

'Be a tree' good defense against attack

By John Ross

FOR THE TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Sunday, March 19, 2006

Dear Dog Talk: I really enjoy reading your "Dog Talk" column. I'm the cofounder of Doggone Safe. It is the first federally incorporated, nonprofit organization dedicated solely to dog bite prevention and education. We now have offices in the U.S. and other countries as well. Our Web site is www.doggonesafe.com

We have won awards, and we are working hard to improve people's lives with their pet dogs by reducing dog bites and keeping dogs and families together. My life is dedicated to this area.

It's never easy when people ask the question, "What do I do if a dog attacks me?" It's difficult because both of us know that every situation is different. Giving advice with respect to "what you should do" can only really work if the person who wishes to use the advice understands how to use the advice. In order to be successful, people need to first be able to "read" what the dog is saying.

I'm an expert with respect to dog attacks and dog bite prevention. (I hate to use the word expert.) I would be glad to consult with you with respect to future questions such as the one you received and prompted some of your recent articles. I really think you would find the information regarding dog bite prevention useful and insightful.

You handled the situation with the dog on the beach well. Your example worked in the situation you were faced with. We recommend to people, when faced with an aggressive dog, to "be a tree." Stand perfectly still. "Be a tree" is the first line of defense. It will give you time to decide what you can and cannot do. It worked well for you.

One of the reasons that we have been so successful with Doggone Safe is the simple fact that our advice is from the child's point of view, not the dog's. We can only infer what the dog's emotional state is in any given situation.

I know that your readers will enjoy the information on our site. The more people that we reach, the better for all of us. Thanks for doing what you do and getting the word out to keep dogs and the people who love them together.

Dear What To Do: Thank you for writing. Your website www.doggonesafe.com is very interesting. I recommend that all "Dog Talk" readers who would like to learn more about handling dog attacks to check it out.

Dear Dog Talk: Have you seen the news footage about the woman in France who was mauled by the family pet? They finally named the breed, and it was a Labrador retriever. That just proves that any dog, not just the pit bull breed, can rip someone's face off. I am so sick of this breed being getting a bad rap. The real problem is irresponsible owners. Punish the deed, not the breed!

Dear Old News: It had been mentioned in a previous "Dog Talk" column that a Labrador retriever was responsible for mauling the woman in France. I am aware that all dog breeds have the potential to be dangerous. However, statistics show that some breeds have more prevalent aggression issues than others.

My story of the dog that harassed me on the beach was not intended to single out pit bulls. It just so happened that the dog was a pit bull. If it makes pit bull owners feel better, when I was an 8-year-old paperboy, a beagle bit me on the knee.

John Ross writes the Dog Talk column for the Tribune-Review. He has been training dogs professionally for 30 years, and his newest book, "Adoptable Dog," is in bookstores now. He is the author of "Puppy Preschool" and "Dog Talk," both published by St. Martin's Press. For more information about Ross and his books, visit his Web site, www.the-real-dog-talk.com. Mail questions to John Ross at P.O. Box 1133, Palm City, FL 34990, or e-mail him at dogtalk1@bellsouth.net.