



### F33 What Happens When Your Dog Kills Someone?

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After attending the presentation, the attendees will be able to recognize the importance of understanding local and state animal control ordinances.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting important points in animal bitemark analysis.

To what degree is a dog owner directly responsible for the actions of his animal? Research will show that liability issues differ from state to state. To further complicate the issue, what if several dogs, all licensed and registered jointly participated in a single incident resulting in 200-300 individual dog bites and the ultimate death of a human? If it becomes unclear which dog was the primary perpetrator of the homicide, does that relieve that dog's owner of some of the responsibility or liability?

These type questions may not be frequently entertained in traditional bitemark analysis or animal bite cases. In this particular case, the victim was taking her routine and traditional afternoon walk in a rural town in middle Tennessee. Although there were no witnesses to the incident, her badly mangled and mutilated body was found some hours later in the front yard of her neighbor, friend and family physician. The well known local librarian was readily identified, even though all her clothes had been torn away from her body, which had even been partially eaten. There was forensic evidence indicating she put up a struggle that was manifested by the blood splatter and fingerprint residue found on the unlocked door of the doctor's unlocked auto in the driveway, as she evidently tried to get away from the attacking dogs.

When her body was found by a passerby, a group of four dogs, two of which belonged to the property owner, hovering over the shredded human body. Local law enforcement officials were so confused initially, they originally investigated this case as a possible assault and battery or homicide case. It was noted that the dogs all had evidence of the woman's blood on their coat. When forensic odontologists determined that this incident was completely explained by animal activity, local and state officials immediately began the process of evaluating Tennessee laws pertaining to the degree of responsibility that the dog owner(s) may or may not have.

This presentation will present a time line sequence of details that lead to dental opinions regarding the perpetrators of the attack. Each of the four dogs was anesthetized and detailed measurements were made of their dentition, as well as wax bites of their occlusion and impressions of each animal while were asleep. Details will be presented which differentiate obvious human bites from animal bites, to include cuspid dominance, differing number of upper and lower incisors, as well as the other distinguishing factors.

When overlay templates were fabricated over life-size photos of the most readable and representative of the bitemarks, two of the dogs could be eliminated as perpetrators of that individual wound. It would not be possible, however, to determine their involvement in other wounds on her body as their number was too numerous and many were not of evidentiary value.

The owners of these two dogs voluntarily euthanized their pet even though this isolated comparison appeared to exclude them as possible

attackers. The physician who lived in the home where the attack occurred was also the owner of the remaining two dogs. He denied his pets were involved with the attack even though forensic evidence was leading in another direction.

Additional forensic research was obtained by hiring a veterinary forensic DNA lab to evaluate stomach contents of the animals which proved to be non-conclusive. Without more definitive forensic evidence, the local district attorney was reluctant to implicate the remaining two dogs or the owner with any criminal involvement. Civil litigation soon followed.

This case may very well become a landmark case in the state of Tennessee which addresses specific liability issue on the owners of a dog attack.

#### **Dog Bites, Animal Bites, Bitemarks**