

26 Apr 2016 The Vancouver Sun STEPHEN
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Get ready for a racket if you dump on bad dog owners

Column gets some barking mad — and showcases a lot of denial

Woo hoo, such a wuss when it comes to
man's best friend.



RITA KOCHMARJOVA Dogs will be dogs.

Owners, however, need to take
responsibility for their pets, Stephen Hume
writes.

That would be your idiot, freak, scaredy-cat,
sensationalizing, pooch-hating columnist, of
course, squarely in the crosshairs of the
righteous dog-lovers' judge, jury and firing
squad.

The verdict of this guilty-until-proven-guilty
show trial has little to do with logic and
much to do with denial, romanticism,
anthropomorphizing, affirmation bias and
breed stereotyping. A few exhibits in self-
defence. "I stopped reading when I saw
two Yorkshire terriers lumped in with
aggressive dogs."

Exhibit 1: An out-of-control Yorkie killed a
child in Britain last summer. Another Yorkie
sent a kid to hospital for facial surgery. Cute
little dogs; not so cute little teeth when
running amok. **All dogs will bite. All bites
can be dangerous.**

Do I tremble at a yapping off-leash Yorkie?
No, I don't fear what can be punted — but
why should that possibility ever be remotely
necessary for a small dog just because its
owner is too lazy and self-indulgent to
control it?

"Bounding over and jumping up is just the
way dogs socialize."

Exhibit 2, from another reader: "Recently
my 83-year-old friend was pushed over by
an off-leash dog who was apparently in a
training session with a trainer and owner.
After being knocked to the ground, upon
which she suffered torn ligaments in her
knee, she was reproached by the 'trainer' not
to approach an offleash dog. They didn't
even help her stand up."

Big dogs suddenly socializing with seniors can have its downside.

“My Belgian Malinois is 90 pounds of pure happiness, yet people like you immediately think he is aggressive ... the best thing to do is be proactive and teach your child how to behave around dogs in order to prevent dog attacks, not to blame dogs for being dogs.”

Exhibit 3: In Calgary just a couple of weeks ago, a 12-yearold was savaged in his own back yard and sent to hospital when a Belgian Malinois escaped the neighbour’s yard. In February last year a Belgian Malinois attacked a four-year-old California boy. His leg was amputated. In December, a seven-year-old girl in Virginia was savaged by two Belgian Malinois.

Everyone was shocked. Everyone is always shocked. Such friendly dogs, so good with kids — “I couldn’t imagine in a million years being in a situation like that,” said a stunned neighbour.

Exactly. Failed imagination is not the dog’s fault. Don’t blame dogs for being dogs. Blame owners for being so narcissistic they’ve lost the capacity to foresee the possibility of their dog going into attack mode and then being unable to control it. “A Labrador being aggressive?” Exhibit 4: In 2014, a Labrador ripped the face of an eight-yearold Florida girl. A “gentle pooch” of a Labrador in South Carolina dismembered a baby. Everyone was mystified. Everyone is always mystified. “A very gentle dog,” the neighbour said to the local newspaper. “A beautiful dog. I went over to say hi one day, and he came right up to me and stopped. I rubbed his head, then he left.” And tore the baby apart.

Everyone was shocked in England, too, when a friendly lab abruptly seized a three-yearold by the face at a family picnic causing what the Daily Mail called “horrific injuries.” And labs aren’t ageist; last spring in Quebec a lab jumped a fence and attacked a 75-year-old man.

Dog enthusiasts denounce breed-specific stereotyping of dangerous dogs. But they enthusiastically stereotype breeds — the breeds they own — as harmless. The Argument: All dogs of all breeds, large or small, can be dangerous, just as all loaded guns can fire unexpectedly. Big dogs are more dangerous than small ones, just as a 12-gauge shotgun does more damage than a .22 — however, if either hits you in the right place, you won’t know the difference. Responsible gun owners know only a fool takes the safety off a loaded weapon until the moment it’s intended to be fired.

Why does this precautionary principle elude some dog owners? Some dog owners, I reiterate. Responsible dog owners understand: All dogs can bite; all dogs can maim; all dogs can kill wildlife, pets or people.



Conclusion: Dog owners have a duty to keep their pets under control at all times. If they can’t, they deserve to be held fully accountable.