

# Up front/commentary: Dogs claim their owners are the ones who are responsible



Tribune/Kyle Mills

Posted: Monday, July 16, 2012 12:00 am | *Updated: 12:13 am, Mon Jul 16, 2012.*

## **Kathy Hedberg of the Tribune**

I was telling a story the other day to my dog, Christmas Belle, about a couple of dogs I'd heard about that got out of their yard and attacked a mailman. The dogs, apparently, were fed up with junk mail and just making a preventive strike.

She sighed and said, "It's owners like that who make dogs look bad."

"What do you mean, 'owners?'" I asked. "The owner didn't attack people - the dogs did - what kind of a rude comment is that?"

Christmas Belle has a tendency to be judgmental against humans when it comes to being responsible for their animals, and she cited a story she'd read in *The New Yorker* some time back that talked about studies that laid the blame for miscreant pets solely at the feet of their owners.

Any kind of dog can be dangerous - now this is according to Christmas Belle; I didn't read the story in *The New Yorker* because I have to work for a living while she sits around on her backside and peruses magazines - and no particular breed is more likely to attack humans than another. Even wiener dogs have been known to rough up human beings, which, if you know wiener dogs like I do you won't be too surprised to find that out.

What makes dogs dangerous, Christmas Belle said, is irresponsible owners - people who are agitated themselves, belligerent, unkind, neglectful of their pets and others. A dog comes from a family like that and no telling what it might do when provoked. Whereas dogs who come from homes where the owners take good care of themselves and their pets are seldom a threat to anyone, even cats.

Pets, in other words, reflect their owners' dispositions. You find a dog out looking for trouble and you can trace that right back to the home where they came from. Or so says Christmas Belle.

There may be some truth to that theory but I don't buy it all the way. I've had dogs and other pets that displayed weird and obnoxious personalities and I don't think they got it from me. I had a dog awhile back, for instance, that liked to chew the siding off the house and once even bit right through a metal door knob. Neither I nor my children have ever done anything like that - I don't know where the dog got it, but I'm not to blame.

On the other hand, you can see where coming from a tense or dysfunctional home could negatively affect an animal just like it does a child. True, any environment can throw a bad seed once in awhile, but for the most part people and pets who live in peaceful homes where everyone is well-cared and loved are likely to turn out that way themselves.

And I must say, Christmas Belle doesn't have much to complain about. Sometimes I pull chunks of her hair out when she's shedding and she doesn't like that, but generally she is treated with nothing but kindness and respect.

She even has plenty of time on her hands to sit around reading magazines and making biting judgments against the human race.

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