

BCSPCA

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News and Features from the BC Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Gentle pit bull wins 2008 Animal Courage Award

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Holly's life began on Christmas Eve, 2007.

That was the day the little black and white pit bull was wrenched away from her puppies, shot in the face and left to die in the parking lot of a grocery store in Cobble Hill.

But it was also the day she stole the heart of Sandi Trent, manager of the Cowichan & District Branch of the BC SPCA.

"She embodies not only heroism, but also courage," says Trent, who adopted the gentle dog into her own already large family of animals.

Holly was presented with the 2008 BC SPCA Animal Courage Award during a special awards dinner May 30 at UBC.

Bleeding profusely from her face and back on that fateful Christmas Eve afternoon, Holly was rushed to nearby Mill Bay Veterinary Hospital by SPCA animal control officer Rick Hunter. There, the emaciated dog, who was also suffering from a horrible case of mange, had two bullets extracted from her back and thigh. Additional bullet fragments in her jaw were too small and shattered to remove.

The following day – Christmas morning – Trent and Special Provincial Constable Dale Bakken went door to door in the area looking for any witnesses to the brutal attack but there were no solid leads for the investigation.

Holly, however, still had much to accomplish. Chemainus Community School approached Trent about delivering a five-week humane education

course to students ages 10 and up, and Holly, who within a month had become the shelter's official "greeter," was a natural for the job.

"Holly had a lesson to teach," says Trent. "She became a logical ambassador for second-chance animals, and for her breed, breaking down some of the stereotypes about her breed."

Bakken began taking Holly to the school, where children would sit enthralled listening to her story of triumph and later crowd around the small, meek dog to stroke her fur, which still bears the scars of her ordeal.

"Holly asks for little and gives everyone that meets her an entirely new perspective of not only pit bulls, but also animals that have suffered at the hands of human beings," says Trent.

During Holly's final school appearance at the end of the program, she was presented with a \$300-cheque for the SPCA as a thank-you from the children.

Today, Holly continues to appear before schools and service organizations. Her amazing story of survival is helping to teach a generation of pet guardians not to tolerate cruelty toward animals.

"She is living proof that animals have an endless capacity for love and forgiveness - traits that we humans sometimes lack," says Trent.

The BC SPCA Awards Program honours both people and animals who have made outstanding contributions to animal welfare during the past year. Recipients include veterinarians, staff, volunteers and, of course, animal heroes.

Holly shared the Animal Courage Award with Onida, a three-legged Australian shepherd who chewed her way out of a leg-hold trap in a rural area near Williams Lake.