, lay down. You're hurt!" I asked Dominic how long he thought this lasted and his words were, "Like two and a half minutes." I almost cracked at this point, I was trying to stay matter-of-fact, but I made this sort of hiccup sound, like a reflexive suction noise you make before you go under water, or cry, or are surprised. I don't know what to call it but it is like having the wind knocked out of you while playing sports. I was so glad we were alone because I doubted anybody else could have kept it together and not traumatized him by reacting angrily. When I made this noise, I gathered myself just as quickly, and I said calmly, "How did you get home?" I said, "Did Kyle and Chris get Mommy?" He said, "I don't know, I just remember Mommy, Mister Eric and that Paramedic guy being over top of me when I woke up." I said, "When you woke up?" He said, "Yeah, I was having a dream and when I woke up they were all talking to me." I said, "Man Dom, you sure are lazy resting in the middle of the alley like that while everybody is doing all of the work." He just laughed.

I said, "So Dom, what was your dream about?" He said, "You know that tree on Mrs. Bonnie Hannigan's lawn?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well I was lying under that tree and Scotty was at my feet. Brenna was near my right shoulder and Ashley was at my left shoulder. I was looking up at the sky and the whole sky was real bright and the tree was kind of blocking the sun but not so much that I couldn't see its brightness. The whole sky was lit up and bright. Then I heard Mommy calling me for dinner from our front porch. She said, 'Come on Dom, we have to go.' I woke up in the alley and Mommy was acting all hysterical." I said, "Yeah Dom, women are like that," and we laughed. Then he said,

"Dad, you know what a Spartan would do? A Spartan would have pretended to be weak so the dog could get closer and then just before the dog got him he would have put his spear right down its throat."

Dominic is so proud of his Greek heritage. I said, "Dom, so you are just like a Spartan." Dominic said, "No I 'm not Dad, because a Spartan wouldn't have been afraid and I was." I said, "Dom, after what you told me, the Spartans are a bunch of pussies compared to you. You were very courageous and I hope I grow up to be half the man you and Mommy already are." He just said, "What?"

Because to him, he was explaining about the game and he was very matter of fact.

The other boys had not visited and no one ever brought it up to Dominic for fear of traumatizing him. Once I heard his story, not only was I numb for what he, my wife, and our neighbors went through, I knew that it would take my own death to stop me from seeing this to a systematic and proper conclusion.

The dog owner's negligence and his landlord's irresponsibility had injured one child and almost killed another. The dog owner attempted to cover it up with threats to the first child, when the child most needed care. He threatened the first boy and he abandoned a second child in the alley. As bad as Dominic's experience was, at least he saw people coming to his aid. He didn't have to suffer the despair that Scotty must have felt having to seek help, being injured and threatened, and then lead to

and abandoned on a side of the street he was not allowed to be on. We are talking, a 9-year old, Scotty, and a 10-year old, Dominic.

Finally I casually said, "Dominic, that's cool, now I know what to tell the reporters about Nerf tag." Then as if on cue, one of his monitors went off for a new I.V. bag and a nurse came into the room. Dominic got sort of disgusted because the stupid machine was doing that noise all the time and he said, "Jesus God, I hate this thing." He began asking a lot of frustrated questions of the nurse and she expertly steered him to a calm place. "Man, what a little fighter," she said. He laid his head back in frustration; shut his eyes and that quick he was nodding off. I whispered, "Ok Dom, I am going to the cafeteria, the nurse will fix you up and I will be right back."

I went down the hall to the bathroom and tried to figure out what emotion I was feeling. I wanted to throw up but I couldn't and I wanted to cry but I couldn't and I wanted to fist fight so bad it was incredible. I don't mean the "I hope I come out on top" type of fighting. I mean that I am so fucking mentally miserable that either I can put you out of my misery or you can put me out of my misery, but I want out or this misery. I suspect that this is what being on the brink means. This was the second time I had no proximity to the dog owner as my only controlling issue. The first time was when I found out that my son was in critical condition and I had to divert from the neighborhood to the hospital and then now while I was with Dominic in the hospital. To this day, I am neither grateful nor disappointed that the dog owner and I didn't cross paths while I was in such an emotional frame of mind. I remain mostly just numb.

Basic Instincts

Before moving on, I would like to make a few points that I hope will provide greater clarity as you advance through this story. Surely, when you get to the point in the story where Dominic was trying to get up and run, then was trying to walk, and then trying to crawl home, I am positive you were filled with sadness, horror, and rage. That is unfortunate, but what holds your attention where it should be and helps to make an objective point. The dog reacted the way at it did, not by breed but because it is a dog like any other. The contributing stress factors and the dog's reaction cannot be trained or behaved away in any breed. The basic instincts and limits of the canine species will default upon itself. It is by default that the Pit Bull breeds, along with other dangerous breeds and mixed breeds, have incredible strength and size that creates the severity of the injuries associated with their attacks. Although breed certainly is a factor in animal-on-animal attacks it is not always the breed of dog as the main cause of attack on humans.

Breed is undeniably, however, the cause of such devastating injury, maiming, and death along with some very specific attack characteristics.

By doing a simple Google search, I was able to find out that Dominic and Scotty hit the lottery of dog attack scenarios. These are universal scenarios that apply to any breed of dog. Most dog attacks occur during the spring and summer of the year. It was the end of April, almost May. Children between six and 14 years of age are the most likely to be attacked; the boys were 9 and 10. Boys are attacked more than girls, they are both boys. The attacking dog is more likely to be male; it was a male Pit Bull. There is a higher likelihood of attack if the male has not been neutered, this dog was not neutered. It is a high likelihood for a male to attack if a female dog that is unaltered is in his company. He was penned with a female who was not spayed. There is an even higher likelihood of attack if the female has puppies. She did and the owner had the adult Pit Bulls penned outside while he cleaned the puppy area inside the house. Attack probability can be higher if the animal is not properly contained and can escape; the pen was only a temporary structure of four-and-a-half feet high. In addition, the yard was not fenced. There is a higher likelihood for attack if the dog has already shown signs of aggression. Neighbors at that end of the alley were already talking and showing concern, and had called animal control about these dogs. There is a higher likelihood for attack if the dog owner is irresponsible in general for the care and training of his pets or is and engages in idiotic behavior. Jackpot, here's your sign.

In the same way that a line has to be drawn between a wild animal and a domestic animal, you have to draw a definitive line with domestic animals that can do this kind of damage. Common sense tells us that if the above 10 stressors are universal to all dogs and that the breed of dog and its physical limitations compared with the victim's physical limitations will determine the severity of the injuries. This begs the question: if this breed standard did not already exist and citing all of the aforementioned negatives of such a pet, not one reputable expert or advocate would recommend breeding a dog of this standard. Remember, we are not just talking negative as the aggressor; we are talking negative as being highly sought after to be exploited and abused as well. Certainly the average dog owner would not support such a breed. It is because we have formed knee jerk attachments first without understanding their impact beyond ourselves we see such dysfunction. Ultimately, a fully

functioning human being will ask if this is a good family pet and is this breed a good pet to have in a community. To ask either question, you have to have a working frame of reference. Far too many while kind individuals aren't well rounded enough to be able to know what to consider.

With simple education to the facts for people and not training to an ideology or rescue agenda, the matter would have a natural sense of boundary. With true education this issue would dissolve and we would find these breeds predominately only in the most productive settings and environments. This is the very definition of domestic suitability.

Surely, Dominic and the other boys were high-tailing it out of there when the dog pursued them. If you don't know what high tailing actually means, ask a deer hunter to tell you. Either way, the boys instinctually reacted and ran. There are these repeated attempts by experts to review and discuss what would be the best way to react; i.e. the curl-up-in-a-ball defense. This is what Scotty did instinctively because he had no chance to react and was first knocked to the ground. What actually saved Scotty from Dominic's fate was not his being in a ball, as some took false refuge in believing. By responding to Scotty's screaming for help, it was only the direct intervention of the dog owner that stopped the attack. Ironically, screaming was another instinctive reaction on Scotty's part and an extreme inflammatory no-no" which further insights any dog's attack and prey instincts. Scotty's screaming could have been a fatal mistake. By luck and the grace of God, his instincts saved him. It sounds good on paper, but in reality the basic instincts of the animals and humans involved are the real-world gauge of the hazard. Thoughts to the contrary create a false sense of security for the powerless and fearful seeking some kind of physiological refuge.

After the attack, some parents took refuge in doggy-education pamphlets and this certainly does have its place. I want them to know when these techniques are applied under attack with extreme breeds, any feeling of security you get is exactly the same placebo contrived in a basic self-defense course. I was taught that you could gain an understanding of how dangerous a situation is by how drastic the precautionary measures are. We are talking, like it or not, submitting fully to fate in extreme attack cases. After that kind of appraisal, the best advice is preventative. In the realm of dangerous domestic or wild animal attacks, some advice is mere key-ring mace. It is better than nothing when nothing is all you have, but if that's the best defense advice they give that alone should tell you something.

Not coincidentally, two of the four boys were able to escape attack. Should each have curled up in a ball instead of running?

Maybe Dominic could have curled up in a ball and then the other boys could have taunted the dog into attacking them. Then each boy could have taken turns curling in a ball and getting chewed on as they worked their way systematically up the alley in a tactical leapfrog of retreat. It is highly unlikely, but could seem a tactic of value when drafted in the comfort of an animal behaviorist conference room. I like the real-world options the other boys fear reflexively chose for them. Odds are, in fact, in knowing what they know now, they would have fled even sooner. I am certain their parents are pleased with the results of their boy's instincts. A parent should be educated to know how safe their child is if the child exercises their instinctive right to panic when endangered by someone's right to harbor such extreme pets. Let the pamphlet educate parents to these realities so they can decide what the acceptable and unacceptable risks are. It makes more sense to train our focus on eliminating the material hazard before we institute all of this HAZMAT training.

You have to be in a situation that allows you to react ideally and have years of education and training. That is not likely in all but the smallest number of cases and completely unlikely with panicked children. When all hell breaks loose, luck is the biggest factor. The scary part is that Dominic and Scotty are two very lucky little boys. Because I know this, I don't want parents taking false refuge in these placebos just because so-called prominent experts have the platform and agenda to soften the hard truth. As someone who is familiar with dog shows, field trials, and the dog world in general, I can assure you that outside of the politics of acquiring ribbons and a flock of extremely motivated well-meaning people, the whole industry is fairly bush league.

I would also like to point out that in my experience dangerous breeds are every bit and completely as warm, loving, loyal, and affectionate as any other breed. I cannot tell you how stunned people are to hear I support breed-specific legislation, up to and including bans, especially when they see me and Dominic petting these dogs and engaging in conversation with their owners. Further, the dogs attained through rescue tend to be with some of the most loving and caring owners. My sister's bully, Roxy, and my neighbor's bully, Sage, are two examples. My Brittany has jumped up and put more scratches on visitors than what these two dogs combined have done to fleas. Pit Bulls and other dangerous breed mixes are without doubt, as nice as any well raised, trained, cared for, and properly socialized dog you will encounter. I do not know that they are any more likely to or any less likely to attack a human than any other breed. It is this bite potential, common with all breeds, which alone establishes their questionable suitability. Somehow the defenders have interpreted this fact as the reverse, confusing their propensity to attack with the intensity of their attack. Strangely there is no debate, stigma, or sense of stereotyping with horses, pigs, goats, chickens, and a plethora of animals on farms and even at the petting zoo with wonderful temperaments and training being relegated to more suitable environments.

Temperament, training, treatment, spaying and neutering are known effective deterrents from attack in all breeds. They are a bulletproof vest. This means you are dealing with loaded guns and their caliber is the more telling factor. It reminds me of the misconception, no pun intended, that the media promotes in the use of a condom mantra, many unwittingly see this as the be-all-end-all in protection. The intelligent approach is to ask yourself, if you knew that somebody had AIDS or an STD would you still engage in an at-risk activity? Exactly! This is why on issues concerning more primal animal and human behavior, temperament and training reveal themselves, as more of a physiological prophylactic.

Without question, the majority of bites and attacks are reported as a complete surprise to the dog owner and the victim. Veterinarians, rescue workers, and animal-control workers have techniques, tools, and facilities at their disposal, such as choker poles, mace, muzzles, holding and containment kennels, sedatives, and trained staff to assist with and carry out handling tactics geared to the animals they deal with. Most of all they have above-average education, experience, and training in animal behavior and they are prepared and coordinated. This common theme of preparedness is staggeringly and almost completely none existent in the mano a mano of real world dog attacks. The idea that this danger can be educated away has some merit in that with the proper education, more people would choose a better-suited breed for companionship and community. Expecting to educate people to the degree necessary or that education would remove the threat of incidents, allowing for an increase in placing larger numbers of these types of pets among us, is more of a cult mentality. In many ways it is promoted like a cult religion with the same amount of divine deception. This also begs the question, "what would it say about us as a society if we were better educated in animal care than in health care?" When things don't go according to plan, it is this vulnerability and absence of safeguards sensed by an animal that works as a trigger for any breed's attack and prey instincts. This fact is canine specific.

The “all breeds of dogs can bite” acknowledgement of the Baltimore County Task Force was the only objective fact in their report.

Then shamefully, they put a spin on their acknowledgement that implied all dog bites are the same. Attempting the equivalent of comparing a non-venomous and venomous snake bite as the same, this reach is demeaning of these tragic incidents.

Their amateurish attempt to argue the specific to the general is prolific among advocates along with a myriad of inept platitudes such as 'blame the deed not the breed'. Their conclusions were not objectively based but biased. They intentionally failed to gather or solicit a comprehensive input group. Their irresponsibility revealed by submitting only a vague two-page report to Councilman Gardina. One can draw only two possible conclusions; complete incompetence or conspicuous absence of objective input they knew would hurt their agenda.

My Dad used to tell me, “It is one thing to wake up in a firehouse and go to a fire; it is another matter entirely to wake up in a house on fire.” When you are being attacked it is like trying to put out a fire with a smoke detector. The only fail-safe weapon is prevention.

The epitome of contradiction speaking to hazard being only a matter of how an animal is trained and treated, defenders show more ignorance and prejudice when they speak about the yappy little toy breeds being more aggressive. The hole in this theory is that toy breeds and lap dogs are notoriously lovingly well treated and pampered by their owners. They are practically carried everywhere like babies. It has more to do with your size to their size to their sense of threat ratio. Moreover, if the toy breed does attack just like a Pit Bull, you wouldn't drop and roll up in a ball. You would likely drop kick its little ass like a ball.

I read an e-book by an animal-advocate who wrote that she evacuated her bladder when her Husky attacked her. That reaction is real world because you cannot educate it away. I had this same understanding of instinct when I was waiting to see if Dominic would survive. Until I knew that he would live, I also was Dangerous by Default. The author went on to explain what she thought was the best way to house dangerous breeds and survive attacks. She is a leading expert in the field and focuses on layers of redundant containment. The flaw was not seeing the effort required as an indicator of a problem. I fully agreed with the required excess and redundancy for safe containment and housing. These measures are not practicable or endearing of a breed to the average dog owner. My Mom would just say, “Gee, that sounds like more trouble than it is worth. Why do people need to have such pets anyway?” Good question, Mom. To me, even though I fully agreed with the author's safety measures, it was still tantamount to being a residential zookeeper.

I remained anonymous because of on-going civil litigation, but was interviewed and cited in a thesis where the author disagreed with my conclusions on suitability driving this issue. Instead, the author put forth that the problem was in the circuit of communication that creates legends and unfairly stigmatizes this breed. I never heard back from the author when I wrote back to say that by only researching animal behaviorists and not medical experts associated to the liability in these incidents, her communication circuit was equally incomplete. I wrote that to describe the work in electrical terms, it was a short circuit. In my experience with most debates, people are positively or negatively charged. To me, this is the dynamic that makes life so electric. However, with many people who are not, pun intended, well grounded, the real world can shock the living hell out of them.

If owning these types of breeds was a critical part of man's specific or daily needs, I could see the merit in these debates. The fact that there are so many other suitable breeds to achieve the same level of companionship raises my eyebrow more about the people, their choice taking and attachments than any real contribution they add to a solution.

Clearly, the dog is always the least common denominator. While it is a uniquely human trait, it is irresponsible to create a problem by stretching to extremes the boundaries of certain environments and settings in the first place. I cannot turn my back on the fact that, as a parent, involved with my family, I don't see too many people in my same situation contributing to this problem either by abusing dogs or by a fanatical rescue agenda. I also don't subscribe to the idea that the surrogate use of pets is equal in task or deed to a family responsibility. What I do see with my peers is bar set by parents with children, interests, pets and pursuits that reflect family and community first as their most basic instincts.

Animal Control

Even though it is clear to me now that the folks at Animal Control don't share my views of a solution, I have to say that they, or at least their point man, were really an effective communicator. I thought that they did an exemplary and effective job within their guidelines and at the dangerous dog hearing. Conversely, their lack of comprehensive input on the specific-breed law was conspicuous and I viewed this as I believe did the Councilman as obstructionist.

Early on I called Animal Control to inquire about the fate of the Pit Bull that attacked Dominic. When the lady who took the call asked who was calling and I identified myself, I could feel her reaction through the phone and in her voice. She said, "Mr. Solesky, how is your son doing?" I brought her up to speed and it was a wonderful and warm conversation. Then she said, "Hold on, I will connect you to the supervisor." She again wished my family well. In two seconds, a man picked up as if he was waiting his turn. "Hello Mr. Solesky," he said and then he gave me his name and told me that he was an employee of Baltimore County Animal Control. He inquired as to everyone's welfare and he was genuine and quite soothing.

With that he said words I never expected to here from a government agency. He said, "Mr. Solesky, let me tell you what we are doing with regard to the Pit Bull, Clifford, involved in the accident with your son." This gentleman lead me through item-by-item details as to what they were doing, what they had done and what they intended to do. He was so detailed and meticulous; I wanted to hug him through the phone. When he was finished he politely said, "Mr. Solesky, do you have any questions I can answer for you?"

I said, "Sir, first you thought of everything I had on my mind and answered some questions I didn't know to ask. I want to congratulate you on such a complete and meticulous job and communicating everything so clearly." I said, "I guess, with such a detailed answer, that the agency had been expecting my call. Further, that it must be a high compliment to you, as a staff member, to have been picked as the one to handle the whole affair." He was very appreciative of my compliment. I then went on to tell him that I could only find one flaw in his entire statement. He inquired in a genuine way, "Mr. Solesky what would that be?" I said, "The only word you spoke, that I take exception to, and be forewarned it is not semantics, is your use of the word accident." I went on:

"This was no accident. It was an Incident that involved neglect, deceitful intention, malice, and reckless contributory factors. As you can imagine, I have been hyper-focused on this matter."

He gave me a genuine, polite, and empathetic response, "I cannot imagine what you are feeling." I said, "By definition, it is not an accident and the severity of my son's injury was not from what one would term a dog bite." I went on to tell him that I was most appreciative that he did not refer to this as a dog bite as some other people had called it. I told him I would stop those people in mid-sentence if they used the term bite. I would tell them adamantly that it was an assault by K-9 attempted murder, or manslaughter by K-9. Not a dog bite. I would calmly and politely rant to him that besides my son's plight, there is this legal vacillation connecting responsibility to the dog to shield the owner from prosecution and then animal rights groups putting it all on the dog owner's irresponsibility to shield the

dog as a contributing factor. I told him it seems that people have taken sides and as a result they are not only impeding progress but not recognizing that responsibility is with both the owner and the suitability of the animal to the community setting. Again he said, "Mr. Solesky, I understand."

Next, I inquired if the owner of the dog was going to fight the dangerous dog charges to keep from paying the fine and having the dog euthanized. I wanted to know if any attempt was being made to reclaim the dog. He said, "Yes, he had heard from the owners of the dog and the mother of the dog owner." I said, "They don't sound very remorseful if they are attempting to impede this process." I was hoping he would offer up some kind of information on their mentality. He just said, "Mr. Solesky, you are a very understanding man and I wish more people were as cooperative and understanding as you." I gathered that to mean that the dog owners weren't too worried about anything but themselves. Frankly, it was all the same to me. At this point, I had all the help a man could ask for. I saw the dog owners not as a solution to the problem but one more fire to extinguish. Yes, I would take all the help I could and was getting all I could have prayed for. Regardless, I did not intend to relent nor would I.

He told me I would be contacted by mail of a hearing date and location, and that he looked forward to meeting me in person. I told him I felt the same and that our meeting may be the highlight of what otherwise will be a lousy day. With that he cordially said, "Have a good afternoon, Mr. Solesky." I bid him the same and we hung up. I immediately called my wife, friends, and family and conveyed to them the contents and experience of the warm conversation I had with the gentlemen at Animal Control and that the dog owner was fighting the charges.

After the hearing, I would contact the Animal Control board until the dog was finally euthanized. I was always greeted warmly and developed a bit of a friendly rapport with all of them. I even found out in conversation that the very meticulous man was a Rottweiler owner, one of the top two killers in the last 15 years. I never gave it much thought about his choice of breed, until I saw he was one of the members of the panel of the very weak and vague report from the Task Force months later. Once I saw he was involved, I knew there was no way one so meticulous could have unwittingly been involved in the filing of such a weak body of work, as was the Task Force report. This also spoke to defenders who blamed things on the circuit of communication, working as hard to dilute the truth as those they accused of sensationalizing the truth. The facts remained the same, however, and our experience with pets our whole lives showed these pets, whatever the argument, to be a poor fit.

Small-Ti-More, Maryland

Dominic was healing nicely and they had his pain medication down to a steady routine. He was not progressing as well with physical therapy. If he did not show the improvement they wanted he was going to give up a hospital bed for a bed in a rehabilitation center. That all changed one day when Dominic received a visit from Baltimore Ravens kicker Matt Stover and longer snapper Matt Katula.

A couple of years prior to meeting Matt Stover, the boys and I were watching the Sunday football games and I was concerned about them idolizing some of the players and their influence beyond their ability to play football. We were watching the Ravens and Matt Stover had a terrible day. He was always very reliable and had kicked us into our one super bowl in 2001.

On this day after the game when he was interviewed about his poor showing, Matt said, "I just want the football fans of Baltimore to know that will never happen again." I turned to my boys and said, "Now that is somebody to look up to. That is the kind of thing Johnny Unitas would have said. Did you hear that? No excuses. That's the way you have to be no matter what position you play."

From then on, we became huge Matt Stover fans. By Christmas of that year the boys wanted Ravens paraphernalia and jerseys. In the spring of that same year Dominic did his book report as a biography on Matt Stover. At the end of that summer in August, Lutherville Timonium Recreation Council football started and Dominic was starting his third year of playing. I would take up my spot on the bench with the other parents while the kids worked on their football skills. On the second day of practice, as we got in the car to head home, Dominic said, "Hey Dad, did you see that guy who was helping us with our blocking drills today?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "That was Matt Stover." I said, "Yeah Dom and I'm Johnny Unitas." He said, "No Dad, I swear that was Matt Stover." I said, "Dom, why would he be at LTRC (Lutherville Timonium Recreation Council)?" He said, "His son, is on my team." I asked, "Did you tell him about your book report and that he was your favorite player?" He said, "No." I sensed that Dominic was too overwhelmed to tell him. I told him, "You know, I am sure he would rather be a Dad when he is here than Matt Stover anyway so let's give him that respect and we will keep it that way."

At the next week's practice, I saw Matt on the sideline and I introduced myself. I told him the story of how we all came to respect him as a role model and a football player for his comment that Sunday the year before. He immediately knew what I was talking about and described the day to a tee. I told him that made us all fans, both of my boys had his jersey, and Dominic did his biography for a book report. He was genuinely moved and thanked me for sharing that with him. Matt was easy to talk to and I spoke with him often that year. We never asked him for an autograph or bothered him too much with football talk. He was getting plenty of that without us.

Now, back to the hospital. I received a phone call from one of the parents from LTRC football league with whom I was keeping in touch regularly along with Dominic's coach. His name is also Matt. In classic Small-Ti-More fashion, he knew the EMS Captain that treated Dominic at the scene and he knew Matt Stover. He said, Hey Tony. I was talking to Matt Stover and he wants to know who Dominic's favorite Raven is and he is going to see if he could bring him along for a visit." I said, "Matt, I don't want this to sound corny because we know Matt Stover personally, but he is Dominic's favorite player." I told him how Dominic had done Matt's biography for a school project before we ever met him and he received an "A." I said, "If somebody else from the Ravens said I am coming by and I would like to bring Dom's favorite player, we would have asked if they would be able to get Matt Stover to come along." That is when I first heard the word Small-Ti-More. Matt said, "Man, that's amazing. Only in

Small-Ti-More!" Then Matt said, "Listen, Debbie Stover will call you and arrange for a time for Matt to stop by the hospital."

The next day Debbie called and asked if around two in the afternoon be okay. I joked and said, "Deb, I think we will be here for a while." Then she asked how Dominic was doing and I told her he is healing very well but he was not progressing as well with physical therapy. I told her that if he didn't show progress he would undoubtedly go to an in-patient rehabilitation facility. I told her how we would just love to get him home. I said he was really looking forward to Matt stopping by, so the good thing was that he was in good spirits and getting plenty of attention. With that she said she would keep us in her prayers and that Matt had my cell phone number and he would call just before he headed over. I told Dominic that Matt Stover was coming by and he said, "Dad, that will be so cool."

The following day at about 1:00 in the afternoon my cell phone rang and it was Matt Stover. He said he was in the parking garage and would be up in about 15 minutes. It was just me, Dominic, and my good friend Bob Perkins who stopped by between sales calls to visit with Dominic. Moments later, Matt Stover was in the doorway of the hospital room and standing behind him was a large man who I did not know but I was not about to attempt to throw out. He was a big dude. Matt walked in and immediately said hi to Dominic and introduced his friend as long snapper Matt Katula. Then he turned to my friend Bob and me and introduced Matt Katulato to us. They were each carrying a shopping bag with the rope handles. We settled in and Matt started talking to Dominic about all kinds of things and giving him encouragement from Lutherville Timonium football parents and kids. Then well wishes from the Ravens players who, he told Dominic, had made his story the talk of the locker room at spring camp.

Matt Katula was standing behind Stover and he was holding both of the bags. Stover said, "Dom I have a couple of things here for you." Stover reaches in the bag and pulled out a real game jersey. Dominic was beaming and just taking it in. Stover signed the jersey and gave it to Dom to keep. Then he pulled out an 8 x 10 color picture of him kicking a field goal and signed it and said, "This is also for you." This was one heck of a way to spend time with your favorite player and it could not have come at a better time. Then he said, "Dominic I have a little something here from the LTRC Football league's parents." He reached in the bag and pulled out a Sony PSP (PlayStation Portable). I knew it was something really neat but I really don't know much about electronic things, so I just went by the excitement and reaction on Dom's face. He knew for sure what it was.

Stover seemed familiar with a PSP but Bob and I were in the "I guess I am going to learn something" mode. Finally, after Dom got it opened, I saw it was a state of the art miniature game/computer/TV/DVD player. Dominic was just totally forgetting he was in the hospital. Then Stover said, "We also brought you a couple of games to play on it."

Next I realized that Stover is going to join Bob and me in the learning process, as we really did not have a clue how to operate the PSP. Dominic had a real good idea and Matt Katula owned one himself. Katula sat down on one side of the bed and he and Dominic start sharing ideas, taking turn playing the PSP, and learning all of its features. Stover was seated on the other side of the bed and here is this kid who was never so happy to be in a hospital bed in his life.

While Dominic and Katula were playing the PSP, Matt Stover turned to Bob and me and started to discuss with me understanding of God's role in healing, both physically and mentally. This was especially important because I don't know football all that well. I had always been a golfer. Matt speaking to me about God made the visit not only for Dominic but now for my family and me as well. What was gratifying about what Matt told me is that he is not a preachy type of guy. He talked about God the same way sports enthusiasts talk about sports. What really got my attention was when he told me, "I cannot tell you what to do and I sure would not want to tell you how to feel about such a horrific

situation with the Pit Bull or its owner. But I can tell you what God wants you to do.” I sure hope I have continued to do that, as that advice was one of the most calming experiences in the whole tense ordeal. Matt spoke of what may be my mission in all of this and we discussed the personal side of family life and raising children.

Then, just as we started out we returned our focus to Dominic and Katula. We discussed golf and exchanged some tips and talked about life in general. It was cool. Matt Stover, Matt Katula, Dom, Bob Perkins and me just sitting around talking about God, life, raising children, golf, and a little football... all real comfortable and casual.

It was even funnier when the physical therapy staff came in. They did not know we had special guests and with the way we were sitting around talking they would not have noticed if we had the president of the United States in the room. Katula was up at the top of the bed, sort of seated and leaning back next to Dominic so they could take turns with the PSP. Stover is sitting on the foot of the bed, I am slouched in an armchair and Bob was sitting on the windowsill.

The therapy nurses said, “Dominic, it is time for your therapy.” and they said hello to the three guests. I introduce Bob, Matt Katula and then Matt Stover but I didn’t say they were from the Baltimore Ravens. They got into their work for about 20 seconds trying to get Dominic out of bed into a chair, which is about all the pain he could stand. One of the therapists had to move the jersey off the bed and all of a sudden, the two therapists looked at each other and then turned and said, “From the Ravens?” It was funny. They said, “Oh my God,” and then they reintroduced themselves. The one girl said, “I don’t know why I didn’t recognize you guys at first but you were all just laying around so casually.”

We all laughed and then Matt Stover inquired as to how Dominic was progressing and where he needed to be to be able to go home instead of to a rehabilitation facility. The nurse said, “Well, by now we would at least like to see him get from the bed to the doorway and back to bed. When he does that and if he can get up and down steps and basically show he can navigate safely, then he can go home and commute to rehabilitation three times a week.”

Stover said, “Dominic, I am going to check up on you everyday till you get out of here and get back home. I want to see you make it to the doorway and back today and then to the door of the room next door and back tomorrow and eventually down the hall and back, okay?” Dominic had an IV tree attached to him, he was holding onto a walker and he had more staples and stitches, scrapes and bruises then we could count. Plus his calf muscle was still hanging out on one side. Everything was bandaged so you couldn’t tell how bad it looked, but you could tell by the bandages that it was very severe.

For the first time since he started therapy, Dominic used the walker supported by the therapist on one side and with Bob, Stover, Katula, and me looking on. Everybody was encouraging Dominic, especially the therapist. Dominic got to the doorway and turned to Matt Stover and said, “Mr. Matt, where do you want me to get to?” Matt said, “Each day I want you to progress until you can make it down the hall and back.”

Dominic just turned back to the doorway and started heading down the hall with IV tree, two therapists, walker, medical gown, and all!

Now it was staring to get emotional as we all cheered him on in the middle of the hallway. Some of the other nurses were looking on and giving him the thumbs up as he passed their station. Then he got to the end of the hall, turned and started heading back. I turned and faced Stover, Bob and Katula with

my back to Dominic and said, “Man, you just cannot imagine how grateful I am. I don’t know if you realize what he looks like under those bandages, but this is no minor event.” I thanked Matt and without missing a beat, Matt said, “It’s not me Tony, it is the power of God that allows these things and I am just happy he is using me.”

Finally Dominic was back where he started and Stover asked, “What else will he have to do to be able to go home?” The therapist said, “He will have to be able to sit on his fanny and go up and down steps.” Matt said, “Dom, do you want to try the steps?” He just said, “Yes.” Off to the steps we went and this time Matt Stover said, “I am going to sit right next to you and go up and down with you.” Down a flight they went scooting and back up they came. Matt would set the cadence, just like in team PT drills. The therapist, Katula, Bob, and me looked on and rooted. For us guys it was sports adrenaline and testosterone. For the therapist it was the coaching staff bringing out the best in one of their players.

Once PT was finished the therapist said that with a couple of more days like that and it was just a matter of getting Dom off IV medication and teaching Mom and Dad to do wound care. With that we got Dominic back into bed. Matt told Dominic he would call each day to check on his progress and that when he got out, he had another goal for him that they would talk about. Then Matt turned to me and said, “Tony when is the dangerous dog hearing?” I told him it was in about four days. Matt said, “Let me know, I intend to be there. We all said our good byes, thanked our Maker, and went on about our routines.

I knew that it was a special accomplishment that day. I was sure Stover and Katula knew it too. Still later that day when it hit the eight-hour cycle to dressing Dominic’s wounds, I took pictures. I e-mailed a nice note to Matt extending my thanks to all involved. I went on to say, “Matt, attached are some pictures of what it looks like under the bandages. I wanted you to see what Dominic was walking around on and that today was no minor event.”

The pictures would show an upper thigh that had missing muscles and was completely encircled in a series of jagged wounds held together by staples with a drain hose sticking out. His right thigh had a long surgical wound stitched where they harvested a vein to graft to his femoral artery. His lower left leg had a suture on one side where they closed up and reinserted his calf muscle on one side. The other side was a surgical opening that ran the length of his calf with the muscle still bulging out. Dominic also had various stitches and bruises on his arm and face that were healing nicely, but no less painful.

Matt wrote back a personal message. I would see him briefly at the hearing. He just let me know he was there and then moved inconspicuously to the back of the room. I asked what he thought of the pictures. He just looked me right in the eyes, praised God, and shook his head yes. I turned and walked up to join the others who would testify that day.

Every Dog Has Its Day

It had now been 17 days since the attack and the first legal action was taking place. This was a hearing to determine the fate of the dog and what laws under the purview of Animal Control would be enforced against the dog owner. While still on the scene the day of the attack, the Police summoned Animal Control, who, with the assistance of the dog owner, took custody of the Pit Bull. The dog was deemed a dangerous dog by Baltimore County Animal Control and a hearing was held to prosecute those charges and any associated fines.

These types of hearings are held within the parameters of the law but at the same time grant greater latitude for input from the community. Those appointed to make these decisions are more like a panel of judges than actual judges. Just as with any neighborhood issue, there was a sign up sheet to testify. I walked up to sign in and there was this man meticulously organizing papers and perfectly orchestrating his responsibilities. I just knew he was the man with whom I spoke to on the phone from Animal Control. I introduced myself and we exchanged warm regards. Then after I signed in, I made a comment about being disappointed with some of the anthropomorphic influence on the Task Force my Councilman had appointed. He bristled and I thought it was odd, but never gave it another thought, not until months later, when I found out he was on the Task Force. Then the electricity turned on the computer in my head and it all came together.

All of the top dogs or their representatives were at this hearing, Animal Control, Representatives, County and State Attorney's offices, Police, County Executives Office and the media.

In addition, the hearing room was filled to standing room only with organization leaders from the community, recreational sports representatives and coaches, along with relatives, friends, neighbors, and anyone else who was appalled or affected by the incident.

Just as in a court of law, Baron, his wife Andi, Irene, and I were seated at a table to the right. The table to the left was for the dog owner and his council. Shortly after we were seated, the room got suddenly quiet and I knew the dog owner had entered the room. I turned to get my first look at a man who until now had not shown his face or made any personal or public comment to us. I went into some strange mode of being at the ready even though I don't know what I thought was going to happen with all those people there.

He entered with his lawyer and the first thing that struck me was that he was a clean cut-looking young man. The next thing that stood out in my mind was that while he made no offensive eye contact with anyone, he had what I would call a resistant posture. What I mean by this is that I expected this guy would be overwhelmed by the whole event and come to his senses. I expected his gait and his posture would show someone who seemed more submissive and remorseful, maybe even embarrassed. Instead he walked directly to his table with his eyes level and forward and his shoulders held back.

Certainly there was evidence that the dog owner was both willful and defiant in the whole event, but for some reason I expected that in such a large gathering his body language would indicate he understood the seriousness of his actions or lack thereof in the incident. In other words, I figured that

it would dawn on this guy to catch a fucking clue. I couldn't believe he wasn't showing any remorse about the situation. Finally, I concluded that he was a person who reacts to his troubles with a lawyer rather than the common sense to stay out of trouble in the first place. A background check would prove me correct. As if I needed more fuel, I finally had my own personal assessment of him to add to the already pathetic composite.

I was sitting in a hearing room while my son was still confined to the hospital after 17 days. Here was a guy who rather than humbly throw himself on the mercy of the community, take responsibility for his actions, and as a gesture of contrition, show compassion for the victims of the incident, he has decided to attempt to get his dog back and spend his potential fine money on a lawyer. Worse still, he is willing to have us relive this entire trauma in a hearing to do it. Here I must say if you are attempting to build a team to make a case for Child Endangerment charges, the dog owner by far was our "Most Valuable Player."

No coincidence that the only words I have ever spoken to him was at a later date at the criminal trial for which he now has a conviction for Child Endangerment. I said, "Thank you." To my neighbors who wondered why I said thank you to him on the formal record, now you know.

It was crystal clear that this guy saw us, the victims, as the problem and a huge intrusion on his selfish little world. I burned a look into the side of his head. I was actually trying to communicate with him telepathically. In my mind I told him, "You think you are going to back anybody down with fear. I almost lost a son and my wife's and my own mind to anxiety. Now you are going to put your spoiled, limited, and sadistic will on display and your chest out in defiance against our community, my family and me. You want to think we are the problem. Well then Nostra-dumb-ass, you don't know how prophetic you are." Then I snapped out of it and I had this thought that said, "Tony what does God want you to do?"

Then instantly the hearing officer brought the meeting to order. When it was my turn to testify, it became apparent that the publicity and interest in this hearing was not going to allow for the normal latitude you would expect in an Animal Control Board hearing. They allowed no one who was not directly associated with the incident that day to express a view or opinion. I came to this knowledge when, as the father of the victim and in mid- sentence, I was asked by the hearing officer if I was at the incident that day. I said, "No sir, I went directly to Johns Hopkins." He told me, "Sir, I want to speak to someone who was at the incident." I shot back that I still considered the incident ongoing. My son was still in the hospital as we spoke. Again he admonished me with the parameters of the hearing and I still saw it as unusual to that type of venue but I yielded to his authority.

I would only speak twice more.

During my wife Irene's testimony, I let the hearing officer know that I would not stand by and allow him to refer to this attack as a bite incident.

I ranted on that it might be assault by canine with intent to murder or manslaughter but not a bite. If he continued to call it a bite, then he was at the wrong hearing and we might as well all leave. I was again respectfully admonished and then my wife proceeded with her account. At one point she was interrupted by the counsel for the dog owner who informed her that he and my wife where childhood friends. He said he did not associate her by her married name until she started to speak. Irene and I both knew and recognized him in the beginning and thought he recognized us. In the middle of his acknowledging our knowing one another, I rudely said, "We know we know you. Now say anything you

have to say into the microphone.” He informed the hearing officer of our relationship and that he had also informed his client that he felt it would not interfere with his ability to defend the charges. He informed the hearing officer and those at the hearing that the dog owner did not see it as a problem as well. Small-Ti-More again.

What took place for the rest of the hearing was the testimony of the four most critical witnesses and emotionally traumatized victims at the scene. Michelle Mayer would testify in a grueling and emotional, sometimes tearful testimony that was barely discernable as she quivered and shook. She spoke of hearing a child pleading, “Oh my God, help me help me, I am going to die.” Armed with only a wireless phone, she ran outside to see a child attempting to get up and run, then starting to crawl up the alley with blood all over him and around him. At the same time as she called 911, she told the little boy, “Please lay down, you’re hurt.” She saw the dog owner carrying the Pit Bull back to his house. She sobbed uncontrollably when she said, “He just abandoned that child lying in the alley covered in blood and screaming. He never even came back to help us.” At that point she was left to deal with a situation outside of her control and began imploring 911 to hurry, while Dominic lay bleeding in the alley in back of her house.

Eric would testify that he was awakened from the peaceful slumber of an afternoon nap by the sounds of a child screaming for his life. He stated that at first he thought it was just dramatic child’s play. Then as he came out of the fog of sleep, he sensed that something dreadful was happening. He would testify that he saw Michelle on the phone with 911 and my wife Irene arriving at about the same time as he did. He testified that he assisted my wife in trying to stop the bleeding and that Irene was hysterical. He started to explain to her that she had to calm down so they could help her son. He explained to the hearing officers how severe the wounds were and that he knew it was bad. He went on to say how he and Irene and Pastor Greg Garriott were providing emotional support for each other and first aide to Dominic while waiting for EMS personnel.

Irene would testify that she was in the house preparing hamburgers for a cookout and hearing a frantic knock at the front door. It was Kyle and at first she thought he was looking for Dominic but he kept saying, “No! Dominic has been attacked in the alley by a dog.”

Irene went down the alley in bare feet, unarmed, unprepared, and totally expecting to find a child that needed consoling with an apologetic dog owner offering to pay for a doctor’s visit.

Instead when she looked down the alley, she saw Dominic flopping around on the ground and a women screaming into a phone.

She became frantic and started to run to Dominic and could see he was covered with blood and that there were various pools of blood in the alley. Irene would testify that it looked like a shark attack and that Eric gave her a towel and assisted her in keeping calm and stopping the blood from leaking out. Irene also testified that Dominic was asking if he was going to die and at that point, she really didn’t know the answer to his question. Finally the EMS personnel arrived and she stated that she accompanied Dominic in the ambulance to Johns Hopkins.

Here again I must interject that Irene was disarmed by the thought of what a dog bite would mean to a rational person. We were brought to this unfortunate incident by three contributing factors. First, a mentally vacant pet owner; second, a breed of dog that possesses very specific and extreme attack characteristics; and third, a breed of dog who’s enthusiasts submit that a personal belief their pet would never do such a thing, is relevant to the issue. This denial exacerbates the problem. Their

mantra is, "Blame the deed not the breed." I never supported blaming the breed. I just understand very clearly what the word breed defines. The deed is in the vacant owner and the enabler -- the pet owners --- who must push the extremes. Then when the inevitability of excess happens, they rationalize it away. This deed guarantees there will be more Scotty and Dominic's as well as Pit Bulls ending up like Clifford.

Andi would testify that her frantic and bleeding son, Scotty, summoned her to her front porch. Scotty had deep open bleeding puncture wounds to the face, neck and shoulder. Seconds later, she was joined by Kyle who said that Dominic was also being attacked. She testified that she asked the boys, "Where is Dominic now?" When they said they didn't know, she commanded them to wait on the porch. Then she lit out across the street and through our yard to the back alley to locate Dominic. As she passed by our front porch she spied the children's baseball bat and having only that for her protection, she commandeered it and headed to the scene.

As I listened, I found this to be one of the most heroic things I had heard, as I continued to have my body temperature change with each sentence in her and everyone else's testimony. Clearly, Andi was the first one who knew what she was getting into, by the condition of her son and the frantic reaction of the boys, compared with what one would assume from a dog bite. With only regard for Dominic and foregoing any thoughts of her own personnel safety, she headed toward trouble to rescue Dominic. With the fortunate advent of the boys playing baseball that day, she grabbed a bat from our porch.

Even I question my manhood against her motherly instincts. I wonder if I would have first retrieved one of my hunting rifles, before entering the fray. Then, I also wondered if I would have stopped, once I started.

Andi would go on to recount how she arrived to find Irene and Eric on hands and knees in the alley trying to stop Dominic from bleeding to death. Pastor Craig Garriott standing over them laying his hands on both of their shoulders and praying to God to give them strength. She came upon a scene of blood, terror, anxiety, and the overwhelming noise of emergency vehicles. Surrounded by chaos, she composed herself to offer even more encouragement to Dominic and those administering to him. She testified that at one point Dominic said he was tired and wanted to go to sleep. She told him, "Stay with us little buddy." She also stated that he asked if he was going to die and she thought that his chances were not good.

Finally, I had the complete picture of how everyone ended up where they did, what level of information they had, when they responded, with all of this culminating in a back alley filled with panicked faces, urgency, anxiety, deafening sirens and blaring horns, Police, EMS, a fire engine, first aid and prayer. While Andi stood guard with her bat, she wasn't playing games even though I knew this lady had some balls.

Once they whisked Dominic away, Andi would run back to her son and take Scotty, her son, to the hospital herself and attend to his needs, as well as make all attempts from St. Joseph's to inform me of what had happened.

That pretty much set the tone for the hearing. The lawyer made a brief statement that he would not burden the issue or those assembled further, other than to say that his client conceded to the fine and the charges of a dangerous dog with the recommendation that the dog be euthanized. He also said words to the effect of how badly he felt about the whole ordeal. The only other charge was the associated maximum under the law, a fine of \$500 for having a dangerous dog.

We stood up, the dog owner's lawyer came up to Irene and myself and offered his concern for Dominic and was sorry he didn't know it was us at the outset. At the same time, we knew he was doing his job but not the kind of job we would be caught dead doing. As I spoke to the lawyer, the dog owner looked directly at me with contempt in his eyes, no sorrow in his posture or demeanor. He had the

unabashed balls to attempt to stare me down. I stared back at him with a look that said, “Go ahead, step up. I have prayed you will.” About then, Stover had sent Bob Perkins up to stand next to me and remind me of what God wanted me to do. True to form, the dog owner would again show me no mercy by not obliging my distain. He looked slowly down and walked out.

I turned to see friends, family, and strangers in tears or just stunned by the emotions they had experienced listening to the whole ordeal. We must have lingered for a good 20 to 30 minutes just thanking people and discussing future action. The President from the Towson Manor Village neighborhood association, Ed Kilcullen, told us that he was standing next to who he believed was the dog owner’s mother. He said that when Michelle Mayer was testifying in such an emotional way, the woman turned to him and said, “What a drama queen.” He said she had various other negative running commentaries.

I was not surprised and it was just another of many validations about these vacant sociopaths we were dealing with.

Before we made it outside, I received a phone call from my cousin Debbie Nazelrod who told me the TV news was outside. I told her I was glad because I had something I wanted to say.

When we finally made it outside, we were interviewed by the local TV news and a Towson Times reporter. After the interviews were complete, Irene and I were anxious to get back to the hospital where her mother was keeping watch over Dominic. The news would get even better when we returned to the hospital to hear that Dominic was going to be released and come home.

Dominic Comes Home

It had been 17 days and finally they decided Dominic could go home. He would need a nurse to visit and assist with wound care and he had to have a therapist come to the house but he could go home. The mood was a strange blend of happy to be going home, sad to lose the camaraderie and scared to take on the responsibility of his care. It was exactly like when you bring a newborn baby home from the hospital. Even the constant care and the excitement of just being home are the same. There is even that same extra level of help around the house from friends, family, and visitors to see how everybody is doing and looking to help.

I made several trips from the hospital room to the car carrying all of his gifts, cards, games, and all of the medical supplies we would need. Then my mother in-law grabbed up all of her plastic containers from the "catering operation" she was running. With many hugs, kisses, and warm wishes, the staff sent us on our way to make room for someone in greater need. As if on cue, the overpowering jet sound of the State Police helicopter resonated through the room. I had heard it everyday and night I was there. It was someone else's turn. I made that suction noise again, composed myself, and down the hall we went.

We were into the middle of May and I just watched as Dominic took in all of the sounds and smells we all have to become re-acquainted with after a long confinement. I got him loaded in the Jeep and as we were leaving he said, "Hey Dad, can we go for a nature ride tomorrow?" I said, "Not until we stop at Dunkin Donuts and get a plain bagel, bacon egg and cheese." That was our routine before the attack -- get breakfast and take a nature ride through Loch Raven Reservoir. We left the Hospital parking lot and headed up I-83 to 695 and into Towson and on home.

When we arrived, it was the Truman Show all over again. The neighbors let us get into the house even though they saw us. In about a half an hour, all hell broke loose. Kids from all over the neighborhood came by to see what he looked like and to see any cool scars, stitches, and staples. I have to agree with my wife now that I am a Dad; boys are such idiots. At the same time, my heart sunk at the thought that it could have been one of the little girls who stopped by to visit having to live with these scars. Psychologically for a girl, it would be a whole different ordeal. Eventually parents looking for lost children began to show up and it was quite a nice homecoming.

A little while later, it was time for the news and we wanted to see how the report on the dangerous dog hearing we attended earlier that morning was covered. Sure enough, it was at the top of the news. We had an even greater shock when we found out that the dog owner and his mother had an altercation with the news reporter and photographer from WBALChannel 11. When they did the news tease at 4:45 p.m. with the coming up at 5:00 p.m. intro, they highlighted this shot of a woman having words with the camera and then another where the dog owner pushed at the camera lens and then ran and hid just like he did when he left Dominic in the alley.

At the top of the news, they chronicled the attack and the events leading up to the hearing. Then they told of the decision and from there they went to the reaction of the dog owner and his mother. It showed a surprisingly effeminate swat and push of the camera and then the dog owner running away to flee responsibility once more. Next, they showed his mother in an argumentative mode with reporters that apparently also led to an off-camera altercation with the news reporters in which the Police had to be summoned to take a report.

They would show our response last. I was happy that they reported my vow that both the community and I intended to be unrelenting until this was resolved. I was also pleased that they used

my comment that there is a huge gap between what people think protects them and what actually does. This was in response to the idea that something so horrific could happen and that everyone's natural assumption was there were laws in place, as with motor vehicles and guns, to hold people accountable.

The fact is they are not. No assault, manslaughter by canine, nothing...just that a dog is property under the law and it is an Animal Control issue.

The next day we headed for Dunkin Donuts and then took a long nature ride. Somehow we ended up in Harford County and this huge, and I mean huge, bird ran across the road. I stopped and then looked where it was running and standing about thirty feet from us was a male peacock in full fan display. Man, we were excited and that turned out to be a great way to remember our first nature ride since the attack.

The following day, the Police Officer who was with us at Johns Hopkins, stopped by to introduce himself to Dominic, who was out of it when he came on the attack scene and at the hospital. We caught up on things and I asked if the Police were still working the case. He told me I should be hearing from a detective any day. The next day I did.

In the days that followed, we would be greeted by nurses and physical therapists that came to the house for wound care and physical rehabilitation. Irene and I put Dominic in our bed because it had a queen-size mattress so the nurses and therapists had more working room. These were tough visits for about two weeks. The changing of the dressing every eight hours was a slow, painful, and when Dominic cried, an enraging process. There was always the pain of physical therapy topped off with the sudden and inexplicable nerve regeneration that was ever present. It would leave him writhing, screaming and crying in pain. All this over someone's right to have such a pet and the atypical lack and regard for the responsibility that goes along with that right.

Two detectives arrived at the house preceded by our state Senator, Jim Brochin, five minutes earlier. I had never met Jim before and I am not very political, so other than his name, I didn't know him. He was a nice man and had arrived to give Dominic a couple of honors for citizenship. The word had gotten around about three boys going to rescue a friend from a Pit Bull attack and the trouble that two of them wound up in. Jim wanted to personally deliver a Maryland State flag, which is by far the best looking of the 50 states. In addition, he gave Dominic a Maryland General Assembly pin. He also gave Dom an official citation in recognition of his display of remarkable courage in the face of adversity.

I was never as engaging or appreciative as I should have been to Jim for his kind gesture, but I didn't like the reminder of what could have happened nor what did happen. The visit immediately jolted me back to when I was a kid and my Dad and two fellow firefighters were honored for saving three people in an apartment fire. My Dad didn't care to attend the ceremony and only went reluctantly. I never understood it then, but when I pressed him about it he said, "Look Tony, I'm just glad it all turned out the way it did. I didn't want to be there, I had to be there and I would like to forget about it." Again, at this Moment I understood him better.

Later that night, Dominic had all of the neighborhood kids gathered around his bed showing them what he received from the Senator. Just as was pointed out to me so many times by others, I realized it didn't matter how I felt, it was how Dominic felt and he thought it was great to be noticed. I am extremely grateful to Jim Brochin for personally taking the time. It turned out to be a good thing.

Now it was back to the detectives waiting in the living room. The young man that would be handling the case was brand new to the detective division and he was one very thorough and up-front guy. As I had done with the Senator, I invited the detectives to talk to Dominic with me in the next room so they could just see him for the little boy he was. They introduced themselves as Police detectives and had a nice friendly conversation to put Dominic at ease. He was already at ease anyway because he likes the police and was used to all of the attention he had been getting in the last month. After they finished talking to Dominic, we went down stairs to the living room and they explained what would be required of me. They went on to inform me that they would be talking to the parents of all the boys involved. I think the fact that they were at my house meant they already knew everything happened just the way the boys said it did. I think they knew every story worked out except for the dog owner's. I was confident that that would all be reaffirmed for two reasons. One, we would have an official record and two, except for Dominic, the other boys didn't like to talk about the incident even to each other because they were very traumatized. Naturally, when they were interviewed separately, everything checked out. From there, it was a matter of seeing what law was violated besides the laws of common decency. Once that was determined, they had more than enough reason to charge the dog's owner with a crime.

It wasn't long before Dominic could be taken to a physical therapist's office and Irene and I could do his wound care ourselves. Dominic would also be released to return to school. I thought it was a mistake at first because he was not very mobile. I called the doctor and he said the school had the accommodations and a nurse. It was the fastest way for him to heal and recover. With that I said, "You have gotten everything else correct, so school it is."

Just as with his neighborhood home coming, Dominic was a distraction for about the first 10 minutes of his return to school. After that, he was just another kid in the class. He only had to come home early one time when he kept having nerve spasms in class. Not only was it a scary and painful distraction for the children, but the school nurse was a little concerned as well. For the most part during the school day, his medication kept it under control fairly well. Eventually the school year would end and Dominic did remarkably well on his make up tests. He went on to graduate with his class from the fifth grade. I don't know what was more emotional, the melancholy of watching time go by marked by the graduation of our youngest, or the whole ball of emotion of finally having a chance to come out and participate in a normal event. I just know that what ever it was, it was an emotional roller coaster to watch and Irene and I would revisit that sudden gasp before convulsive crying feeling again that day as well. Good thoughts and blessings always prevailed and a deep appreciation for what we did have kept us on track.

Physical Therapy

After the therapy nurse, who came to the house, recommended Dominic for outpatient therapy at Sports Physical Therapy of Towson, I called and spoke with the owner Jennifer Bolster to make an appointment. On the day of his first session, Jennifer assessed him personally. My first impression of her was of a physically fit, upbeat, very pretty lady. After she worked with Dominic and assessed him, she seemed a little emotional. She looked at me and said, "I have a child his age myself and I don't want my emotions to interfere with my ability to push Dominic through therapy." She told me she was going to have him work with one of the younger therapists who she felt may not be impeded by emotion. To break the tension I laughingly said, "Yes, that is a good idea. I will feel better that he is in the care of one of your less feeling or parentally-experienced technicians." I was really thinking to myself, "Wow, this lady is going to be perfect for his recovery." Further, I was grateful that we continued to be cared for each step of the way by very competent people. This lady really struck me with her competence. That evening when Irene came home from work, she was quizzing Dominic on his day and how therapy went. Then she asked him, "So, did you have a lot of pretty girls making all over you today?" He just rolled his eyes.

Irene turned to me and said, "So how was it? How did he do?" I said, "He was great, they gave him a warm reception and I thought he was in the best possible care."

From May to December 2007, Dominic attended PT three days a week, two hours each session. He also had several follow-up visits with doctors at Johns Hopkins. Ultimately, he was fitted for a day and a night brace to stretch and increase the range-of-motion in his foot. His sessions were pleasant and painful, and never ended or began without a good experience. Dominic looked forward to his sessions and we fell in love with the staff. He was also quite a popular guy with the other patients. He was starting to have a little bit of a celebrity status. Between the two, anxiety or popularity, I favored popularity as his relief valve. I would remind him when he took too much liberty that I didn't enjoy one single aspect of this ordeal and this was not a cool thing to have happen.

It was at the end of June when the Police announced they had arrested and charged the dog owner with Child Endangerment.

I believe that was the first time we all; our community, the rest of the staff, and our friends, exhaled a sigh of relief. We finally saw this drama coming to a head where the dog owner had to bear the weight and responsibility of his actions and inactions.

The news contacted me and asked if they could do a story on Dominic's current condition and recovery. They also asked me for a statement about how we felt about the charges brought by Baltimore County. It was the first report after they recounted all of the incidents leading to this day that ended on an extremely high note.

I was very involved in Dominic's recovery and sometimes a little too involved. Jennifer made no bones about telling me to drop him off and pick him up rather than stay for his session. I knew she was right and I respected and trusted her directive.

Finally, as a Christmas present, Dominic was released from therapy to do his own regiment of exercises at home. Just as it was when we left Hopkins, leaving the comfort of your caregivers is very

scary and emotional. I really never have developed a good way to say goodbye. The good thing was that Dominic went to school with Jennifer's son and I knew we would see and hear from her again, and we still do from time to time.

Thank Heaven for Medic 11

We would finally get a chance to meet the men and women that saved Dominic's life. This took place September of 2007, 5 months after the incident. Dominic was invited as the guest of honor and to meet his heroes. On that Saturday in April 2007, Captain Steve Adelsberger, PM/FF Brian Neville and EMT/ Rachelle Alexander responded to the call for help. It was through conversations with Captain Steve that I got the real sense of the kind of call it was for these heroic people. While the idea of a child being attacked and mauled incites all kinds of fear and anger, it is the frame of mind it puts one in that can make something seem less or more deadly than it is. From the perspective of those trying to save this little boy, it was more about the nature of the injury, than the way he came by it.

The survival rate for a femoral artery tear of any size, much less as big as Dominic's injury, is not likely.

Being as close as we were to St Josephs and GBMC Hospitals didn't really offer any advantage. This injury required a trauma team and Captain Steve had to make that call. As it was, it took the best-equipped doctors and the hospital 5 hours and 19 minutes to save his life. Once Captain Steve made the call, Paramedic Brian Neville had to keep Dom alive and EMT Rachelle had to drive as fast as possible if Dominic had any chance for survival. The only words Rachelle ever spoke to Irene were when Irene asked her why weren't they going to Saint Joe's or GBMC. Irene said Rachelle kept her eye on the road and said, "Ma'am, this is very serious." Irene said that she never once felt like saying to her, "Can't you go a little faster?" That is quite a tribute to Rachelle because a panicked parent cannot get help fast enough. Rachelle got them from Towson to Hopkins in eight-in-a-half minutes. They were all pulling for Dominic, but not one of them said they would have been surprised if he didn't make it. They said it was that close. They told me it was all about the Golden Hour. They described this as the critical hour that makes the difference between life and death with extreme injury. Suddenly this thought popped into my head that if it weren't for such prompt care, many more people would perish as a result of domestic pet attacks. It is the imagery of an animal attack that makes wild animals so scary, but now I understood wild or domestic was just a mindset. This meant that more people would survive wild animal attacks but for being in the wilderness too far from help.

After we got that conversation out of the way, we settled in to hanging out with the crew at Station 11. I would find out that Rachelle's son went to school with Dominic. Paramedic Brian had three children all under school age. Captain Steve had a couple of children and the Pump operator had a daughter who went to school with my oldest boy. We also received a tour of the firehouse and the apparatus. Dominic got to wear full- turn out gear, then we went outside and the firefighters charged the line and let him see what it was like to man the pipe. He also learned how to put up the gear and the hose. After that, we sat in the kitchen/living room and had cake and ice cream and just sat around getting to know each other. A few emergency runs interrupted us, but when they returned, we just picked up where we left off. I couldn't imagine why they weren't the guests of honor instead of Dominic and I mentioned it to Captain Steve Adelsberger. Captain Steve told me that in their line of work, it is devastating when you do all you can and you still lose somebody, especially a child. He said it could lower morale and create depression. I guess with all this being brought on by a dog attack, it reminded me of something I had seen on TV. I saw a program that said when they train search dogs, they have to have a certain number of live finds in practice. When the search dog finds a missing person, they

really pet the dog up and give him the “good boy” treatment. They said if a dog gets too many dead finds, they will become depressed and stop searching effectively, if at all. Captain Steve told me when they bring somebody back from the brink and they can see the fruits of their labor, it creates the right frame of mind and camaraderie to keep up the good fight. Dominic making it was a living tribute to why they chose this profession and that is why he was the guest of honor. Finally, after about 3 cherished hours together, we said goodnight. It felt just like leaving a family gathering. I asked them if they minded if I gave them all a hug. They said no problem. I hugged them all really hard and they hugged back. I was glad I could show my appreciation by that gesture. I was glad because just one year later, I would hear a name on the news about a paramedic who had passed away while on duty. It was Paramedic/ Firefighter Brian Neville, a husband and father of three non-school age children.

This time I couldn't hold back the emotions and I didn't even try.

Dog (and Pony) Show

We have gotten our lives back. It is October 2007, six months since the attack. We were in the mode of administering to all of the affairs of any life-changing event. Councilman Gardina's only request of me was to help promote his legislation on a specific breed bill and would I appear at the end of a scheduled Council session. It is customary at a Council session to give members of the public two minutes to express concerns on future issues they might address in session before they adjourn. The Council body was quite aware of the dog attack, but now I was a face to a name.

To any parent reading this, please encourage your children to learn and do public speaking. I don't care how well they do in school if they cannot communicate confidently they have relegated their education useless. Further, if they can communicate well but not in the public forum, they will find the next limit of their education's value. Never underestimate the practical application skills and tools of a child's education along with scholastic achievements.

I was somewhat nervous, but a little more determined than anything. Moreover, I was certain I had more empathy from the Council than contempt for anything I might have to say. I had in my possession a typed rant. I cannot spell or punctuate very well, so a rant is essentially what it was. I still stand by its content to this day. I did not read from it, however, as I just spoke from my heart. I simply made a statement to the effect that I would appreciate if the Council would give Councilman Gardina's proposal consideration on a breed-specific law. I asked that they take into account that we live in Maryland, the home of the Preakness, where we are inundated with the importance and influence of breeding in racehorses. It was reasonable to assume that breed had equal influence on all animals, dogs included. With that short request, I thanked the Council and asked if they would allow me to hand each one of them a copy of my rant, which they politely accepted. In addition, I called all of their offices the day before the specific breed hearing and left a message on their respective answering machines.

At the breed-specific hearing workshop, those assembled against the proposed legislation were more compelling with organizational skills, their sheer numbers, and their agenda than anything in context of a solution that potential legislation proposed. Sadly, and in a demeaning way, rather than this being a Public Health issue, it was allowed to and turned out to be, a referendum on dog owner's rights.

There were some, but not too many, that did speak to the real issue. Most all were kind people. They had a few rude people, but that can be said of any group. No one was violent or aggressive. Very few people truly spoke to the relevant issues and the ones who were the rudest were the proclaimed experts. They cited real facts that they had to know did not apply to the issue. Most seemed put upon to have to even be engaged in such an idea that any breed should be singled out. The overwhelming majority of speakers gave passionate testimonial dissertations of their dog's importance in their lives. For some, their pets were described as being their children. It was so poorly moderated that I was able to find comic relief by teasing my wife. I told her that most of these people looked and acted like they

had seen one too many Billy Jack reruns. I teased her that when it was her turn to speak, if she wanted empathy, she had better testify that she thinks of her children like they were her very own pets.

The wrong tone set by the Health Department led the entire matter down the path of dysfunctional infinity from the beginning.

As a result, with no representation from the emergency responders, the medical community, the insurance, and legal industry to balance the testimony, the focus pandered to a well-organized obstructionist posture.

The tone and concern for who this law would most benefit was not discussed, but rather that a breed-specific law could create unwarranted stereotyping of specific breeds, thereby punishing responsible pet owners. This egregious failure of comprehensive involvement resulted in nothing more than one-sided suppositional statements more contrary in nature than fact to what the specific breed legislation attempted to address. Essentially, they could have said anything they wanted and many did. It was the Council's total lack of familiarity with the subject that forced them to wilt. Experts made factual, but non-applicable, out of context dissertations with cage rage, as their main concern and it simply did not apply to what the legislation proposed. The most informative was a Pit Bull show judge. He vehemently opposed a breed ban but had no trouble with the containment criteria. He rebuffed the idea that it was humiliating to the dog or its owners as most in attendance sincerely believed. One impassioned advocate, complete with tears, was concerned that this was animal racism. I swear I was waiting for a director to yell, "Cut!"

As it was, it was so ridiculous that I almost blurted out, "I need more cow bell!"

I know my mother and my neighbor Bill Gunther who accompanied us for support were biting their lower lips and fighting fits of laughter. Some of these people had no idea or belief that it was relevant the carnage the boys, as well as many people and pets, have had exacted upon them. It was so disconnected from intelligent and structured input that rather than being angry, it provided a much-needed awakening for me into the mentality behind the whole extreme-breed phenomena. While the speaker and many supporters really believed in the concept of animal racism, it is merely a stonewall tactic. It is designed as a way to fight legislation by putting forth that it is the job of the general public to identify the dog owner's pet properly by breed. They contended that if identity couldn't be established by the general public or was concluded in the way a dog looks, it was animal racism. Further, reporting alleged misidentified breeds unduly contributed to the reputation of already unfairly treated breeds. The fact is, if a dog owner doesn't know or cannot otherwise prove what breed or mix they are in possession of, that is their burden and both they and the dog are a potential danger. I contended that it is the sole responsibility of the dog owner to identify their dog to the contrary of the victim's assertion when reported. It did not diminish the negative traits of the breed in question but rather highlighted that potentially more dangerous breeds may exist.

Every restriction that Councilman Gardina proposed was gleaned from the expert's handbook on how veterinary, breeder, and rescue organization's house maintain and handle animals in their care.

The Councilman was obstructed and the entire council completely blind-sided by the well-organized and completely unexpected resistance. The truth came out as people talked about how important it is

to find responsible, educated owners for these dogs. They also spoke about education in general just as the Health Department Task Force recommended. How could I argue with that? I didn't. Again, there is a vast canyon between public relations propaganda, ideology, and training, in contrast to pure public safety information and education. I was all for complete education, but not doctrine passed off for the other.

What bone of contention had defenders been trying to bury? Of all you will read in this book, what follows is the impetus behind their ambiguity. All one needs to do is look at the motivation of those at any gathering and listen to their concerns more than the quagmire of rationalizations they put forth. From that, you can intelligently find the truth. I am one who has always believed that the highest form of intelligence is honesty. You can outwit another individual, but it is impossible to out honest someone.

Here is the dilemma of the advocacy, defender, and rescue position. At that time and more so now with our poor economy, the strain to find homes and place rescue dogs is overwhelming. Further, if these dogs could only be placed in homes and environments that were mandated to meet the common sense safety recommendations of specific breed restrictions, rescue groups would be drowned in a sea of dogs.

Most of the placement client base of renters and college-age people would not be able to meet even these simple common sense requirements. Further, most don't have renter's insurance, which is the least I asked for at the hearing. On top of that, no apartment complex or landlord would put out that kind of money to modify properties to accommodate only transient owners of this breed.

Most residential covenants and codes don't allow for fence heights over six feet to meet the requirements to properly contain these athletic breeds.

While their disciples and ambassadors may be sincere, these facts are the hard reality. This is the motivation of leaders in the animal-rescue industry fighting the very same methods used as their containment and housing criteria while waiting to place an animal. Further, they know these to be sensible handling techniques, housing methods, and beneficial safeguards in densely populated communities. The Councilman had extracted his outline from their practices and handling guidelines. The experts, with the exception of the show judge, were disingenuous. Some of the other more responsible owners in attendance already used these safeguards and were not restricted by codes, which then allowed them to suitably house their pet. They had concern about a breed ban in general. One couple I spoke to would have been responsible owning a tank. In fact, the husband said they housed their dog pretty much the way the bill suggested. He said it was more from worry about the people that steal these breeds than concern for his pet attacking anyone. They were wonderful warm and caring people and expressed much concern for Dominic. The bulk, however, were the more anthropomorphic owners, not malicious, just detached.

In reality, bites are a statistical constant of pet ownership. The only variable is who will be involved and to what degree. The input group lacked the balance that is the key to common-sense solutions, sadly perpetuating this repeating decimal of fate.

The next obvious concern for defenders was that establishing these guidelines, as law would be a public relations nightmare for recruiting new interest in providing a rescue dog placement. People teetering on whether or not to consider rescuing one of these breeds would likely use complete information to make less knee-jerk ownership decisions. This placement burden is why we see so much “Anne Frank syndrome,” with people in cramped quarters rescuing two and three dogs. They actually seem to see their pet’s plight equal to her epic struggle. How sad. Essentially, rescue extremists have decided that, given the choice between not placing or placing a dog, covenants, codes, you, your family, and community safety is an acceptable risk. It isn’t that these dogs cannot be housed safely in many settings, but they are not statistically well suited to be in the densities of areas that have greater restrictions for the purpose of human quality-of-life issues. This density of people statistically increases the likelihood for any dog to wind up in a bite scenario.

No one seemed informed enough to see the contradiction in disputing breed as the primary influencing factor for suitability. I can name numerous breeds of dogs that were conceived of and bred into existence specifically as a way to meet high-density living-space requirements. Not understanding or acknowledging the what for, the why for, or how specific dog breeds came to be and what role is influenced behaviorally or physically by breeding to a standard is absurd. I get the impression that most advocates, or at least certain breed fanciers, don’t realize that different breeds aren’t a separate species but are a line of dog created by man to serve a purpose. Breeding in and of itself is what is used to determine outcome. It describes both the intent of the breeder and a dog’s undeniable characteristics.

Far more bizarre is that if certain breeds today did not already exist, no one, not even the experts, would recommend the creation or breeding of such standards into existence. They would site all of the same concerns and problems that currently do exist. In my area, these rescue ambassadors and disciples tend to be single, young, childless couples, widowers, widows or empty nesters. The vast majority in my immediate neighborhood also do not own their residence. As my children have taught me, the drug education term gateway drugs, I have come to refer to rental homes as gateway houses. I refer to the landlords who focus only on the need to find tenants while neglecting concern for their tenant’s impact on a community as parasitic enablers. Unfortunately, the residents who maintain and make it an attractive place to live play the roll of host on which these parasites feed. Not coincidentally, the owner of the dog that attacked Scotty and then Dominic resided in one of these gateway rental properties.

This is what should have taken place once the two children were attacked. The Councilman should have appointed a Task Force as he did. The Health Department should have immediately set the tone and public perception that the welfare of the human public and safety will prevail over any suggestions offered as a solution. Next, they would have recognized that they have an obligation, as with any incident this serious, to pull together a group of advisors from all affected agencies (not just those who specialize in animal behavior) including:

Pediatric, geriatric, cosmetic surgeons, physical therapists, and emergency room physicians, lawyers who prosecute and defend such cases, medical insurers, property causality insurers, law enforcement, and E.M.S. first responders who deal with the extreme incidents, along with input from victims and dog owners alike.

This collaboration would have created a scenario in which balanced input would provide a real public education. This council would have established a line of both suitability and responsibility. Further, it would have put the safety burden where it belonged, with the dog-owning public. I am certain that such a gathering would conclude that dog ownership in general and extreme breeds specifically associates humans to risks that pet owners must be able to offset by the assumption of full accountability and liability for their pet's actions. They would have suggested that not having property or health insurance and proper containment requirements is an at risk behavior. I am certain that temperament, training, and doggy citizenship would be relegated as the bare minimum of both expectation and responsibility that a dog owner should provide. They would have concluded that the inability of a dog owner to provide both financial and containment measures would exempt these people from owning such pets. They would have concluded that dogs present a specific hazard associated to them as living beings by having a capacity to act alone. Part of the joy of ownership is their individuality so they are autonomous property. They would have suggested that the doggy information pamphlets designate equal space to the liability realities of owning a dog as they do to the care and training. Lastly, they likely would have statistically separated out the 12 most dangerous and extreme dogs, the dangerous dozen and suggested specific mandatory requirements for ownership.

It is reasonable to expect and public policy demands that the Health Department would have taken on the role of leadership and oversight that is their actual function.

In that role, they would have mandated to Animal Control not relied on them to create policy. If this method of resolving this issue seems vaguely familiar, it is because except for the autonomous property aspect, these are the same guidelines we use to establish suitability, classification, liability, and responsibility when owning a vehicle, a boat, or pursuing hunting and fishing activities. Ultimately called upon to deal with such incidents, our public safety officials have an obligation and a duty to provide a robust response and to implement measures that such a comprehensive objective report would have provided. We all can agree, right, wrong or indifferent, that did not happen in this incident. I did pick up one major bit of information that was very enlightening. I learned that any dog that is chained or tethered is more dangerous. Naturally, this stood out in my mind because they kept screaming to enforce the leash laws and not create new laws. So I wondered, where do these people in apartments and homes with unfenced yards allow their dogs to run free when outside? What made this stand out in my mind was I could ride the alleys of Loch Raven Village and surrounding Towson and find Pit Bulls in fenced yards that are tethered to chains. So by chaining the dog as a restraint against escape from a fenced yard that meets code but is inferior to the task enclosure, they have revealed not only the breeds lacking in suitability, but added to its potential hazard level in that community. Other than that revelation, the whole gathering was just another bush league Dog Show.

Criminal Trial

There is a lot of preparation preceding any trial. The lead prosecutor was going to be a young woman by the name of Christina Cuomo. Christina was very concerned for the emotional impact on Dominic, our family, and any of the other children that may have to testify. She thought that it would be best to first meet at our house in a setting that Dominic would be more comfortable. Slowly, as she became a part of his life just like doctors and therapist, he would warm up to the attorneys with the same ease. It was a great approach. Dominic warmed right up to Christina, which was easy for a young boy when the lady helping him out is also very pretty.

For Dominic and the other children, the whole episode had been pretty high profile and, more importantly, it was a positive and progressive experience at effectively dealing with the issues, from the doctors, physical therapist, Police, firefighters, EMS, political and legal officials and media people. This allowed the best possible psychological outcome for the community, Dominic as well as our family. I felt that there was a bit of hesitancy on the part of some of the other parents that thought a trial might be too much for the children. I was working the angle I saw at Hopkins -- move forward, don't suggest fear -- observe Dominic's reaction and get results by moving forward and instill confidence by getting results. I believe that all of the children benefited by this approach and would have had much greater psychological damage by fear-based or avoidance behavior. Basically, the message to the kids was, you did nothing wrong. Your fear is the only tool the dog owner has to keep from facing justice. You have nothing to fear and let us show you how to be confident and supported while going through the process. Some would have preferred it to all go away and they may have felt put upon at first by the process. I was vigilant about calling evasive or submissive behavior to task while at the same time keeping my own perspective of the mission. In the end, it made for a good balance. Irene and I were confident in the value of the process and so we were equally engaged in the idea. I presented this to Dominic as an adventure and an opportunity to go into the belly of the beast just as his Spartan heroes.

In one of our meetings while the prosecutors and I seemingly counter interrogated each other, always mindful we were on the same team but still needing to ferrate out the limits of what would and could be done. The conversation would always prevail to any questions Dominic would ask. Here we are one day sitting in this comfortable and professional conference room hashing it all out when Dominic jumps in and inquires, "What are all those books for?"

He was referring to a ceiling to floor tall built in book cabinet that took up most if not the entire wall. Obviously they were books on case law and law in general. I can assume now that they are probably all on computer disk somewhere but are retained for decorative purposes. I blurt out, "Well, they are for all the people that think there is more to it then the Golden rule and the Ten Commandments." The lead prosecutor gave a more in context answer and described them as reference material as you would use in formulating a book report to Dominic.

I liked the analogy for the purpose and was gratified more that Dominic could gather from it even in a child's view that they were helpful guides to the golden rule. After the meeting was over and we were walking to the parking lot, I could always see Dominic and certainly me, as a nice visit just as normal as any stop and chat you may have with a drop in on a friend. They did a real good job at that and I have always remained grateful.

On the drive home I reminded Dominic of the conversation and I said, "Dom, this may not mean anything to you right now, but one day when you are older or I am dead and gone, I just want you to

know that what we are doing isn't in any book." I said, "Dom, there are a lot of people out there that don't know the difference between the rule of law and the rules they make called the law. I know you don't know what that means, but just remember in those books, the guy whose dog attacked you, his lawyer is trying to figure a way around or out of this responsibility. The people we left are trying to find him a way into the responsibility. In kids terms, Dom, it seems like a lot of headache just because people cannot accept responsibility for their actions."

Dominic said, "You mean like when you yell at me?" I said, "No Dom, that is what the law does. It's like when I punish you for something you did wrong and spank your ass. You know how you always get the message when left to thinking about your behavior and having to stand up at the same time." He laughed. Then I said, "Did you ever see Mom Mom, Pop Pop, PaPouli or Yia Yia, Mommy or me get out a book to deal with your wild streak?"

He laughed and said, "Well, not you Dad, you can't even read." I said, "Yeah, but I could teach you more with whacking your little ass with that book then you would ever learn reading it." Man did we both have a good laugh.

Later that night as I spent another sleepless night recounting the days events in the radio talk show going on in my head, I took a caller, it was me, Tony in Towson, and I was on the air in my mind. In my head, the vast Cosmos that spaces my ears. My topic was augmentation to the point of mutation as I laughed to myself, I could hear a Saturday night live version of Jesse Jackson preaching. He said that tonight's conversation is about the need for participation in emancipation from all of this legal proclamation. For you cannot gather the rules from the law but you must respond to a higher call that started this all the rule of law. There has been such an augmentation by passive participation that there is no longer in this nation anyone who has a dissertation that reflects anything of the original nation but rather it is a mutation. I report to you that this takes place in full view and is bent to individual purview to the point of skew. Any further debate or personnel commiserate causes opposing forces to agitate and the heat that it generates fully conflagrates all it's compatriots. There was more but mercifully the radio in my head put me off to sleep.

In February of 2008, the dog owner pleaded guilty and was convicted of Child Endangerment. In a plea agreement, he received all five years in a suspended sentence and two years supervised probation. The benefit to us in accepting the plea deal was it set a precedent for future victims to criminally pursue other reckless pet owners. It also taught the boys a valuable lesson in trusting responsible adults to not wilt to punks and their threats. Dominic showed great poise and comfort when he was asked if he wished to speak to the judge in front of everyone assembled. He would again show this same confidence and public poise when he shared stories about my Dad, his grandfather, in front of all the mourners gathered for his wake.

You need light moments after such an event as a trial. This day had just such a Moment. In preparing his plea deal the dog owners defense attorney requested to have the families and children pointed out to him. He would scan the pews seeing John Hall, Commander of the Dundalk Sail and Power Squadron, Coach Phil McClusky L.T.R.C. Football and an assortment of parents and children none of whom looked alike even in the same family. Dominic, pale and blonde, his brother Jimmy, dark with dark brown hair. Scotty, both black and white, Kyle, of Korean decent, one kid Peter, is Greek and Jewish. The defense lawyer turned to the prosecutor and inquired, " Where did you get these people, Central casting?" That comment has been the highlight of many gatherings when we revisit this story or just looking out our front door.

Civil Doody (Duty)

Civil action was just one more in a series of avenues we were committed to pursuing. The dangerous dog hearing was to address the immediate threat of the offending pet. Sad as it was, it had to be done.

Another avenue was the breed-specific law hearing. No legislation was imposed but we increased our knowledge as to how to address dangerous breeds in future debate. We also believe that in Baltimore County we had a positive influence on the way dog owners supervise their pets.

The Criminal trial was important to us because of the resulting conviction kept this man from seeking anonymity simply by moving. We saw this as our duty to those communities where he might flee.

Two important venues remained in this incident. They were bringing a civil action against the dog owner and his landlord, and writing this story. The chronicle idea surfaced very early on when Tracey Stuenes, the Executive Officer for the Dundalk Sail and Power Squadron, called to pray with us. Before she hung up, Tracey encouraged me to write and record everything I was thinking. Tracey said it would be helpful to our family in the future if we needed to remember important information. As time passed, I realized though our incident involved landlords and dog owners, it had disturbing characteristics similar to many dangerous incidents.

Each time someone hears Dominic's story, they are visibly shaken. People very familiar with the case who testified two and a half years later still found themselves blindsided by raw emotions.

I hoped I could use that raw emotion in a chronicle to shed light on the whole issue of owning dangerous pets. I believed our situation had value both figuratively for dangerous behavior and literally specific to landlords and pets. I began to see that this ordeal might have value philanthropically. I realized this story could help victims like Dominic, by paying for medical and legal expenses. Our medical insurance policy has limits and only time will tell whether Dominic will need a future operation due to complications and scarring.

As long as I can remember, there has been negative public opinion of rental properties in general and specifically here in Towson. The dichotomy of a resident mortgage holder's communal interest and an absentee mortgage holder's financial interest breeds conflict. I remain confounded that nothing of significance has been instituted to curtail such negative impact. Common sense demands that in the most successful communities, the residents are equally yoked. A landlord's primary interest is the property as a revenue stream. This by any definition makes them a business. They are literally operating a business in a residential community. The homeowner has their primary interest in the sanctuary that the community itself provides. These people are the fabric of the neighborhood. They are the motivation behind renovation and on-going upkeep. These completely different objectives in a community have historically proven to be problematic. There are always examples of competent landlords and homes that have been rented effectively without being a nuisance. They tend to be landlord-occupied or the landlord resides in the community proper. This further serves to highlight the positive influence of being a resident mortgage holder. The resident homeowner's stabilizing influence

on quality of life is unfortunately and fatefully what attracts parasites to any host community. Often times these profiteers leave entire streets held hostage by the nuisance and criminal activities in a single residence. Residential landlords in America's third and fourth generation assimilated society are a big destabilizing factor in the sanctuary of any community.

I have observed two major contributors driving this imbalance. The laws of times past are mostly unchanged to effectively meet the needs of today's communities and served the sole interest of the landowner or landlord. The other factor is that back in the day, the fabric of most communities was controlled by ethnic homogeneity. The pulse, vibration and influence on the community within its boundaries, was much more consistent resident to resident. Each enclave had greater Matriarchal and Patriarchal influences. As people assimilated they shed some of the restrictive aspects of their backgrounds they crossed racial and ethnic lines. They maintained ethnic identity but saw that they had different traditions, superficial to any real cultural differences. By the second generation, they had fully assimilated into neighborhoods and associations that were ruled by supposed equality. By the third generation, ethnic cultural influences and their enclaves all but disappeared. This undermined the communication network critical to a tight knit community's influence on their own quality of life. One could observe that America itself does not have its own culture but is an extension of the culture from which the first generations came. Having no identifiable culture of its own, it creates the question, what abyss has the watered down generation assimilated to? It can be viewed as a society, trapped in a sometimes superficial and often rogue acculturation of disconnect. They essentially lack community glue.

Using only my personal observations, most neighborhoods reflect an eclectic gathering whose biggest common thread is requiring a place to sleep. Monday through Friday, both adults spend the day at work. Those who are parents, send their children to day care. This has further undermined our ability to mind the store. It is fair to say that lacking these binding threads, the community is open to the looting of its own fabric. Whole communities and neighborhoods have become part-time, evening, and weekend guardianships. Rental properties are too often a gateway to blight on the last remnant of community fabric that neighbors share in common -- the resident mortgage holder. The more transient activities of these properties exploit the vulnerability of a community that is already crippled by part-time oversight.

It sickens me that no laws, sanctions, or substantial enforcement efforts have been born out of the stockpiles of complaint statistics that reveal these gateways. I have many more observations on the subject, but let me close saying, I believe this happens far too often to be coincidence. The design perpetually steals cheapened land and resells it high. It is the hamster wheel that fuels the machine parasitically creating blight. Those who manipulate this shell game are positioned in owning and developing the communities where blight victims, just as bait fish, are schooled for the feeding. Then they scavenge on the carnage and financial melee of their own doing. At the highest levels, these parasites portray themselves as saviors using taxpayer monies to subsidize and redevelop the very communities they plunder. It is veiled under the illusion of growth, yet it is nothing more than the reconstitution of property fleeced from a previous generation. Revitalization is a buzzword for reconstitution. It is the epitome of creating a market and then marketing to it. I can easily draw a parallel to my family and the multitude of families I grew up with, fleeing the decline of Baltimore City to the surrounding counties. It is no different in principle than the blight of war that drove prior generations to America. With our social fabric looted, we are exposed more than ever to the whims of unrestrained profiteers. It went from a formally subversive practice, to a blatant, crazed fad, during the amateur house-flipping era. Many will have "Reservations" about my conclusions, while ironically, those who understand it best, live on them.

Whatever one concludes regarding the property in question, its tenants and their landlord engaged in the behaviors so typical of these problems. Civil actions against the dog owner lead them to file for bankruptcy. Now we turned our attention to the landlord.

For us to agree to pursue the landlord in this incident, we had to see that they were involved in its construct. We could not help but notice conspicuous absence of emotional support from the dog owners or landlord. Neighbors motivated by the horror of this incident began to contact us. They were unanimously disgruntled for years because of the past activities at this address as well as problems with the current tenants, the dog owners. Not one person that spoke to us had kind regards for the landlord or their tenants. Many had complained to the County but to no avail.

The County, not keeping careful records, implied they had no reports of complaints to substantiate our claims. Without going too far a field, the truth is, most counties in Maryland try to stay out of the civil arena. This is why there are so many agencies that are ineffective as a resource for change on matters of livability codes. Their inefficiency tends to wear on the thinking being. They are often staffed by well-meaning people whose agencies are not well networked. Sadly, their knowledge base and training is geared primarily toward what they cannot do for you, rather than what they can. These employees want to do more and as a whole tend to share these same frustrations with the system.

Moving forward, we established a court date for a civil hearing. I had planned to let Dominic appear only for opening statements. Dominic's presence would help the jury put a face to his name. After that, I saw no need for Dominic to miss anymore school. Certainly, his incident had its own built-in drama. We did not and would not support campaigning for drama or sensationalism. In fact, we had a great deal of pride at showing the dog owner, the landlord and the community that we would fight the good fight. Having overcome so much, we would not allow anyone to propose that Dominic's recovery was proof of a less serious incident. Fortified by our family, friends, and community, we knew it was a testament to a substantial heart and will.

Once the jury selection started, I quickly changed my mind about Dominic's short stay. Favorable ruling or not, the education value was incredible. I learned things at 49 that I wish I had learned earlier in life. I remember turning to Irene and saying there should be a mandatory field trip for high school children to see how our court system functions. Our attorneys always respected our decisions as parents and left the parenting to us.

The trial spanned three days. The first day we learned how a case is argued by the attorneys based upon what the judge will and will not allow the jury to hear. This is entirely the judge's decision and to our amazement, the judge has incredible latitude. These decisions can and often do, reflect their own personal prejudices. This surprised us because in a court of law, the constant mantra to citizens and jurors is that we reason without prejudice. Attorneys as a rule, battle constantly by objecting to evidence they feel is prejudicial. While the law in theory may project itself as objective and balanced, I would draw attention to the overwhelming public view that it may be quite to the contrary. In many ways, in practice, the system is something of a law Ponzi, obscured by its own volume and sometimes-intentional facades to project infallibility. This law Ponzi often feeds on its investors, the law-abiding citizen.

It was important for us to know where the responsibility would rest for the good or bad of our system and our case in particular. Once the judge handicapped the rules of the trial, a jury was selected. Because sympathies for children and pets were involved, the high emotions made it a daylong process to find the required six jurors and two alternates. After interviewing 55 citizens, both sides were able to conclude the jury selection.

Day two, the attorneys reviewed last minute preliminaries with the judge and then the jury was brought in to hear the case. In opening statements our attorney gave a complete chronology of the

events. Irene and I felt extremely well represented. The defense attorney essentially said that all the jury was going to see was a production; that he had nothing but kind regards for our family, but that under the law, his client had no duty to Dominic Solesky.

We began to call witnesses starting with Irene who set the tone for what happened that April day. The next witness was the lady who phoned 911 Michelle Mayer. After her testimony, they played the seven-and-a-half minute 911 call. This was emotional for me because in the recording was the answer to the only question I had remaining after all this time -- how Irene got blood on both legs of her pants from her waist down to her shoes. I could hear the woman on the phone with the 911 operators screaming for Irene to put the child down. Irene, in shock, was trying to pick Dominic up and carry him to the safety of our home. Hearing that call for the first time, I finally knew that it was best I was not there. At last, I completely understood that the people at the scene, by whom I have remained humbled and small in their presence -- my heroes, were better in that circumstance than I could ever have imagined being.

In total, we had the original people that testified at the dog hearing, the dog owner's immediate neighbor Lisa, Captain Steve Adelsberger, the first EMS on the scene, physical therapist Jennifer Bolster, myself, Dominic, and Dr Richard Redett, a Pediatric Physician from Johns Hopkins. Rick cared for Dominic during his trauma, follow-up surgery, hospital stay, and outpatient care.

The landlord and the dog owner's behavior throughout were appalling. Even more shocking was the fact that the landlord, two retired women, mother and daughter, had worked in the Baltimore County School system at the elementary school level. The mother was a cafeteria worker and the daughter was an Assistant Principle. The dog owner's then girl friend now wife, is reported to have been a health care worker.

At the time of the incident, the dog owners had an infant in the home.

The couple that lived next door testified that they had never met the landlord in the nine years they lived at that property. This neighbor also had a 2-year old daughter. Neither she nor her husband would use the back of their home when the dogs were penned outside due to aggressive behavior toward them. The neighbor did not own a pet so they perceived the dogs' aggressive behavior was directed at them. The judge agreed with the defense's objection that her concerns of aggression were not proof of viciousness. There is no on street parking on the north side of Burke Avenue. The dog owners and other residents of that side of the street parked in driveways in their back yards. The inability to access ones own parking space was not only inconvenient but it required crossing the constant traffic on Burke Avenue with a two-year old child in tow.

The lady who called 911 was heard on the recording screaming that the Pit Bull had previously attempted to get at her dog. The defense was quick to interject that her statement that the Pit Bull was after her dog was not an indication of aggression towards humans. The judge entertained the defense's assertion that the caller's perception is specific to the Pit Bull's intentions only toward animals. The best he should have reasoned was that it could have been aggression toward either. After the testimony of both witnesses, Michelle and Lisa, reason would demand that the judge rule that the Pit Bull's aggressive behavior was indiscriminate.

The landlord was aware that two Pit Bulls were living on the property. In the landlord's deposition, it was revealed that they had observed the tiny dog pen and both Pit Bulls. The landlord had been at the residence to photograph and inspect the property for lease renewal. They had decided not to use the original realtor to provide the lease service although there was no indication of dissatisfaction of the service the realtor provided. The original lease was a more comprehensive form lease. It was clear this was an economic decision on the part of the landlord.

These ladies obviously had the education and mental acuity to observe and conclude that this tenant's breed of dog, their size, and the number of dogs, lacked compatibility with their property as well as the surrounding community. The landlords admitted to amending the original lease, as indicated by the cut and paste insertions and miss-numbered chronology of the new contract. Their eyewitness observations were in fact the genesis for amending their personally crafted lease to say that in "NO WAY" (capitalized) would they be liable should the dogs harm anyone.

We understood owning dogs is entirely legal, so is smoking. Their lease did not allow smoking citing that it damages the property. As a painting contractor, I fully agree. This could also present a fire hazard affecting the neighbors in this semi-detached dwelling. They acted within the law to protect their interest by restricting certain activities -- no smoking.

It is also legal to possess Pit Bulls as pets. The landlord had amended the original lease from 1 Pit Bull dog to indicate two Pit Bull dogs in the new lease. They had the same opportunity to mitigate harm to others by stating "No pets" in the new lease. Clearly, the inconvenience of searching for more suitable renters and the loss of income was coupled with their own self-preservation. Their efforts to write themselves out of their responsibility cannot logically reveal any other motivation. I stand defiant to anyone that would try, even legally, to make an argument to the contrary based on this scenario. The landlord desired to jump back and forth in the contract, whereby the language that serves their purposes is specific, definitive, and implicitly binding and the language that did not serve them or impugns their intentions, was portrayed as arbitrary and general.

Certainly we understand that the mentioning of potential short falls from failure to make payments to including damages to the property is standard. It does not necessarily imply that the landlord knows or infers that the tenant has an expectation of the short fall. It is responsible and sensible to address that potential as they did, with language and associated measures. As an example, including a penalty for late payment of the rent does not imply you expect or have reason to believe the renter will be late making their payments. It simply recognizes inherent facts to any contract for payment. The language was used to responsibly address these potentials; a security fee binds the rent structure establishing integrity. It also has a remediation procedure in the event of a lapse occurrence.

Had the contract maintained continuity with that type of language, we might indulge or at least consider that the landlord was unwitting to their own particular responsibility -- this breed and the overall pet hazard in general.

When the contract entered into the realm of life and limb, there was an entirely different standard morally, ethically, honestly, and legally in the Civil Court. The acknowledgement that pets can bring harm even within the constraints of the rest of the contract, leads us to reason that the landlords must take a course of action to safeguard and protect against that potential harm. That protection standard has to prevail on the side of the humans that could be harmed.

As stated in the lease, serving notice to the tenants, they will be responsible for the actions of their pets civically and financially. This is appropriate to addressing the tenant's legal responsibility. It did not necessarily address the reality of the tenant's ability to meet that responsibility or that the landlord also has accountability.

When action goes from nuisance to physical harm, the completion of responsibility is not served by a landlord granting oneself absolution while at the same time facilitating the existence of the hazard. As an example, the landlords made no effort to show they had a reasonable expectation that the tenant could meet their mandate with respect to harm by not at a minimum requiring them to secure renter's insurance. The fact that the landlord's amendment to the lease stated that "they would in NO WAY be responsible for harm," revealed they knew the tenant's financial position and their property's shortcomings were a predictably inevitable hazard. Their amendment was bound by no mechanism

and thus no integrity equal or in keeping with to its own concern. This impugns the contract as selfish and greedy, written by their hand not coincidentally or arbitrarily, but directly with that knowledge.

In our view, the words NO WAY capitalized is telling. When you are speaking to concern for harm to humans, concern cannot be confined to ones own skin. We don't allow that they can absolve themselves and bind themselves without equity, take unfair advantage or vacillate as they see fit. Knowing their tenants were material tantamount to a time bomb, they opted to run for cover rather than defuse it. When it exploded, their absence was conspicuous contrasted against the way everyone else was taking action. To us, it implicated both a plea and admission of guilt. We endured, as our community dealt with and cleaned up the debris of another's making. I cannot respect anyone that would ask another person to live next to, to reside in, or to expose themselves to any danger they themselves would not. In the height of elitism and self-preservation, they have tried to extricate themselves from the collapse of their own construct. Their conspicuous absence left one child injured, left my son maimed and left our community stunned and shaken by the shrapnel of their insensitivities.

The judge attempted to rationalize that all statements in the lease were essentially standard for inventory purposes and do not imply or infer knowledge of a vicious dog. The judge got it wrong! We hold the view that the addition of the exculpatory language, which shows concern for harm, prevails to ruling in Dominic's favor. Worded in such a way, it is not inference as the judge said he would not make. It is a substantiation of all of the evidence our attorney's introduced. It was the judge who restricted what is termed more prejudicial evidence that he knew could not escape the inherent and vicious propensities of this breed. The landlords knew this and the judge was most certainly familiar but took personal exceptions to breed trait characteristics already acknowledged in current legal rulings. The judge's exclusions, thus his decisions, were the pinnacle of self-fulfilling prophecy. I just want the readers to know that what our attorneys were able to introduce, was formidable enough. If we had presented all our evidence, it would have been overkill.

When all witnesses had been heard, both the plaintiff and the defense rested. The jury was removed and the two lawyers argued over the charges. This was when we learned more about the power a judge has. The judge could stop it going to the jury and make a ruling. He could let it go to the jury and then pass sentence. He could let it go to the jury and still overrule them. The judge didn't let it go to the jury. After what was no more then a lengthy disclaimer and borderline diatribe, the judge granted the defense A Motion For Judgment, saying we had no nexus. While looking at Dominic, he then ended the record in a stern voice saying the landlord had No Duty To Dominic Solesky. It is better stated that the landlord performed no duty to Dominic Solesky. As with so many other convoluted aspects of power, it was one more steaming pile of Civil Doody.

We remain undeterred and will appeal not for animosity or even shock at the judge's ruling. We will appeal because the core issues in this mission have always driven us -- that sensibilities prevail.

We would be enablers if we did not fight this diseased thinking with as much resources as we can muster. Objectively, it is a poor ruling in principle and, if somehow correct under the law, it speaks again to how and why this law Ponzi continues to victimize its sweat equity investors, the every-day citizens.

Pet Project

My cousin Debbie Nazelrod is a successful business women. I do quite a bit of maintenance work and painting at her Salons. She has a rule for all employees, "you cannot come to me with a problem, unless you have a couple of suggestions and preferably a solution to resolve it." That has always stayed with me; as a result, I would be remise if I wrote an entire book and didn't try to offer a solution. Debbie's approach comes from the balance of understanding that if you know your rights, then understand equally and know your responsibilities to them.

When I testified at the Council hearing for a breed specific law, I stated that there was no need to reinvent the wheel; in fact we could plagiarize already proven programs to address public safety. I am on the record repeatedly, that it would make sense to have mandatory safety education for pet ownership. I also wrote a rant too the council in which I stated that there are abundantly more people interested in animals and dogs in particular, then hunting and boating combined. As a result it would be far easier to enlist volunteers to teach animal safety as they do with volunteers in mandatory boating and hunting safety courses.

Knowing the possibility exists that someone with the influence to make changes may stumble upon this e-book. It is equally likely outside of this chapter they will not have time to read it. So at the risk of redundancy and with specific readers in mind, I will briefly re-state my observations as well as my solution.

It is my hope to see a complete plagiary of boating and hunting safety courses currently in existence to create a mandatory pet safety course. For the mandatory birth date requirement, I would suggest January 2000. This means any one born after that date, just as the July 1972 birth date for boaters, must complete a pet owners safety education course. I would like to see a voluntary course available immediately and become mandatory by 2015. This date allows pets currently alive and their owners to not be affected legally but still have education readily available. Pet owners over the age of 18 will not be affected until January 2018.

When a boating accident occurs involving severe injury or death, the Coast guard will file what they term, a robust report. Along with the report on the incident, they will offer opinions, facts and recommendations to support what are generally referred to as, substantial safety barriers to retard the chances for the same type of accidents to occur if at all, at least less frequently. For rational people, this is what they expect from any department tasked with the responsibility of public safety.

It is often our first inclination to ask a boat salesmen or marine mechanic for advice on the seaworthiness of a vessel. Upon further examination however, you may conclude it makes more sense to ask a Coast Guardsmen. This same analogy can be made to compare seeking a Veterinarian for a safety opinion on a particular pet, instead asking or at least including the council of your pediatric or family physician.

There are those that will say, "We don't need any more bureaucracy." Not only do I agree, I am certain that this plan serves to eliminate most of the current ineffective bureaucracy. This plan makes what infrastructure that remains function effectively and eliminates their current short falls. As with the boating and hunting safety courses they would enlist public service organizations. Currently boating and hunting safety courses commission gun and yacht clubs that are accredited to teach the mandatory courses. There is abundantly more interest in pet ownership, then boating and hunting combined. Motivated volunteers have been waiting for a vehicle to create change. While committed and passionate, I have not observed a cohesive direction, effort or philosophy among this pet

enthusiast. I lay the responsibility for this absence and proper leadership, squarely on the shoulders of the Health Department. The singular reason they exist as an agency is public health, safety and welfare. This is specifically why animal control comes under their umbrella. While animal control does an important public service, it has been forgotten even ignored that they are a subordinate agency that should not be involved in mandating but rather instituting the human welfare directive of the Health Department. It seems they at least in Baltimore County, see their mission much differently.

A structured education course dedicated to human health welfare and safety, as its primary obligation, would describe the responsibilities of the pet owner to the immediate and general public first. Second it should describe the financial civil and criminal liabilities improper handling or containment may expose a pet owner and landlord to. Further it should point out the real health hazards from simple bites, through to maiming and attacks resulting in death. The course should be balanced with risks associated from animal on animal attacks and legal actions that can be levied for cruelty and improper treatment of animals.

This would be followed with a statistical list of the 12 most dangerous dogs, the dangerous dozen that put both the pet owner and the public at highest risk to be involved in extreme injury or death as well as, civil and legal action. Lastly it should give compressive education to the care, health, feeding, training and housing of pets. It has been proven that this is a multifaceted problem, the responsibility and obligation to provide a comprehensive solution is required of the Health Department in addressing this matter.

The local Government should mandate that anyone who buys, sells, gives away, rescues or brings a pet to a veterinarian should sign a consent release form stating that they have been informed of the associated hazards and responsibilities of owning a pet in general. The form should state that you have read and understand the more extreme hazards of the top 12 breeds. This form should have a box to indicate what category a pet falls under. If a pet owner cannot identify what breed of dog they have, that should remain their burden and the pet must fall under a miscellaneous breed category. This category will place specific limits on the pet owner and pet, rather than allow either to evade inclusions or claim exemption from compliance. The handlers and agencies stated above should then check the appropriate box of the pets they place or handle. The entire compliance obligation could be done on line and maintained by the local government Animal Control websites that already exists. Further dog owners could be checked on the web for compliance, by law enforcement and the public before either or both, makes or responds to a complaint. I would further like to make it mandatory, that all veterinarians are required to track whether a pet they treat is licensed,

Let those pet owners who feel their rights are put upon by these requirements, be mindful that the non-pet owning public represents a vastly larger group. The non-pet owning public should not have their sanctuary burdened or should the pet owning public victimize them. A safety course would address these pet encroachment problems and remind pet owners their pets are guest. Often pet owners are not vigilant about sanitation, smells, food that draws rodents or the ascetics of the community. These poor habits and residences are a gateway to innocent people and communities being victimized by the very real associated risks of pet ownership. Under the current law a pet is property, however it is autonomous property. This ability to act on its own is unique to property, over cars, guns and boats etc., which require direct owner input. For the matter of hazard and safety to be addressed in a real world effective way, there is going to have to be a change in the mindset of pet owners. Far too many need a lesson in the guest status of their pets. If there is not a sensible response to this issue, there will continue to be a call for and eventually we will see, either a complete ban on all deemed dangerous pets or a one and done bite law for all pets. This will mean that any pet that bites for any reason is euthanized. Suddenly an instinctive awareness on the part of pet owners of their pet's limitations envelops their minds and fear for their pet's welfare. This is the same fear for ones

welfare experienced when the encroachment behaviors of extreme breed fanciers leave one with a sense of being held hostage by another's choice of pet. More important this inequity is wrong! An extreme accountability law highlights how a pet owners confidence is based primarily on easy access to pets and no real consequence for their actions. A pet owners safety course, would close the gap between what people perceive protects them and what actually does. This is the heart and soul, of why without common sense boundaries we fulfill the law of the predictably unexpected. Such a after the fact drastic law, strikes right at the heart of the issue. I don't seek a after the fact drastic measure. I seek to create this instinctive concern as the initial motivation for pet owners to be focused, by promoting both safety and boundaries. It is clear to any objective observer, that many pet owners are not properly focused. This irresponsibility leaves victims in its wake. That is why I wish to plagiarize a boating safety course, where we are responsible for our wakes. With two an one half million dog bites annually, it is time the pet owning public loans greater accountability to the impact of pet ownership on their community.

The standard has been set as companionship and non-aggressive sentinel. The statistics have established an overall bite problem with any pet and a specific more extreme problem consistently associated to specific breeds. In reality we know that even through no fault of our own, incidents and accidents are going to happen. It is easy to understand why we are required to place a fence around pools and remove doors from discarded refrigerators. Children are the least common denominator in these situations. With the need for these luxuries we have developed a mechanism of establishing acceptable risks in an owners rights and equitable precautionary laws, to meet the responsibility of ownership. If your homes size or community rules, do not allow pools or certain height fences, then just as with certain breeds, if your apartment, landlord or community isn't suitable to allow you to properly facilitate your pet, that must remain solely your burden. This establishes the same criteria followed by livestock and horses relegated to suitable environments. If you are an environmentalist, then to borrow one of their terms, certain pets aren't "Green" they leave a bigger paw print on the community.

I don't like government intrusion or intrusion of any kind ever. By the same token, if you cannot provide a method outside of public tax dollars and 911 for dealing with your accident, or the expenses and support staff needed when things go wrong. If you cannot clean up your own mess so to speak, you are the intruder. Between the two, pets and humans, human beings must come first, no exceptions, ever. The sad fact is many folks resist guidelines and requirements used at the professional and institutional level, because of a socially detached animal first philosophy.

These are my contributions to a solution, reasoned after living through and based on the nature of these types of unnecessary incidents. Common sense demands a comprehensive panel, which can be convened just by reviewing the statistics from each organizations records. Plagiarize boating and hunting safety courses in their entirety. Enlist the same proportion of volunteers and more as these public service organizations do. Follow the same classifications as with boat sizes and caliber of firearm. Create boundaries that restrict people to suitable use environments. Apply a all else equal default assessment to reveal the least common denominators for danger and proof that you have in place the ability to assume liability for both you and your pets actions. Advise the public that the classification of animals as property under the law leaves huge liability gaps in providing attack victims relevant legal recourse. At best a pet is autonomous property and there should be provisions to meet that reality squarely on the muzzle.

The greatest irony is that so many animal advocates seem current and open minded about individual human rights and life choices. Still it was they who started up the slippery slope that drew constant anthropomorphic parallels.

I could only assume they lacked meaningful relationships with humans as the impetus for elevating their pets to such human proportions. I could not understand how they could appear logically reasonable enough to conclude humans can be born with certain predispositions that cannot be trained or behaved away, then take a complete 180 in logic as proponents that concluded, animal instincts and behaviors can be usurped by their grand mastery as pet owners. It left me feeling as I so often do by such thinking, held hostage to the whims of people who are not looking to find a solution but instead to put it frankly just want their way.

Initially I was stunned by this whole experience. I have always loved and admired dogs. They seem so eager and aspire to please man by emulating their masters. Paradoxically, many people are only too eager to have their pets treated as human citizens, while treating their fellow citizens like dogs. This entire episode has been a twist and turn of irony and paradox. Through it all, with the grace of God, there has been far more serendipity. If we would see the greater value of investing time working on our human relationships the way the unabashed pet owner does with their pet relationships, we would invariably be better people and it follows, pet owners.

Now I see the sentiment and the irony Will Rogers spoke about: "If there are no dogs in Heaven, then when I die I want to go where they went."

WHEN WE NEED A HUMAN: MOTIVATIONAL DETERMINANTS OF ANTHROPOMORPHISM

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We propose that the tendency to anthropomorphize nonhuman agents is determined primarily by three factors (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007), two of which we test here: sociality motivation and effectance motivation. This theory makes unique predictions about dispositional, situational, cultural, and developmental variability in anthropomorphism, and we test two predictions about dispositional and situational influences stemming from both of these motivations. In particular, we test whether those who are dispositionally lonely (sociality motivation) are more likely to anthropomorphize well-known pets (Study 1), and whether those who have a stable need for control (effectance motivation) are more likely to anthropomorphize apparently unpredictable animals (Study 2). Both studies are consistent with our predictions. We suggest that this theory of anthropomorphism can help to explain when people are likely to attribute humanlike traits to nonhuman agents, and provides insight into the inverse process of dehumanization in which people fail to attribute human characteristics to other humans.

Aristotle suggested that the only critical ingredient in the recipe for supreme happiness was other people, and social psychologists more than 2,000 years younger have provided empirical justification for this claim (Diener & Seligman, 2002). People need other humans in daily life for reasons ranging from the practical to the exist-

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tential, and we suggest here that this need is so strong that people sometimes create humans out of non-humans through a process of anthropomorphism. In particular, we suggest that such inferential reproduction can be used to satisfy two basic needs that other humans (or the concept of humans) can satisfy in everyday life—the need for social connection (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and the need to experience competence (i.e., control and understanding of the environment; White, 1959). We derive these claims from a more general theory of anthropomorphism (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007), and spend the remainder of this article testing two predictions derived from this theory and explaining why psychologists should care about anthropomorphism.

WHAT ANTHROPOMORPHISM IS (NOT)

Perceiving humanlike characteristics in either real or imagined nonhuman agents is the essence of anthropomorphism. These humanlike characteristics may include physical appearance (such as a religious agent believed to look humanlike; Guthrie, 1993), emotional states perceived to be uniquely human (e.g. Leyens et al., 2003), or inner mental states and motivations (Gray, Gray, & Wegner, 2007). Real or imagined nonhuman agents can be anything that acts—or is believed to act—with apparent independence, including nonhuman animals, natural forces, religious agents, technological gadgets, or mechanical devices. Such anthropomorphic representations are important determinants of how a person behaves towards these agents (as with nonhuman animals, for instance), or how a person may behave in light of these agents (such as with guidance that people seek from anthropomorphized religious agents).

Knowing what anthropomorphism includes requires only one minute spent alone with a dictionary (readers are encouraged to take that minute now). More important for psychologists, however, is what it does not include, and it does not include at least four things. First, anthropomorphism does not include behavioral descriptions of observable actions. Announcing that the snarling dog chewing on one's ankle is aggressive is a description of an observable action, and even the most ardent Skinnerian would accept that there is no anthropomorphism in that statement. Anthropomorphism requires going beyond what is directly observable to make inferences about unobservable humanlike characteristics (such as stating that the dog is vindictive; see also Semin & Fiedler, 1988).

Second, anthropomorphism does not merely entail animism. Piaget (1929) noted, for instance, that children tend to see living agents almost wherever they look. But animate life is not a uniquely human property. Although anthropomorphism entails treating an agent as living, the former is not reducible to the latter.

Third, anthropomorphism does not include any requirement of reasoned or reflective endorsement of an inference. Like any belief or attitude, the strength of anthropomorphic inferences will vary from one domain or context to another (variability that our theory is designed to predict). Religious believers frequently speak of God's will; cat owners describe their pets as conceited, and computer users verbally scold and curse their technology when it fails to "cooperate" with them (a practice reported by 79% and 73%, respectively, of PC users; Luczak, Roetting, & Schmidt, 2003). These examples describe behavior consistent with anthropomorphism, but not all people in these instances will, upon conscious reflection, report that the agent in question truly possesses humanlike characteristics. Strong forms of

anthropomorphism (such as many religious beliefs) entail behaving towards an agent as if it possessed humanlike traits along with conscious endorsement that the agent actually possesses those traits, whereas weak forms (such as cursing one's computer) may only contain the weaker as-if component. This variability in strength is the same kind of variability that occurs in the strength of any attitude (Petty & Krosnick, 1995). A theory of anthropomorphism does not need to accept one form or reject another, but it does need to explain both strong and weak forms equally well.

Finally, anthropomorphism is not necessarily inaccurate. Everyday discourse, scientific debates, and scholarly treatments of anthropomorphism have equated anthropomorphism with an overgeneralized error (e.g., Guthrie, 1993), and therefore hinge on whether anthropomorphism actually represents a mistaken representation of a nonhuman agent. But considering an inference anthropomorphic only when it is clearly a mistake is itself a mistake. Readers are encouraged to return to their dictionaries for another minute and note that accuracy appears nowhere in the definition of anthropomorphism. People conceive of gods, gadgets, and an entire gaggle of nonhuman animals in humanlike terms. Although interesting, whether such inferences are accurate is orthogonal to a psychological understanding of the conditions under which people are likely to make an anthropomorphic inference. A psychological theory of anthropomorphism should predict variability in the tendency to perceive humanlike traits in nonhuman agents, and can leave questions of accuracy for others to answer.

MOTIVATIONAL DETERMINANTS OF ANTHROPOMORPHISM

Due to the incessant focus on accuracy, much research on anthropomorphism has actually overlooked a psychological explanation for the very phenomena in its midst. Although anthropomorphism is arguably widespread (Guthrie, 1993; Hume, 1757/1956), even the most casual observer of the human condition will notice that it is far from invariant. Some people anthropomorphize more than others (Chin, Sims, DaPra, & Ballion, 2006), some situations induce anthropomorphism more than others (Epley, Akalis, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2008), children tend to anthropomorphize more than adults (Carey, 1985), and some cultures are notorious for their anthropomorphic religions and worldviews (Asquith, 1986). We provide here a brief overview of a theory of anthropomorphism focusing on three critical determinants designed to predict variability across the four major categories of operational influence in daily life—dispositional, situational, developmental, and cultural (see Epley et al., 2007 for a more detailed description). We derive this theory largely from work in social cognition investigating how people think about other people.

Anthropomorphism represents just one of many examples of induction whereby people reason about an unknown stimulus based on a better-known representation of a related stimulus (Rips, 1975), in this case reasoning about a nonhuman agent based on representations of the self or humans. The basic operations underlying inductive inference are the acquisition of knowledge, the activation or elicitation of knowledge, and the application of activated knowledge at the time of judgment (Higgins, 1996). The application process includes attempts to correct, adjust, or integrate less accessible information into a more automatically activated default representation—a correction process that is often insufficient leaving final judgments

biased in the direction of the initially activated representation (for examples see Epley & Gilovich, 2006; Gilbert, 2002). Seeing humanlike attributes in nonhuman agents is therefore likely to be determined by the relative accessibility and applicability of anthropomorphic representations compared to nonanthropomorphic representations, and the likelihood of correcting an anthropomorphic representation once it is activated. How people perceive nonhuman agents therefore utilizes the same mechanisms involved when people think about other people (see also Kwan, Gosling, & John, 2008, this issue).

As part of a larger theory of anthropomorphism (Epley et al., 2007), we suggest that two motivational factors are important determinants of anthropomorphism, namely sociality and effectance motivation. Sociality motivation is the fundamental need for social connection with other humans. When lacking social connection with other humans, people may compensate by creating humans out of nonhuman agents through anthropomorphism—increasing belief in anthropomorphized religious agents (e.g., God), or perceiving nonhumans to be more humanlike (e.g., pets). Those who are momentarily or chronically lonely should thus anthropomorphize more than those who are connected. We test this hypothesis in Study 1.

Other humans not only provide a sense of social connection, but the richly detailed and readily accessible concept of “human” (or the self) can also serve as a useful source of explanatory power for understanding, controlling, and predicting another agent’s behavior. The concept of human or one’s own egocentric experience is therefore likely to serve as a useful knowledge structure when reasoning about nonhuman agents (in the same way that egocentrism is useful heuristic for reasoning about other people; Dawes & Mulford, 1996). Use of this heuristic, however, should be moderated by one’s motivation to understand, control, and interact competently in one’s environment. Such effectance motivation (White, 1959) is strengthened by variables that increase the incentives for competence, such as a desire for control or predictability, the possibility of future interactions, or strategic interactions. Anthropomorphism can satisfy effectance motivation by providing a sense of understanding and control of a nonhuman agent, and should therefore increase as effectance motivation increases. Those who are particularly fond of feeling in control of one’s environment, for instance, should be especially likely to anthropomorphize in times of uncertainty. We test this hypothesis in Study 2.

These two motivational factors make unique predictions about how specific dispositional, situational, developmental, and cultural variables will influence anthropomorphism. We believe these motivations are among the primary determinants of anthropomorphism (and other important motivations may exist, see Norenzayan, Hanson, & Cady, 2008, this issue), and certainly do not expect all instances of motivated reasoning (e.g., motivated self-enhancement) to influence anthropomorphism. Our goal here is not to articulate all specific predictions (see Epley et al., 2007, for such articulation), but rather to test directly a subset of them—namely dispositional and situational predictions regarding sociality and effectance motivation. Our theory of anthropomorphism is derived from work in social cognition, and many of our predictions need to be tested directly. The experiments here provide two such tests.

STUDY 1—SOCIALITY MOTIVATION

Most readers will be well familiar with the stereotype of the introvert who becomes just a bit too enamored with her cat (those in the minority may visit www.crazycatladies.org). Being disconnected from other people is not only unpleasant and uncomfortable (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), but it is unhealthy as well (Cacioppo et al., 2002; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Thankfully for one's well being, people are relatively clever in their ability to gain a sense of social connection even in the complete absence of actual human agents. Television characters, photographs, and religious figures all appear to be effective surrogates for actual human connection (Gardner, Pickett, & Knowles, 2005). Our hypotheses here, however, go beyond predicting that chronic social isolation or disconnection will increase attraction or liking for nonhuman agents, and predict that such a chronic need for social connection will alter the humanlike characteristics that people attribute to these agents. In particular, we suggest that when people are chronically isolated they make up humans by anthropomorphizing nonhuman agents—creating a sense of social support through a kind of inferential reproduction. We tested this hypothesis in Study 1 by asking people to evaluate familiar pets on anthropomorphic traits related to social connection, anthropomorphic traits unrelated to social connection, and non-anthropomorphic traits. We predicted that dispositional loneliness would increase the likelihood of anthropomorphizing one's pet on traits related to social connection.

METHOD

Participants

One hundred sixty-six Harvard University undergraduates completed this experiment in exchange for a chance to win \$50. Participants were recruited via e-mail for a study investigating how people think about their pets and directed to an online website where they completed all of the following measures. All participants were current (or for 2% of cases, past) pet owners. The vast majority (96%) reported that they were not currently living with the pet under consideration.

Procedure

All participants completed the 20-item UCLA loneliness scale (Russell, 1996), consisting of items such as "I lack companionship," "There is no one I can turn to," and "I feel alone." One group of participants did so before, and the other group after, completing the pet-rating items. On the critical pet-rating items, participants were instructed to consider a series of 14 traits and asked to rank order them, from 1 being most descriptive of their pets to 14 being the least descriptive. These included three anthropomorphic traits related to providing social connection (thoughtful, considerate, and sympathetic), four anthropomorphic traits unrelated to providing social connection (embarrassable, creative, devious, and jealous), and seven non-anthropomorphic traits that were simply behavioral descriptions (aggressive, agile, active, energetic, fearful, lethargic, and muscular). We classified traits based on existing research that identifies metacognition as a critical distinguishing feature between traits seen as humanlike versus those shared by other living agents

(Demoulin et al., 2004; Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee, & Bastian, 2005). When finished, participants were logged off of the website.

RESULTS

No effort was made to restrict variability in the pets participants considered, and this sample included 99 dogs (of roughly half as many breeds), 48 cats (also of reportedly different breeds), and 19 "others" (11 fish, 2 lizards, 2 parrots, 1 chicken, and 3 unspecified). Including pet type (dog, cat, "other") did not reduce the significance level of any of the following results, and is not discussed further.

To analyze these results, participants' responses to the loneliness scale were first reverse-scored where appropriate to obtain an overall measure of social disconnection. We next calculated the average rank given to the three anthropomorphic traits related to social connection ($\alpha = .73$), to the four anthropomorphic traits unrelated to social connection ($\alpha = .09$), and to the seven behavioral descriptors (after reverse coding "lethargic," $\alpha = .57$). The α levels of these last two measures are unacceptably low (due to being selected as unrelated or irrelevant to social connection), so we analyzed both the composite rankings (for conceptual reasons) as well as the individual rankings themselves in the following analyses.

As predicted, participants who felt more chronically disconnected provided higher rankings of the supportive anthropomorphic traits than participants who felt more socially connected, $r(164) = -.18, p = .02$. A similar correlation did not emerge on the nonsupportive anthropomorphic traits, $r(164) = .07, p = .37$, nor among the behavioral traits, $r(165) = .03, p = .70$. None of the individual items for either the nonsupportive anthropomorphic traits or the behavioral traits approached significance themselves after correcting for multiple comparisons (all $ps > .2$).

We interpret these results as consistent with our prediction that participants who were chronically lonely would create agents of social support by anthropomorphizing their pets. That these correlational patterns emerged among only the anthropomorphic items related to social connection suggests that participants may be creating agents to satisfy their need for social connection. Of course, such correlational results cannot attest to this causal connection, but we report similar results elsewhere in which manipulating a person's sense of social connection increases their tendency to again anthropomorphize their pets on traits related to social connection (Epley et al., 2008). This convergent validity suggests that anthropomorphism may serve a social connection function by creating humanlike agents out of nonhumans.

One interesting possibility not addressed by this experiment is that people who are chronically isolated or rejected from other people may *prefer* social connection through nonhuman agents, such as religious agents or pets. People who are ostracized by another person, for instance, tend to avoid or aggress toward that person (Buckley, Winkel, & Leary, 2004; Twenge & Campbell, 2003) and seek connection from *other* people (Maner, Dwall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007). A person who is chronically isolated or disconnected from people may withdraw from attempts to connect with other humans in general, and may instead seek connection with nonhuman agents through a process of anthropomorphism. Study 1 did not compare evaluations of the mental states or traits of other humans with nonhuman pets, and it is at least possible that experiments that do so may reveal an interesting asymmetry.

STUDY 2—EFFECTANCE MOTIVATION

People anthropomorphize to satisfy sociality needs, but turning a nonhuman agent into a human through a process of anthropomorphism can also fulfill a basic need for understanding, control, and predictability. Charles Darwin (1872/2002) argued, for instance, that anthropomorphism was essential to progress in understanding other animals. So too did Hebb (1946) who noted the utter lack of coherence that emerged when scientists studying with him at the Yerkes laboratory tried to avoid using anthropomorphic descriptions of nonhuman primates. “Whatever the anthropomorphic terminology may seem to imply about conscious states in chimpanzee,” Hebb wrote, “it provides an intelligible and practical guide to behavior” (p. 48).

Humans are generally motivated to feel competent through resolving uncertainty, increasing predictability, and gaining a sense of control or efficacy over their environment (White, 1959). Anthropomorphism may satisfy this “effectance motivation” by providing a detailed knowledge structure that can be used to understand a novel nonhuman agent. To the extent that people use the concept of self or human to better understand a nonhuman agent, anthropomorphism should increase when effectance motivation is high, and decrease when effectance motivation is low. Incentives to understand an agent’s behavior—such as being involved in strategic interaction with another agent (Berger & Douglas, 1981; Berscheid, Graziano, Monson, & Dermer, 1976), interacting with an apparently unpredictable agent (Barrett & Johnson, 2003), or having a high “need for control” (Burger & Cooper, 1979)—should increase effectance motivation and anthropomorphism, as well.

We investigated this prediction in Study 2 by asking participants to watch a short and mundane video clip of two dogs interacting with each other. One of these dogs appeared less predictable than the other (one was small, quick, and seemingly unpredictable, whereas the other was large, slow, and relatively predictable), and we expected this lack of predictability would induce more anthropomorphic inferences about the less predictable dog. In addition, we expected that those who were chronically high in effectance motivation—namely those high in Desire for Control (Burger & Cooper, 1979)—would tend to anthropomorphize more than those low in chronic effectance motivation. It is also theoretically possible that Desire for Control could interact with the predictability manipulation rather than just producing an independent main effect, and we did not have a clear *a priori* prediction about which particular pattern would emerge.

We conducted a pilot study to ensure that the two dogs shown on the video varied in their apparent predictability and controllability. Participants in this study ($N = 54$) watched the video two separate times, being instructed to pay attention to the smaller dog during the first viewing and the larger dog during the second viewing. When finished, participants rated how predictable each dog would be in a future interaction on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all predictable) to 7 (completely predictable), and how easy each dog would be to control on a scale ranging from 1 (easy) to 7 (difficult). As predicted, the smaller dog was rated as less predictable than the larger dog, $M_s = 3.07$ vs. 5.43 , respectively, paired $t(53) = 8.98$, $p < .0001$, and also as more difficult to control, $M_s = 4.57$ vs. 3.54 , respectively, paired $t(53) = 3.13$, $p < .004$.

PROCEDURE

Visitors to the Decision Research Lab at the University of Chicago ($N = 132$) participated in exchange for \$5. Participants were told they would be taking part in a study on “attribution and interaction” and completed all parts of the study on MediaLab computer software. Participants first completed the 20-item Desirability of Control measure (Burger & Cooper, 1979) that asked participants to evaluate items such as, “I prefer a job where I have a lot of control over what I do and when I do it” on scales ranging from 1 (The statement does not apply to me at all) to 7 (The statement always applies to me). Responses from these twenty items (reverse scored where appropriate) were summed to calculate participants’ desire for control score ($\alpha = .81$). The resulting distribution was platykurtic, so we conducted a median split on these totals in order to categorize participants as high in desire for control (high-DC, $n = 65$) or low in desire for control (low-DC, $n = 67$), and to easily submit these results to an ANOVA analysis.

Participants next viewed the video clip used in the pilot study. Participants watched this video twice following the same procedure as in the pilot study. When finished watching the video, approximately one-third of participants simply continued to the critical dependent measures, whereas the remaining participants were asked to imagine that, after the experiment, one of the dogs (approximately one-third told the large dog, and the remaining told the small dog) would be brought into the lab so that they could interact with the dog and attempt to teach it a trick. This variable did not influence the results in any meaningful way and is therefore not discussed further.

Participants were then asked to evaluate both dogs on three items related to anthropomorphism: the extent to which each dog was aware of its emotions, has a conscious will, and has a “personality,” on scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Finally, participants were asked to rate the dog on its similarity to other life forms on a scale ranging from 1 (bacteria) to 11 (human).

RESULTS

The four anthropomorphism ratings were highly intercorrelated ($\alpha = .78$ and $.80$ for the small dog and large dog, respectively) and were therefore standardized and collapsed into a single composite for all of the following analyses.

A 2 (dog: unpredictable vs. predictable) \times 2 (desire for control: high vs. low) ANOVA on the composite anthropomorphism measure revealed a predicted main effect for dog, such that participants rated the unpredictable dog ($M = .12$) higher on the composite than the predictable dog ($M = -.12$), $F(1, 130) = 11.50, p = .001$. A main effect of desire for control also emerged such that high-DC participants rated both dogs higher on the anthropomorphism composite ($M = .15$) than did low-DC participants ($M = -.14$), $F(1, 130) = 6.45, p = .01$. Interestingly, these main effects were qualified by a dog \times desire for control interaction, $F(1, 130) = 3.84, p = .052$. The difference in evaluations of the predictable versus unpredictable dog was especially large among high-DC people, $F(1, 130) = 14.10, p < .0001$, and high-DC individuals anthropomorphized the unpredictable dog more than low-DC individuals, $F(1, 130) = 11.78, p = .001$ (see Figure 1). Neither of the other simple effects were significant (both $ps > .3$).

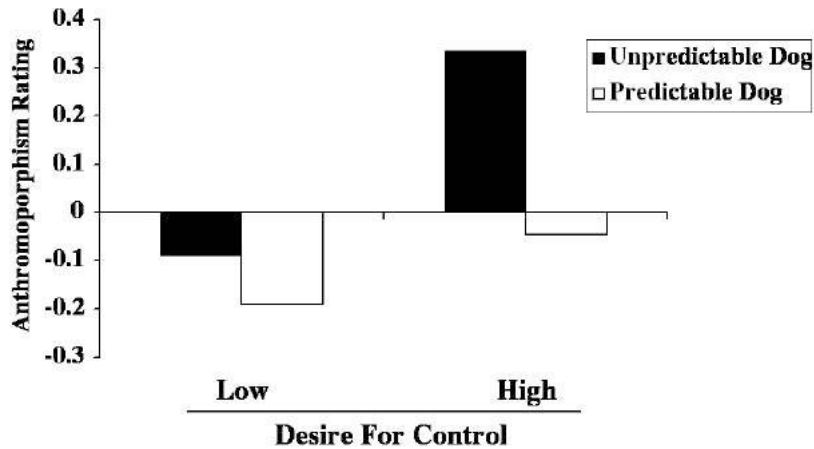


FIGURE 1. Anthropomorphism ratings for the predictable and unpredictable dog from participants high and low in Desire for Control (Study 2). Data are reported in z-scores. Larger numbers indicate greater anthropomorphism.

These results are consistent with our predictions about how effectance motivation may influence anthropomorphism, and provided a test of both dispositional and situational influences on anthropomorphism. An interaction emerged here between Desire for Control and the apparent predictability of the stimulus, suggesting that the dispositional tendency to seek understanding and control is facilitated by a stimulus that enables anthropomorphism. As with Study 1, of course, dispositional measures cannot isolate the cause of this effect, and experimental manipulations of effectance motivation are needed to clearly isolate its causal influence. We therefore find these results to be encouraging evidence of the role of effectance motivation as a determinant of anthropomorphism, and are currently conducting studies that experimentally manipulate effectance to provide convergent support for this notion (Waytz, Cacioppo, & Epley, 2008).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Human beings have been thinking about nonhuman agents for every bit as long as they have been thinking about other humans, and yet scientific understanding of the latter vastly outstrips understanding of the former. This may appear perfectly acceptable. Whether people believe their pets are thoughtful, their PCs vindictive, or speak of their plants as “wanting” sunlight hardly seems the kind of intellectual puzzle that would spark a stampede of psychologists to search for explanations. Whether people recognize these humanlike traits in other *people*, however, is the stuff of love and war. A journal like *Social Cognition* should therefore be filled with experiments investigating people’s thoughts about other people, and so it has been for every issue before this one.

But readers who share this assessment should think more carefully about why studying anthropomorphism is worth one's time before dismissing it completely, and we think it is well worth *our* time for at least four reasons. First, it's not clear that understanding how people think about relatively trivial agents such as pets or their computers is actually all that trivial. Nonhuman agents, from dogs to gods, serve as a source of social connection, and the link between connection to these nonhuman agents and one's health and well-being is well documented (Serpell, 1991, 2003). Computer scientists charged with enabling computer users to learn from their products have begun utilizing anthropomorphism by creating interfaces that look and act humanlike. Such interfaces appear to facilitate learning compared to less humanlike interfaces (Moreale & Watt, 2004). And marketers utilize anthropomorphism to peddle products ranging from movies to motor parts (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Guthrie, 1993). Understanding how people think about even relatively mundane nonhuman agents can have wide-ranging—and potentially very important—implications (for some examples see Chartrand, Fitzsimmons, Fitzsimons, 2008, this issue, Gardner & Knowles, 2008, this issue, and Kiesler, Powers, Fussell, & Torrey, 2008, this issue).

Second, it is important to remember that the agents prone to anthropomorphism also includes religious agents that the vast majority of the world's population uses—or purports to use—as a moral compass. Thinking that one's dog is jealous is one thing, but thinking that one's god is jealous is quite another (see Morewedge & Clear, 2008, this issue). And yet the psychological processes that lead to these inferences should be identical in both cases. Indeed, we report elsewhere that experimentally induced feelings of loneliness not only increase anthropomorphism for one's pets (in an experiment similar to Study 1), but also increase belief in religious agents such as God and Angels as well (Epley et al., 2008). Xenophanes (6th century B.C.) was the first person to use the term *anthropomorphism*, and did so when noting the similarity in appearance between gods and their human followers. Understanding how this anthropomorphic process works with religious agents has advanced surprisingly little since that time. In a world long populated by explicit and powerful religious fundamentalism, such understanding seems long overdue.

Third, seeing a nonhuman agent as humanlike not only entails the attribution of humanlike characteristics, but it also carries the consequence of moral agency. Consciousness, intention, desire, and regret are all the very sorts of humanlike emotions that turn nonhuman agents into *moral* agents. It is no accident that environmentalists refer to "mother earth," for instance, and that appeals for animal rights often hinge on the reality of animal *suffering*. Anthropomorphizing at least some nonhuman agents creates an agent that deserves concern for its own well-being. Such agents are not just represented as humanlike, but are also more likely to be treated as humanlike.

Finally, understanding anthropomorphism should provide precious insight into the inverse process of dehumanization, whereby people *fail* to attribute humanlike characteristics to other humans and think of them as nonhuman agents (see Boccatto, Capozza, Falvo, & Durante, 2008, this issue and Haslam, Kashima, Loughnan, Shi, & Suitner, 2008, this issue). The theory we have sketched here, and describe in greater detail *elsewhere* (Epley et al., 2007), can also be used to make predictions about when people will dehumanize other people and when they will not. For instance, feeling socially isolated increases the search for sources of social connection and increases anthropomorphism. Applied to dehumanization, feeling a

tight social connection to other humans should satisfy one's sociality motivation and therefore predict greater *dehumanization* among those who are highly connected. It is well-known that having a well-defined and highly connected ingroup facilitated dehumanization of an out-group (e.g., Leyens et al., 2003), and we have found in one recent experiment that those asked to think about of a close friend dehumanized outgroup members more than those asked to think about a distant acquaintance (Waytz, Epley, & Cacioppo, 2007). So too, we predict, should effectance motivation influence dehumanization. When incentives for understanding are reduced (no anticipated future interaction, highly predictable behavior, etc.), dehumanization should increase. Understanding anthropomorphism does more than increase understanding of how people think about nonhuman agents. It increases understanding of when people see humans in the environment and when they *do not*, both for better and for worse.

For these reasons we think an understanding of how people think about nonhuman agents in general, and an understanding of anthropomorphism in particular, is both long overdue and of central importance to psychologists interested in social cognition. We have outlined here two motivational determinants that can predict and explain when people are likely to attribute humanlike characteristics to nonhuman agents, and have provided two experiments that test predictions about motivational determinants of this anthropomorphic process. We believe that the long tradition of research in social cognition has already provided many of the pieces needed to solve this intellectual puzzle of anthropomorphism. What is needed now is some focused attention, systematic thought, and well-reasoned assembly.

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Pit bull attack injures boy, 10

05/02/07

by **Bryan P. Sears**

A spring afternoon game of tag in Towson Manor Village turned violent when a 10-year-old boy was attacked by an American pit bull terrier.

Dominic Solesky underwent several hours of surgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital on April 28, according to Tony Solesky, the boy's father.

The father described his son's injuries as potentially life threatening.

Dominic Solesky was playing Nerf tag, a game similar to paintball that involves toy guns that shoot foam darts, when he heard his friends yelling. One of his playmates, 8-year-old Barron Scott Mason, was being attacked by a dog.

Dominic ran to the alley from the front of his Ridge Avenue house where he was "guarding his base" in the game and began to look for his friend, according to Tony Solesky.

It was there that the 1-year-old male dog mauled Dominic.

Dominic suffered "severe blood loss" related to bites to his leg, nose, cheeks and arm, according to Solesky and police reports.

Dominic's femoral artery was severed. He required multiple blood transfusions and skin grafts. Damage to the muscle was severe.

"This will be months of recovery," Solesky said. "There will probably be issues with being able to walk again."

Dominic, a student at Hampton Elementary School, remains in Johns Hopkins Pediatric Hospital. On May 1, hospital spokeswoman Kim Hoppe said Dominic's condition was listed as "fair."

Solesky said he did not know the owner of the dog, who lives at the opposite end of the alley from his brick row home. The owner, Thomas O'Halloran, has not attempted to contact him since the attack, Solesky said.

An attempt to reach O'Halloran was not successful.

O'Halloran, of the 200 block of East Burke Avenue, told police he is a dog breeder and has never had any problems with his two dogs escaping over the 5-foot high fences around the outdoor dog kennel, according to a police report.

There are no criminal charges against O'Halloran at this time, Cpl. Michael Hill said.

The dog, which was not licensed, was confiscated over the weekend by animal control officers, according to Monique Lyle, a spokeswoman for the county Department of Health.

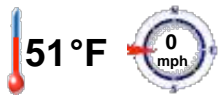
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According to county Animal Control, two complaints related to the dog were made in February. The complaints concerned barking and inadequate shelter for the dog.

O'Halloran faces a \$500 fine and must appear before an Animal Control hearing board. That hearing, which is open to the public, is likely to be scheduled in the next 30 days.

At that time, hearing officers will determine if O'Halloran will get the dog back. The board could also order the dog to be destroyed or removed from the county, according to Lyle.

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Gardina proposes pit bull task force

Breeds not tracked on licenses, bite reports

05/09/07
by Bryan P. Sears

In the wake of a pit bull attack that sent a 10-year-old boy to the hospital with severe injuries, Councilman Vince Gardina is calling for a task force to find out if the breed is a problem in the county.

But that could be a hard task, because no department tracks the breeds of dogs licensed in the county or the breeds of dogs involved in biting incidents.

Gardina proposed the task force last week after 10-year-old Dominic Solesky was attacked by a pit bull on April 28 while playing in a Towson Manor Village alley. The boy suffered severe injuries, including a severed femoral artery, and continues to be treated at the Johns Hopkins Children's Center.

It was the second attack by a pit bull in the county in a month. In Woodlawn, two pit bulls entered a yard and killed a smaller dog.

"We need to do something to address this problem," Gardina told Health Officer Pierre Vigilance during a May 1 County Council work session. "There needs to be something to constrain these animals better."

Gardina, a Democrat, represents the 5th District, which includes Perry Hall, part of Parkville and Towson.

In a May 6 phone interview, Gardina said he hoped the task force would look at creating a more restrictive license. Owners of what he referred to as "dangerous breeds" would be required to keep the dogs in enclosed kennels or have higher fences.

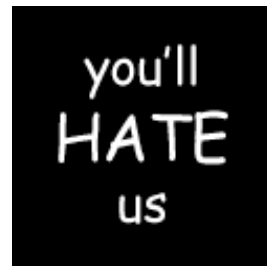
Vigilance urged caution.

"We want to be careful not to stigmatize any one breed of dog or sanction a particular type of dog," he said.

He added that the attacks Gardina talked about were rare and the worst he knew of in the 18 months since he took over the Health Department.

Vigilance said he was not sure what such a task force would accomplish.

Baltimore County issues about 18,000 pet licenses annually. It is generally believed there are many more dogs in the county that are not licensed.



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A database of dogs licensed in the county does not track their breeds, according to Tim Kotroco, director of the county Department of Permits and Development Management, which issues the licenses.

From 2002 to 2006, the county has averaged about 1,000 reported dog bites a year, according to Animal Control records.

The county Animal Control Board does not track breeds of dogs reported to be involved in dog bite incidents in the county despite the fact that there is a space for such information on the report forms.

The space is typically left blank because breeds are often difficult to determine, according to Monique Lyle, a spokeswoman for the county Health Department.

Gardina said the county agencies should look to see if there are ways to track breeds that are licensed or involved in biting incidents.

Indeed, a Centers for Disease Control study of dog bites shows investigators ran into the same problem.

A 2000 study of dog-bite-related fatalities found that "pit bull-type" dogs and Rottweilers were responsible for more than 50 percent of the 238 dog-bite related fatalities from 1979 to 1998.

Authors of the study wrote, however, that the statistics should be used cautiously. First, they believed that related fatalities were underreported. They also believed that description of a breed, especially a cross-bred dog, may be subjective and "even experts may disagree on the breed of a particular dog."

Pit bulls, more formally known as American Staffordshire terriers, have been the target of bans in several jurisdictions around the country, including Prince George's County.

Tony Solesky, Dominic's father, said irresponsible owners are as much at fault as "bad dogs."

"I don't think all pit bulls are this way or all pit bull owners are this way," Solesky said. "There's no debate, though, that these are the dogs that can do the worst damage."

Still, Solesky cautioned against knee-jerk reactions to any particular breed of dog.

"I'd rather see responsible pit bull owners," Solesky said. "I don't want to alienate people. I don't want to see (responsible owners) lose their dogs or have to take up the side of idiots just so they can protect their own rights."

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Dog that mauled boy will be euthanized

05/16/07

by **Bryan P. Sears**

The owner of a dog that attacked a 10-year-old boy two weeks ago has agreed to let the county euthanize the animal.

At the opening of a May 15 hearing, Thomas O'Halloran, through his attorney, Peter Prevas, told the county Animal Control Board that the pit bull named Clifford could be destroyed.

At least one member of the Animal Control Board and many in the audience were moved to tears when witnesses testified to what they found in the moments immediately following the attack.

Dominic Solesky was one of two boys attacked while playing in a Towson Manor Village alley April 28.

Dominic's wounds were the more severe. The dog ripped away part of his cheek and tore a large portion of the boy's left thigh down to the bone. His femoral artery was severed.

"It looked like a shark attack," said Irene Solesky, Dominic's mother, as she described to the board the scene in the moments after the attack.

Dominic remains at the Johns Hopkins Children's Center, according to the parents.

A second boy, Scotty Mason, was also injured. He was treated at St. Joseph Medical Center and released, according to a police report.

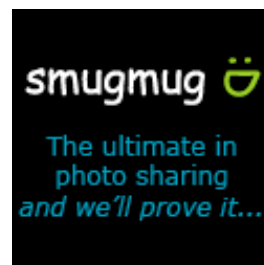
O'Halloran sat nearly expressionless throughout the hourlong hearing. He spoke only once, a "yes" in response to a question about whether he would agree to allow Prevas to continue to represent him after the lawyer disclosed that he had grown up with Irene Solesky.

The board still must decide if O'Halloran should be fined \$500 for owning a dangerous animal. The board can waive all or part of the fine. The board also can order O'Halloran to pay fees and veterinary bills incurred while the dog was in the custody of the county.

After the hearing, Prevas said his client would not make a public statement.

The board also heard the case of two pit bulls that entered a nearby yard in Woodlawn and killed a Lhasa apso.

Before the hearing, the owner allowed county officials to euthanize one pit bull, named Smurf. Another pit bull, named Lisa, is still being held by Animal Control. The board also could order that dog euthanized.



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Decisions in both cases should be announced in a week to 10 days.

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Stop, Fido, or I will Taser you

Police use stun guns on aggressive dogs

05/16/07
by Bryan P. Sears



Each of the county's 10 police precincts has at least one Taser, and 121 police officers have been trained to use the device, which delivers an electric shock to temporarily disable its target.

Tasers -- they're not just for people anymore.

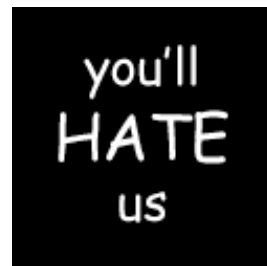
Baltimore County police are using the electronic stun guns on menacing dogs more often than they are shooting dogs, according to police statistics.

Under a policy in effect since March 2006, police officers have used Tasers -- the same devices available for use on humans -- on five dogs. None of the dogs died.

"We've tried pepper spray," said Cpl. Mike Hill, a police spokesman. "Sometimes it worked, most times it didn't. We've had great success with the Taser."

A Taser is a device that fires projectiles delivering an electric shock meant to temporarily disable its target but not kill it.

Police officers can use a Taser on a dog if the device is immediately available,



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according to Hill.

About 121 officers have been trained to use Tasers. There is at least one in each of the county's 10 precincts and an unspecified number assigned to the tactical squad, Hill said.

"It sounds like a good thing, in general," said Frank Branchini, executive director of the Humane Society of Baltimore County. "We'd rather have dogs Tasered than shot."

The number of dogs that have been Tasered since the policy was put in place almost equals the number of dogs police have shot at since 2005.

Baltimore County police have shot at eight dogs since Jan. 1, 2005.

Of those, two died. Three were wounded but recovered. Two others were fired at but were not hit. The eighth dog was shot at but police do not know what happened to the dog because "it ran away and was never found," according to Hill.

Hill said police are most likely to encounter problems with dogs when serving search warrants.

The department released information on police-involved dog shootings and the Taser policy at the request of Patuxent Publishing Co., the publisher of this newspaper.

The request was made after Councilman Vince Gardina said he was planning to look into police dog shootings. The Perry Hall Democrat said he believed the incidents would show how serious a problem "dangerous breeds" are and that the number of pit bulls involved in the attacks would be high.

"Pit bulls seem to be the ones that are the most aggressive," Gardina said. "Others are dangerous. But when you talk about the damage they can do, pit bulls are much more severe than other kinds of dogs. Not that it can't happen with other dogs, but it does seem to be less likely."

Gardina, who represents the 5th District, including Perry Hall and Towson, called for a task force to review the number of dog bite incidents after Dominic Solesky, a 10-year-old Towson Manor boy, was severely injured in a pit bull attack.

The reports do not shed as much light on the issue of breed as might have been hoped.

The police department does not require its officers to note breed in any official report. That information would be known only if the officer elected to include it.

Of the reports in question, pit bulls were involved in three of the eight incidents in which officers fired their guns. A boxer was reportedly involved in another of those shootings.

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Charges could follow pit bull attack of boys

06/06/07

by **Bryan P. Sears**

A Towson Manor Village man could face criminal charges related to an April 28 pit bull attack.

Police have reopened the investigation of the attack after testimony at a May 15 Animal Control Board hearing raised questions about the actions of Thomas O'Halloran, the dog's owner.

"Information came out about an earlier bite that puts a different light on things," said Cpl. Mike Hill, a police spokesman.

The new information to which Hill referred comes from statements made by the mother of one of the two boys attacked.

At the hearing, Andrea Mason, mother of Scotty Mason, testified under oath that her son came home covered in blood from wounds to his face. She said Scotty begged her not to go to the alley where he was attacked because he had been threatened by O'Halloran.

"Mom, don't go. Don't go down there," Mason tearfully testified, quoting her son. "The man (O'Halloran) told me if I tell you he'll get me."

Scotty was later treated and released from St. Joseph Medical Center, according to a police report.

If true, the statement could provide an indication that O'Halloran knew the dog was dangerous and capable of escaping his pen "and didn't take precautions," Hill said.

If the boy was threatened after being bitten, that could indicate an attempt by O'Halloran to cover up the attack, Hill said.

Hill said investigators have spent the past week reinterviewing witnesses to the attack and other residents of Towson Manor Village to determine if the dog had a history of escaping from its pen.

O'Halloran could face two misdemeanor dangerous dog charges, one for each attack. If found guilty, he could be fined up to \$2,500 for each incident and be ordered to pay for any psychological counseling the victims might need.

Results of the investigation likely will be turned over to the county State's Attorney's Office, which would decide whether to file charges, Hill said.

Soon after the attack on Scotty Mason, a second boy, 10-year-old Dominic Solesky, was attacked by the same dog.

Dominic's wounds were more severe. The dog ripped away part of his cheek

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and tore a large portion of the boy's left thigh down to the bone. His femoral artery was severed.

The hearing board has not issued a formal ruling on the charges that the pit bull, named "Clifford," is dangerous. O'Halloran, through his attorney, agreed to allow the county to euthanize Clifford. That procedure has not been scheduled.

O'Halloran also could be fined \$500 and ordered to repay the county for boarding and caring for the dog.

Peter Prevas, O'Halloran's attorney, said he was unaware of any investigation and declined further comment.

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Owner of pit bull facing criminal charges in attack

06/27/07

by **Bryan P. Sears**

The owner of a pit bull that mauled a 10-year-old Towson Manor Village boy will face criminal charges stemming from the April 28 attack.

Thomas O'Halloran was charged June 19 with one count of reckless endangerment related to the mauling of Dominic Solesky.

Peter Prevas, a Towson attorney who represented O'Halloran at a May 15 Animal Control Board hearing, did not return a call from a reporter seeking comment.

Solesky was one of two boys attacked April 28 by a pit bull owned by O'Halloran.

The first boy, Scotty Mason, 8, suffered minor injuries.

After the first attack, O'Halloran put the pit bull back in its backyard enclosure, then took Mason into O'Halloran's house. After cleaning the boy up, O'Halloran allegedly told Mason not to tell anyone or he "would get him," according to sworn testimony at a May 15 animal control hearing and charging documents filed in district court.

O'Halloran, in a statement to police, admitted taking Mason into his home but denied that he threatened the child.

Mason was treated and released at St. Joseph Medical Center.

While O'Halloran and the boy were inside the house, the dog apparently escaped again from the enclosure and attacked Solesky.

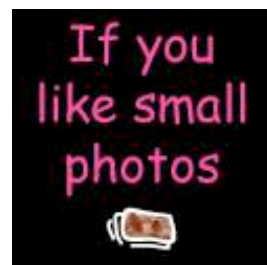
The dog mauled the boy, ripping away a large portion of his left thigh and severing his femoral artery. Witnesses testified at the Animal Control Board hearing that O'Halloran dragged the dog away and did not come back.

In a statement to police, O'Halloran said he beat the dog with his fists to stop the attack.

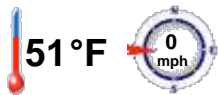
There is no record of O'Halloran calling police or 911, according to charging documents filed in district court.

Solesky underwent five hours of surgery and multiple transfusions the day of the attack. That surgery was followed by a second. After 17 days, he was released from the Johns Hopkins Children's Center.

He is now at home, undergoing physical therapy because of the severe damage



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to his leg.

O'Halloran has implied to police that the boys may have been agitating his dogs before the attack.

According to charging documents, O'Halloran called police the day after the attack to report finding a toy dart gun under his car and a soft, orange toy dart in the dog's enclosure.

Mason, Solesky and two other boys were playing tag with Nerf dart guns in the alley and around the front of their homes on the afternoon of the attack. The Solesky family lives on Ridge Avenue and shares an alley with homes on Burke Avenue, where O'Halloran lived.

Last week, county officials released an Animal Control Board document that determined the dog, known as Clifford, was dangerous. The board ordered the dog euthanized and fined O'Halloran \$500, the most allowed under county law.

O'Halloran moved from the brick Burke Avenue town house he shared with his fiancée sometime after the Animal Control Board hearing and now lives in Bel Air.

He is out of jail on \$35,000 bail. His trial has been scheduled for July 24 in district court in Towson.

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Animal panel avoids mentioning breeds

Report due on dealing with dangerous dogs

08/08/07
by Bryan P. Sears

Dog bite prevention education and the growing number of unlicensed dogs in the county appear to be the focus of a task force charged with investigating the issue of dangerous dogs.

The group's report, which likely will be released by the end of the year, will point out shortcomings in county animal control law but will not contain specific recommendations on changes to the law, according to the Baltimore County health officer, Dr. Pierre Vigilance.

"With regard to the law, we have chosen to show or speak to where we think the law focuses on the animal and not the owner," Vigilance said.

He added that legislation likely will not be focused on "specific breeds."

Education programs would focus on teaching owners their responsibilities under the law. Other programs would seek to teach parents and people who don't own dogs ways of dealing with leashed and unleashed dogs, Vigilance said.

Recommendations by the Dangerous Animal Task Force also likely will look at ways to increase the number of dogs licensed in the county. Of an estimated 200,000 dogs in the county, only about 9 percent are licensed. County law requires that all dogs be licensed.

Vigilance said the group looked at ways to provide licensing information through pet shops and veterinarians.

Councilman Vince Gardina, who requested the formation of the task force in May, said he was disappointed with the recommendations and said he had hoped for some that were breed-specific.

"I believe we have to be very strict about this," said Gardina, a Democrat who represents the 5th District, including Towson and Perry Hall. "I think it's gotten out of control. Some of these dogs are a danger to the community. I don't think being lenient or educating is the answer."

Gardina made the request after a 10-year-old boy was mauled by a pit bull in a Towson Manor Village alley April 28.

Dominic Solesky suffered severe injuries to his left thigh and spent nearly three weeks in the hospital. He is undergoing physical therapy to regain full

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use of his leg.

The dog, known as Clifford, was euthanized. Thomas O'Halloran, the dog's owner, was fined \$500 and faces criminal charges.

Gardina said he is not looking to ban specific breeds but said he is concerned with pit bulls and pit bull mixes. Gardina said he favors tighter requirements to get a license for such dogs, along with more stringent requirements on the use of kennels or yard fencing.

The task force's final report is still in draft form and is likely to be released in the fall.

Gardina said that after reading the report he might consider creating a second task force with members "who bring some different perspectives."

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Gardina would put bite on dogs that bite a lot

09/12/07

by **Bryan P. Sears**

Councilman Vince Gardina wants to put the squeeze on owners of pit bulls and other dogs with a history of biting.

Changes to county law favored by Gardina would create a special set of requirements that owners of pit bulls or other dogs found to be vicious would have to meet before they could obtain a dog license.

Gardina said he plans to introduce a bill at the County Council's Monday, Sept. 17, meeting that would require owners of pit bulls, pit bull mixes and dogs that have a history of biting to keep their dogs in covered, anchored runs. Those runs would have to be locked.

The bill, which was scheduled for introduction at the council's Sept. 4 meeting but was pulled for some last-minute tinkering, also would require that the dogs covered by the bill be muzzled when out in the public.

Violators would be subject to fines of \$1,000 a day.

The bill could apply to "a standard poodle, if it bit people or dogs before or if there's a history of repeated calls to a location. With pit bulls, it's just the breed," said Gardina, a Perry Hall Democrat who owns a standard poodle. Gardina represents the 5th District, which stretches along the Joppa Road corridor from Perry Hall to Towson.

The bill will ultimately define a pit bull and pit bull mix, Gardina said.

The bill is not based on any of the recommendations made by a task force on dog attacks created at Gardina's request. Health Officer Pierre Vigilance was asked to look at the issue and recommend changes to county law.

Gardina called for the review after a pit bull mauled 10-year-old Dominic Solesky in a Towson Manor Village alley. The dog ripped away a large portion of one of the boy's thighs, severing his femoral artery. Dominic survived but spent 17 days in the University of Maryland Shock Trauma Center and is undergoing physical therapy to regain full use of his leg.

The task force's two-page report was released Sept. 4 just before the council meeting. Gardina, who reviewed it with a reporter, said he was disappointed with the effort.

"I thought for sure they'd come up with some substantive recommendations," Gardina said.

The task force made seven recommendations. The majority of those focused on various aspects of public education. One recommended increased fines for

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owners of unlicensed dogs.

Licensing fees range from \$3 to \$12 depending on the age of the owner and if the dog is spayed or neutered. The fine for not licensing a dog is \$25 for the first offense and \$100 for each subsequent offense.

The task force estimates that only 17,000 of the 200,000 dogs in the county are licensed.

The group declined to recommend breed-specific legislation.

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Pit bull owners speak out

Breed-specific laws are not effective, they say

09/26/07
by *Bryan P. Sears*

It won't work.

That's what pit bull owners are saying about legislation proposed by County Councilman Vince Gardina that would require owners of that breed and other dogs deemed dangerous to be kept in locked, anchored runs, among other restrictions.

"Breed-specific legislation is ineffective and woefully out of date," said pit bull owner Lauren Abel.

Abel, a college student from Harford County, commented on the law at a Sept. 17 County Council meeting.

Abel and others spoke out against the bill on the night it was introduced. The bill has attracted the attention of pit bull owners from around the state and the country.

The council is scheduled to discuss the bill at its Oct. 7 work session. A final vote is scheduled for Oct. 15.

The proposed law would require owners of pit bull or mixed pit bull breeds or other individual dogs that have been declared dangerous to keep the animals in anchored, outdoor runs that are locked and covered. Those same dogs would have to be muzzled when out in public.

Violators would be subject to a \$1,000 per day fine.

Gardina's proposal is in response to the mauling of a 10-year-old boy in Towson Manor Village in April. That attack nearly killed Dominic Solesky. The boy is still undergoing physical therapy to help him regain the use of his leg after a pit bull ripped away his thigh and severed his femoral artery.

The law defines pit bulls as any member of the Staffordshire bull terrier, American Staffordshire terrier or American pit bull terrier breeds or any dog that is a mix of any of those breeds.

Determining the breed of the dog often can be difficult, according to a 2000 study on dog bite-related deaths nationwide from 1979 to 1998 by the Centers for Disease Control. Optimal enforcement might hinge on time-consuming and complicated pedigree analysis, according to the report.

Mark Warren, a Perry Hall resident, said his pit bull mix, Steve, is a perfect

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family pet known for frolicking in the park.

"I take exception to having to do something special," Warren told the council.

"Laws like this punish owners who are good. They don't punish owners who are bad."

Gardina, a Democrat who represents the 5th District including Perry Hall and Towson, was not available for comment by press time.

The bill is co-sponsored by Councilman Ken Oliver, a Democrat who represents the 4th District, which includes Randallstown and Woodlawn.

Singling out pit bulls is wrong, Warren said.

"Other dogs bite," he said.

In all, the CDC report found that pit bull or pit bull-type dogs were responsible for 118 deaths over the period of the study -- the most of any breed.

Researchers pointed out that the number is misleading because other breeds with smaller numbers of total bite incidents had higher rates of fatalities than pit bulls.

The report raised concerns that a breed-specific ban would drive people to turn to another breed that has the same qualities they had sought in the banned animal.

A recent review by a county task force estimated that only about 9 percent of the roughly 200,000 dogs that live in the county are licensed.

It is not known how many of the licensed dogs are pit bulls, according to county officials.

Some pit bull owners said Gardina's proposal would drive owners of the breed to keep their dogs off the books.

"What it's going to give way to is people having more of these dogs underground," said Killy Bins, a pit bull owner from Catonsville.

The task force rejected the creation of breed-specific laws in favor of education.

Gardina criticized the efforts and recommendations of the task force in an interview earlier this month.

The CDC report praised additional education efforts in other jurisdictions but said "these approaches appear formally unevaluated for effectiveness."

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Just say no to caging pit bulls

10/17/07

The County Council on Oct. 15 defeated a proposal by Councilman Vincent Gardina that would have required owners of pit bull breeds and other individual dogs judged to be dangerous to be kept in locked, secure enclosures when outside.

The measure, defeated 6-1, also would have fined violators \$1,000 a day.

Gardina had proposed the measure after the April 28 attack on Dominic Solesky.

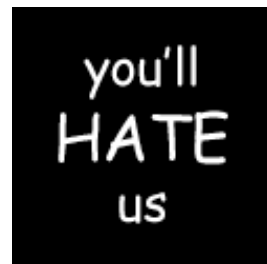
The bill met with stiff resistance from pit bull owners and from other councilmen unconvinced the breed-specific legislation would be effective.

In the end, Gardina was the only one on the seven-member council who supported the legislation.

"The testimony presented showed there were some serious flaws in breed-specific legislation," said Council Chairman Sam Moxley, a Catonsville Democrat. "It's not just pit bulls that can be dangerous."

Before the vote, Gardina removed a provision requiring muzzles on pit bulls and other, individual dangerous dogs.

-- Bryan P. Sears



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