

THE SEASON HAS ARRIVED.
CANADA SAVINGS BONDS are now available.

Replay | www.csfb.gc.ca



the star.com

For visiting pooch, law is the pits

November 12, 2008

ANTONIA ZERBIASIAS

Somewhere in eastern Manitoba, Kerry Pakarinen and his best friend are headed for Toronto.

On the Trans-Canada from Vancouver for four months, they're equipped with nothing more than a shopping cart and sleeping bags, raising awareness for the plight of Canada's homeless.

They've been welcomed everywhere and even received favourable coverage in print and on TV.



COLIN CORNEAU/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Kerry Pakarinen's dog Preacher resembles a pit bull, but no one seems sure exactly what breed he is. The duo are on a cross-country awareness walk for the homeless that will take them to Ontario, which bans pit bulls. (Nov. 12, 2008)

Unfortunately, the moment they cross into Ontario, ~~one of them could face a death sentence.~~

That's because Preacher, whom Pakarinen identified to the *Calgary Herald* as a Bullmastiff, looks to many dog experts, like a pit bull cross.

Which means he isn't welcome here.

In Ontario, ever since 2005, when then-Attorney General Michael Bryant cruelly banned the breed – ignoring the expertise of animal organizations, humane societies and veterinarians – any dog born in the past three years that even vaguely resembles a pit bull is guilty until proven innocent.

For them, it's the needle, or the gas chamber.

No exceptions. Not for people who move to Ontario. Not for military personnel transferred here. Not even for Preacher who is just passing through.

In fact, if bestselling author Cesar Millan, star of the hit show *The Dog Whisperer*, were to bring his popular Daddy here, the goofy-grinned dog would be dead meat.

So, if even a celebrity dog is doomed, what chance does a homeless mutt like Preacher have?

But Pakarinen might be unaware of this idiotic legislation. It hasn't been mentioned in any of the reports on him and, indeed, reporters who interviewed him in other provinces were equally clueless when I asked.

Trouble is, nobody can reach him because he's on the road, and has no phone.

There's no way to warn him of the danger ahead.

Steve Barker, a dog trainer who last year quit Toronto for B.C. where his champions Brooklynn and Star are safe from the law, says all kinds of family pets – including Labradors and Jack Russell crosses – have "have been targeted by authorities since the ban."

Which is why he fears for Preacher.

He, and other experts who saw his news photos, believe he "could be anything – boxer/pit bull mix, mastiff mix, pit bull/Shar Pei, Rhodesian Ridgeback mix.

"If (we) can look at this dog and be unsure, then so can anyone else in Ontario, particularly those animal control officers who may have a bias against this type of dog."

Let's not kid ourselves. There's racism – against humans – involved here.

"Pits" – and I use the word advisedly since, technically, there is no such breed – are the most common inner-city dog in North America. They don't always get the best of care. Sometimes they're used as four-legged guns, and even tortured to become aggressive.

As a result, even the sweetest pooches get an unfair rap.

Remember U.S. football star Michael Vick and his fighting dogs? After he went to prison last year, most of his pits were adopted, and some even went on to become therapy dogs in hospitals.

Still, every time a pit is involved in an incident, the media are all over it. But, just last week, a boxer almost tore the face off a Vernon, B.C., boy and it barely caused a ripple.

Public hysteria based on fear and ignorance always leads to unnecessary tragedy – whether we're talking witch burnings or breed bans. About 100 years ago, the *New York Times* fuelled stupid rumours that white Pomeranians – now known as American Eskimos – were the cause of rabies. All were shot or clubbed to death on sight, or seized and drowned in steel cages.

Look how far we've come since then.

Not very.

As for Pakarinen and Preacher, I hope they're not at the end of the road.

Antonia Zerbisias is a Living section columnist. azerbisias@thestar.ca. She blogs at thestar.blogs.com.