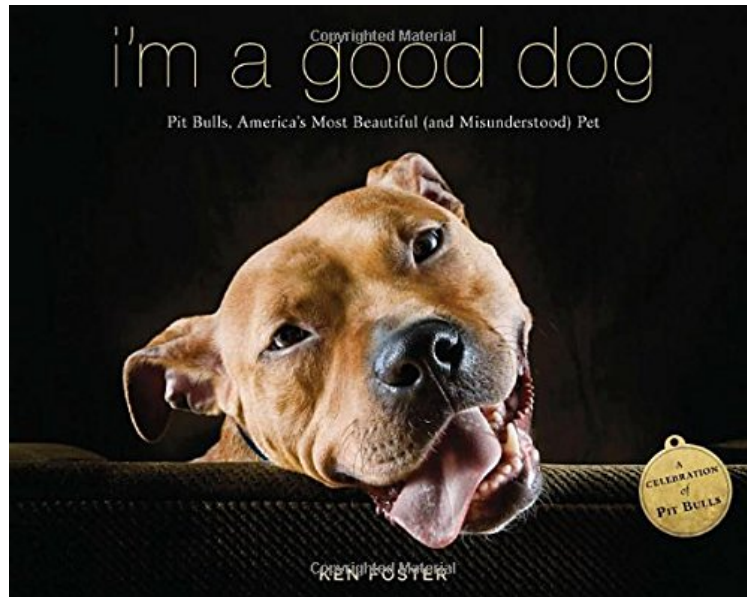


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I'm a Good Dog: Pit Bulls, America's Most Beautiful (and Misunderstood) Pet

Ken Foster

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Ken Foster : I'm a Good Dog: Pit Bulls, America's Most Beautiful (and Misunderstood) Pet before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised I'm a Good Dog: Pit Bulls, America's Most Beautiful (and Misunderstood) Pet:

402 of 415 people found the following review helpful. love that dog!By Susie Book LoverI am so glad someone finally wrote a book like this. I have a pit bull and he is the nicest dog in the world. Someone dropped him off in front of our house on the coldest day of the year and I watched him circle the intersection for an hour and finally called him over to the door and gave him a hotdog and a piece of cheese. He sat on the front porch looking in the window. Our cat sat in the window looking out at him. I wondered what would happen if I let him in. When my husband got home we let him into the garage and fed him some kibble we borrowed from the neighbor next door. He was a beautiful Brindle color and maybe 6 months old. We finally let him into the kitchen. We blocked off the doorway with a card table and he spent the night in the warm kitchen while the cat watched him through a crack. They made friends and the next day we took away the cardtable and let her go into the kitchen to see him. They became the best of buddies and he has been the best dog we have ever had. So loving, so good. You show me a bad dog and I have to look no farther than its owner for the cause. Enough of all this bad publicity. These are great dogs. Thanks for writing this book. I loved it.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Aww cute pupsBy C-DubSuper cute pics of the most beautiful little friends you could ever want. Book does a great service to combat all the dumb misinformation and media frenzy about Pit-type pups. Pits aren't for everyone because they are quite zesty and can have big personalities, so if you are a purse-dog type, you suck and live in a bubble. Get a real dog! Anyway, these babies have a lust for life and live to serve their families, and you can see plenty of smiles - humans AND bullies - in this book.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Pit Bulls Rock!By VeganmanIf you love dogs, or if you have concerns about pit

bulls, you owe it to yourself to read this book. It will likely change any negative thoughts you may have about pit bulls into admiration and respect. They are wonderful dogs; I know because I have one and I love her. She loves people and gets along well with other dogs, too.

Filled with inspiring stories and photographs, this heartfelt tribute to the pit bull celebrates one of America's most popular yet misunderstood dogs. Perhaps more than any other breed, the pit bull has been dogged by negative stereotypes. In truth, pit bulls are innately wonderful family pets, as capable of love and good deeds as any other type of dog. Setting the record straight, Ken Foster sings the praises of pit bulls in *I'm a Good Dog*, a gorgeously illustrated, tenderly written tribute to this most misunderstood of canines. Founder of the Sula Foundation, which promotes responsible pit bull ownership in New Orleans, and the author of two acclaimed books about abandoned dogs, Foster has made it his mission to bring overlooked canines into the limelight. *I'm a Good Dog* traces the fascinating history of this particularly maligned breed. A century ago, the pit bull was considered a family dog, featured in family photos and trusted as loving companions for children. More recently, pit bulls have been portrayed by the media as stereotypes of everything they are not. Foster shatters that reputation through moving profiles of pit bulls that serve as therapy dogs, athletic heroes, search-and-rescue dogs, and educators, not to mention as loving pets. Foster also profiles many pit bull lovers, from Helen Keller and Dr. Seuss to actor Todd Cerveris, who took his pit bull on tour with him for the musical *Spring Awakening*. Proving that there's much to love and nothing to fear, *I'm a Good Dog* restores the pit bull to its rightful place as friend, family member, athlete and entertainer.

"Fellow pit bull lovers, this is a brilliant bible of the glorious, gorgeous terriers."--Rainn Wilson, star of *The Office*

About the Author A writer and teacher, Ken Foster is the author of the bestseller *The Dogs Who Found Me* and its sequel, *Dogs I Have Met*. His collection of short stories, *The Kind I'm Likely to Get*, was a *New York Times* Notable Book. His work has been featured in *Salon*, *Time Out New York*, *The New York Times Book*, and other publications. He lives in New Orleans with his dogs Brando, Zephyr, Douglas, and Bananas.

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In memory of Sula, and my parents.

For close to 10 million Americans, it's a blocky-headed pit bull type that awaits them at home. The mythology of pit bulls rarely matches the real thing. just dogs: an introduction

BY THE TIME I LEARNED WHAT A PIT BULL REALLY was, it was too late; I was already in love. Of course I'd heard the stories, but I had never put these almost mythological urban tales together with the dogs in my neighborhood. I was living in Manhattan, just blocks away from a dog park, and dog watching was a spectator sport among those of us who were still dogless. There were dogs of every shape and size, but my eye kept going to the short, stocky, exuberant dogs that seemed like cartoons. You could tell by the gleam in their eye they felt very lucky to be here, in the city, walking with the person they kept on the other end of a leash. Their heads were blocky and human. Their short coats made it seem like they were wearing costumes made of felt. It wasn't hard to imagine there might be a little person inside. And they were everywhere that there were people: in cafés, outside bodegas, eating at restaurants.

By the time I'd decided to take the plunge into the world of dog ownership, I knew this was the dog for me. Nothing fancy, just an American dog. I was too shy to ask what kind of dog they might be—it seemed so personal!—but finally I broke down and popped the question. It was a girl dog named Dumpling, and the man walking her said, "She's a pit bull." Dumpling smiled at me and wagged her tail; this was not the image I had in mind when I heard the words pit bull. In fact, I didn't really have any particular image in mind—that's how little I'd concerned myself with the world of dogs. So I immediately began searching for a pit bull I might adopt. I lived in a tiny one-room apartment, but I figured living with me and going for long walks through the day would be better than staying at a shelter. I went to the ASPCA's facility on the Upper East Side and fell in love with a sad black pit bull named Mauro, but he seemed too big for me. Then I found a dog named Baby on Petfinder and went to Brooklyn's BARC shelter to meet him. He was kind of skinny and lean and had a striped coat that was like nothing I'd ever seen, and his name had been changed from Baby to Brando. He didn't look anything like Dumpling, but I fell in love with him as soon as our eyes met. He seemed fragile and eager, and I began to worry about him as soon as I left the shelter. It didn't matter so much what his breed was. I fell in love with the individual quirks that made him who he was: his immediate bond with his people, his separation anxiety when his people were gone, his ability to convince me that we should nap together within the first five minutes we were home.

Brando, the pit bull who isn't really a pit bull.

Ken Foster with Sula on their New Orleans stoop.

But even though he didn't look like any dog I'd seen before, other people thought he was a pit bull, too. His primary pit bull trait was that striped brindle coat, which people often mistake as breed-specific when in fact there is a wide variety of dogs who share it. The staff at the shelter decided to list him as a "shepherd mix" on his city license, so, they told me, no one would "come knocking on my door." It became clear to me, confusing as it was, that a single drop of pit bull blood in a dog's lineage designated it as a lower form of dog in the eyes of some, regarded with suspicion and stripped of its individual rights. Yet it wasn't until years later that I really understood the predicament that pit bulls were in. By this time I was living in Florida, and I opened my door one day to find a small black-and-white pit bull waiting to greet me. She was compact and muscular, and it seemed that each part of her body was of equal proportion: head, torso, rump. She was a classic pit bull, and when I called the local animal

organizations, no one would help. I brought her home, temporarily, I thought, and then we fell in love. And when you fall in love with a pit bull—and you inevitably will, if you meet one, fall in love—you need to be prepared to answer a lot of questions from skeptics on the street. “Why would you have a pit bull?” they ask, and sometimes they aren’t quite that polite. Does the fact that people question our pit bull love make it that much more intense?

Possibly—because, in the case of Sula, I know that I saved her life, and despite what some people say, saving an animal’s life is never a selfless act; there are huge emotional rewards. Like all forbidden love, from Romeo and Juliet on down the line, each time anyone questions or disapproves of our love, we defiantly love each other even more than before. But I think, like most other pit bull owners I know, that my love of Sula had more to do with this: She made me laugh; she had the good sense to turn and run away from bad music on the street; she liked to hug. And she loved to play practical jokes like hiding my glasses while I was taking a bath. We even had our own song: Corinne Bailey Rae’s “Like a Star” was, I am certain, written for us. Sula changed my life in a different way from Brando, because it was her idea, it seemed, to move on in. And I accepted her proposal, without having any idea how it would work out. She also changed me because there wasn’t a day that people didn’t judge her solely on how she looked. Pit bulls are devoted. They are known to sing, proudly, in ridiculously operatic voices. I know pit bulls who have nursed kittens and another who adopted a piglet as its own. And this I know from photographs of them in New Orleans wading through water up to their necks: when you take away their unmistakable dog bodies, their round skulls and even-set eyes make them look remarkably like infants or old, bald men, or occasionally like the overly pancaked face of Judy Garland in decline. And like infants, old men, and Judy Garland, pit bulls are capable of expressing anguish and despair, as well as their euphoric joy in being alive. Pit bulls can convey an incredible joy at being alive. What did I do before pit bulls? Sometimes I can’t remember, no matter how hard I try. I went to the movies. I found the time to read every magazine to which I subscribed. I wrote books and magazine articles in which not a single animal appeared. I traveled incessantly. Yet I don’t recall much joy in any of those things. Pit bulls expect more than just being a pet, so eventually, I rearranged my priorities to fit them in. Increasingly, they were the subjects of my work, and even when I was writing about people, it was the pit bulls of the world who took on the role of my muse. Sula, who is no longer with me, lives on in the foundation I named after her. One of the things she taught me is that there is a whole world of people who love their pit bulls, and everyone else’s too. The Sula Foundation is completely volunteer-run, and we work to educate and promote responsible pit bull ownership in New Orleans and beyond. We do some rescue, but most of what we do is build relationships with other pit bull owners, through low-cost vaccination clinics, spay/neuter programs, training, and advocacy. Through this work, I’ve become embedded in a social fabric that wraps above, beside, and below my own. Pit bulls are what we have in common, and once it is known that we have that in common, all other social barriers are gone. The Sula Foundation was inspired by the author’s first pit bull, Sula. But there is still work to do. I have a T-shirt that reads “I Love My Pit Bull” in groovy 1970s-style lettering. Actually, I have three of these shirts, so that I know there is always one clean and ready to wear. (I also have shirts that read “my pit bull is a SAINT” and “Pit Bulls for Peace”—all part of a series of shirts designed to raise funds for the Sula Foundation.) People see me wearing them and ask where I found them, or they point and say, “That’s funny!” because they know pit bulls as dogs that are undeserving of anyone’s love. “But I do love my pit bull,” I tell them, and then, if one of my dogs is with me, I might demonstrate the famously enthusiastic pit bull kiss. That is what we do when we truly love things, whether dogs or people or works of art. We want to show them off in the best possible light. So this is my introduction. Some people might say that my point of view is a little bit skewed. And to them I say that the answer should be clear on every page that follows. Yes. Absolutely, yes. Pit bulls are known and loved for their kisses. “Bed hog” is one term used to describe pit bulls. What’s in a pit bull? WIGGLY. THAT’S THE WORD MOST OFTEN USED by pit bull owners to describe their dogs. Others are loyal, compassionate, devoted, affectionate, couch potato, courageous, lapdog, snugglepuss, heroic, kissy-faced, lovebug, bed hog, pansy, soul mate, family. And if you let them, pit bull owners will never hesitate to tell you how they first met their doggy love. How they had never been a dog person before, but then they stumbled upon this dog: at a shelter, on the street, after reluctantly agreeing to look after a neighbor’s dog before learning it was a pit bull. They will tell you that this dog, this pit bull, was so much different from what they’d been led to expect. This dog loved them. Or they will tell you that their family has kept pit bulls for generations; this was the dog that waited every day for them to return from school. They may tell you they had never realized that there was another kind of dog, or that there were people who felt differently about pit bulls than they and everyone in their family did. You might also talk to breeders, who speak about bloodlines—Boudreaux and Razor’s Edge—and weight-pulling competitions, and you may realize, in spite of what some people say, that these people love their dogs, too. You might realize this while sitting on the sidewalk with the breeder’s sixty-pound dog in your lap; or maybe it is the opposite, and you are the one who is trying to get the dog to climb on top of you to say hello, but it won’t listen to you because it is just too well-behaved. Pit bulls are smart. They are athletic. They can be trained to do just about anything, including leaping through the precise markers of an agility course, or competing in Frisbee and flyball. In fact, the words pit bull owners use to describe their dogs aren’t much different from the words other dog owners use to portray the dogs that have wormed their way into their hearts. The pit bull crowd may be a bit more passionate with their expressions of appreciation, but then so are their dogs. Pit bulls are known for their determination

to give kisses. It's not unusual for a pit bull to drench the entire face and head of a human they haven't seen for a while—or even for just a few hours. They run to greet their masters, hips swiveling like Elvis, and perform happy dances on their arrival home. They love to love, and they love being loved, which is what makes it so easy to fall in love with them, too. But what is a pit bull, anyway? That is the question that can turn the scene from collective cheerleading to something resembling a high school debate. Like a Rorschach inkblot, the pit bull means a number of different things—and different dogs—depending on an individual's point of view. A pit bull greets her owner after a few minutes of separation. Despite their differing looks and lineage, any of these dogs may signify "pit bull" to many people, from the large-headed Staffie type at the left to the bull terrier and more typical American pit bull terrier type at the right.