

# The Huffington Post



Peggy Drexler

## There is Fury in the Canine Nation

Posted August 25, 2007 | 01:11 PM (EST)

I was sitting around with my husband and teenage daughter - and our ever-present golden lab Stuart - when I happened to remark that I didn't think Stuart was all that bright.

Retribution came swiftly.

My husband demanded to know why I would say such a thing about a dog that - with the proper training - could almost certainly master long division. My daughter rattled off his encyclopedic knowledge of commands - sit, shake hands, stay and, well, it kind of drops off after that - unless you count: "Stuart, sit there and look happy."

And Stuart took it all in with his normal hanging-tongue and love-struck gaze, until he was interrupted by some pressing business in his lower regions.

As I listened to their defense of Stuart's intellect, it occurred to me that Michael Vick will never play professional football again.

He has messed with the wrong crowd.

According to the Humane Society, there are 73 million owned dog in the United States. Although owned and owner are probably misnomers. How about: inter-species cohabitaters?

Almost 40 percent of US household share their home with at least one dog. Of those, 25 percent have two dogs, and 14 percent have three or more.

Yes, the canine nation is mighty. But numbers are only the dimension of Michael Vick's problems.

There is also the depth. Ask any dog lover, and they will tell you that these animals who share our lives are not property. They are all members of an extended family. Visit your local dog park on a Saturday morning, and listen to conversation strikingly similar to a

play-date - with parents discussing the best day care while keeping a close eye on the bullies.

Michael Vick crept into this family under the cover of the deep Virginia woods, and did evil things inside pitch black buildings behind the house on Moonlight Road. He has admitted to brutalizing, torturing and killing not the most cuddly members of the clan, but members just the same.

Just to get a sense of what he is up against, consider some recent trends.

The outside dog house is a relic of our less-enlightened past. Recent statistics say that 80 percent of dogs live indoors.

An American Pet Products Manufacturer's Association survey found that these house dwellers often enjoy their own private space - often their own room. Confirmation of that came Friday in a USA Today story that interior designers have a hot new niche in designing dog rooms - often including DVD players looped with animal shows and separate canopied outdoor entrances with their own address.

The APPMA says we'll be spending \$50 billion on pets by the end of the decade. A lot of that is for food. A lot of it is not.

A quick scan of a site called puppytrends.com turns up Kate Spade dog bowls, fruit-scented cleanser for "dirty little fur faces", raised and grassed indoor potty areas, designer dining tables and a 60s retro-print designer dog coat. Other sites offer Swarovski-encrusted collars, dog strollers and flowery spring party dresses.

There are books for planning the perfect dog birthday party, and helpful advice for dog weddings. I found a group advocating -- and offering to facilitate -- marriages between people and dogs (Isn't that what former Sen. Rick Santorum said would happen if this whole gay marriage thing got out of hand?).

Interestingly, you find little of any of this for cats. Experts say people don't see cats as a personal reflection of themselves in the way they do dogs. Besides, I'm pretty sure cats would laugh about it behind our backs

Dog funerals are big. As cremation cuts into traditional human funerals, there are now 500 funeral homes offering pet funerals - up from a handful 10 years ago. The number would be much higher, the industry says, were it not for states that frown on the idea of commingling the departed - which is why some firms are building \$100,000 separate facilities for pets-only cremations.

Maybe it's an uncertain world that is driving people to overlook the slobber and embrace unconditional love. Maybe it's boomers doing a little emotional back-filling as kids move out. Maybe it's the increase in singles and young marrieds having kids later, who hate coming home to an empty apartment.

Whatever the reasons, it's big trouble for Michael Vick. When he leaves prison, the PETA people will be waiting, and they will hound him (the puns are flying) every place he tries to earn a dollar. Who Let the Dogs Out? will become his life's anthem.

Scanning the extended NFL player rap sheet, there is gambling, recreational and performance-enhancing drugs, DUI manslaughters, assaults, sexual assaults, illegal weapons, disorderly conduct and even murder. In the majority of cases, the highly-paid perp admits the crime, does the time or pays the fine -- then works his way back onto the field and into the good graces of a public that can overlook a lot in return for power, speed and a little remorse.

Not this time.

Sure, many of those who consider Michael Vick a serial killer wrap their little four-legged darlings in angora and put on padded booties when the temperature dips. But they are legion in numbers. They are mad as hell. And they won't forget.