

A LETTER ABOUT A BITE

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Dog Training & Behaviour Modification

Dear Doggly Doers,

I want to share one of the first memories I have in life. It's 1985 and I'm on a family holiday on the Gold Coast, Queensland, sitting by the hotel pool with my parents nearby. The hotel owner has a large dog, that lives on the premises and there I am at the age of three, absolutely fascinated by this beautiful animal. So I sit close under his chin, touching his eyes, feeling his



teeth.... The next thing I remember is waking up in my mothers arms wrapped in a towel with blood everywhere. I was on my way to hospital where I had many stitches to my face and to the inside of my mouth to rejoin the tear in my cheek.

But make no mistake, I was one of the lucky ones. This dog did not try to maul me, nor did he want to kill me. He gave me one quick chomp to say "stop touching me I don't like it". That's it - just one bite caused all of this damage. Because my parents were not taught the warning signs, their little girl suffered all of this damage. Because the owner was not paying attention to his dog's body language, he lost his dog. Was it the dog's fault?

He may have given me warning signals to express his discomfort with me - he may have yawned, licked his lips, shifted his weight, stiffened or showed me the white of his eyes. He could have done all these



things within the 60 seconds that I was sitting with him. He finally growled and bit me, but by then it was too late. This was a dog that had never bitten anyone before - not an uncommon phrase we hear is it? So why did he bite me? Why didn't he just get up and walk away?

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Well to be honest, I don't know... I'm not a dog! However I can speculate. So beside the fact that I was poking him in the face, he may have already been feeling nervous as he found the behaviour of little humans my size unpredictable. From here, he may have given me warning signals that he wasn't happy - signals that might have worked for him before and he was left alone. And as these coping strategies weren't working for him, his anxiety levels quickly escalated into a hyper stressed zone and panic took over his normal thinking and told him to either fight or flight, and in this case he fought. He bit me once and that was it. He finally found a way to get me to stop. It worked!

This is why it is so important to teach our children how to interact with dogs, and to always supervise them around any dog. I recommend one adult per child per dog in a shared area. It is also important that we observe our dogs and learn what their body language is telling us so that we can recognise early signs of stress giving us the chance to address the cause.

So what became of me? Well after years and years of loving all kinds of furry animals, I became a dog trainer. No later than a year after the incident was I found playing (a little more responsibly) with other peoples pets!

I hope my story encourages you to learn the body language of dogs, learn how to be responsible with children and dogs and understand the way anxiety can affect a dog. Thank you so much for reading!

kindest regards,

Brooke Ellis



A year later playing with friends dog 😊