



G26 “Three Dog Night” or Death by Dog

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The goal of this presentation is to highlight animal bite mark evidence in an event involving dogs. Special consideration is critical in the process of evidence collection and the requirements for the presentation of evidence within the judicial system in order to secure an equitable solution.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by calling attention to a rare case of multiple dogs participating in the mutilation and death of an elderly woman, followed by a request from the owner for the return of the offending dogs. It is important to understand the process whereby a hearing is held and a judgement is rendered for the disposition of the offending animals.

It is unusual for multiple dogs to be involved in an incident in which an elderly adult is killed directly as a result of the canine activity. From the time of first notification to the forensic odontologist of a possible bite mark to the results of the hearing for the return of the dogs, strict adherence to new protocol was required due to the unusual nature of the victim and the suspects. The victim was examined and a general autopsy was performed by the medical examiner as well as a routine examination for bite mark analysis by the forensic odontologist. The three canine suspects were immediately placed in custody of Miami Dade County Animal Control. It was requested that an examination be made by the forensic odontologist to determine which animal, or animals, might be responsible for the death of the elderly woman. The situation required the expertise of an anesthetist skilled in the care of animals. Impressions of the dogs' dentitions were obtained with standard polyvinyl siloxane putty, and the impressions were poured in acrylic resin to prevent fracture of the relatively long canine teeth. These acrylic models were used to identify bite marks directly on the skin of the victim in areas where the skin had not been torn away. Acetate film was used to record as many marks as possible for comparison with the models of the various dogs' teeth. There appeared to be a significant difference in intercanine distance between the three different breeds (American Bulldog, Rhodesian Ridgeback, and German Shepard).

Following the identification of all three dogs as perpetrators in the death of the victim, the Miami Dade Animal Control Service requested euthanization of all three dogs. This was met by resistance from the owner of the dogs, who was both the grandson of the deceased and the person who had left the dogs with his grandmother. According to Miami Dade County ordinances, the owner of the dogs had a right to appeal the ruling and to appear before a hearing officer for a decision after presentation of evidence by the county and the appellant. The county's case was presented by the county attorney, the Director of Animal Services, and the forensic odontologist. The appellant was represented by his attorney. A three-judge panel heard the case, and the entire proceedings were videotaped by a local television station for presentation on the air (the video will be shown during this presentation).

Since the decision of the hearing officer was to euthanize the three dogs, an appeal period of 30 days was granted but was never exercised.

Dog, Bite mark, Death