

Promoting compassion and understanding for our bully friends



Publisher Heather Davis with her rescued pit bull pal, Pooh Bear

Even underweight, he was a big, muscular hulking mass of a dog: a brindle-and-white American Pit Bull Terrier with an enormous head and an intent stare. He'd shown up in our backyard one bitterly cold winter morning, covered in snow and sleet. He'd outgrown the old green nylon collar that was now embedded in his thick neck. We soon learned that he was terrified of humans, and that he'd escaped from an abusive environment nearby in East Nashville, where he'd been chained for the duration of his young life. He spooked easily but came around every morning and night for the food I'd leave out, and slept among the hay bedding in the cedar shed intended for the feral cats. Week by week he came closer to me as I lured him with food, but I could never quite catch him.

I knew I had to help him before he fell into the wrong hands. Some would consider him a prime male fit for fighting. Neighbors had already complained about us aiding a "vicious dog" and some had called animal control asking to have him euthanized. So, I enlisted the help of Bill, my husband at the time, to create a trap door in our basement. We set the trap with fresh food and, after several attempts, finally caught him. Bill retreated upstairs and bid me good luck while I settled in for what I assumed would be a long night. Sitting there alone in the basement, face-to-face with this huge, growling canine hunkered in the corner, my heart broke for him and for what he'd suffered. I gently spoke to him, allowing him just enough space so that he didn't feel trapped but close enough so that he had no choice but to adjust to my presence. Over the next half hour, his growling began to soften and his body became less rigid. Then, suddenly, he gave me a startle: he glanced at me sidelong over his shoulder and then dove onto me, knocking me on my back... and then began to smother my face in big, sloppy kisses.

The photos above were taken only days after bringing him into our household, which consisted of three cats and three other dogs. He immediately attached himself to me: spooning me in bed, napping with me on the sofa, curling in my lap like a kitten. He played fabulously with the other dogs and was curious but gentle with the felines. With socialization and training, he quickly began to trust the two-legged kind and decided that he loved children and women in particular. Although timid around men, he warmed up with some patience. And I've

never met a dog so eager to please or more affectionate. Walking him down the street, people would cringe and move away. "What a monster!" a woman cried out one day. "Yeah, a *snuggle* monster," I replied.

Pooh Bear spent many happy months with us before he found his perfect home: a loving, out-of-state family with two children and another dog. He has been with them nearly a year now and has become a beloved and loyal member of the family.

In a nutshell, bullies get a bad rap—and it's up to us as animal advocates to be their voice and to promote responsibility, humane education and positive awareness. That's why I'm so excited that Bless the Bullies is hosting their 3rd Annual National Pit Bull Awareness Day on October 24. In support of their effort, and in celebration of our bully friends, we have featured Roxie on our cover, as well as her bully friends on page 11—all of which are adoptable through The Humane Society of Sumner County. And be sure to check out "Beautiful Bullies" on pages 20-21, as well as Kat Martin's bully tips on page 13. If you're already a bully advocate, you can help by promoting awareness, volunteering, writing legislators and more. And if you're not yet a fan of pit bulls—or, if you've just never had the opportunity to experience them but would like to learn more—I invite you to explore the websites listed on page 21 to gain a better understanding of these beautiful breeds, their ongoing plight and how you can help make a positive difference.

Finally, I'd like to thank Greymont Kennels for coming on board as our back cover sponsor this issue! Like many small businesses, we are struggling during this hard economic time, and their support has gone a long way in helping us print this issue of Nashville Paw! We are proud to partner with a local company that offers a total canine experience and that supports our animal welfare mission.

I hope you enjoy our fall issue! As always, I love to hear from you and welcome your comments, questions and suggestions at nashvillepawmag@gmail.com.

For the Animals,



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