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**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **The Signs of Aggression in Dogs are Almost Always Present Before an Attack**

*Los Angeles, CA* – “For more than thirty-five years I have worked with dogs and their owners including aggressive dogs with bite histories. Almost without exception, the signs of aggression exist long before the problem rears its ugly head and bites someone,” says dog Trainer, author and aggressive dog expert, Matthew “Uncle Matty” Margolis.

Margolis emphasizes that most dog bites could be prevented if dog owners would educate themselves about dog behavior and learn to recognize the signs of aggression. In addition to a lack of knowledge, many owners of aggressive dogs ignore the problem rather than spend the money to diagnose and modify the behavior if possible. Others are in denial and prefer to believe that their aggressive dogs will never attack anyone, especially members of their own family.

Even some people with professional titles may be adding to the problem. “There are some highly effective and knowledgeable dog professionals all around the globe,” says Margolis. “The ones I worry about are those with little experience and even less or no professional training regarding dog aggression and this includes trainers, behaviorists, veterinarians, groomers and others who fail to recognize the real problem or worse yet, are incapable of providing the necessary counsel to their clients.”

As a service to dog owners and professionals, Margolis hosts one of the most comprehensive Internet resources for aggressive dog information at <http://www.unclematty.com/training/dangerdogs.htm> where he lists the signs of aggression and the places and times they are most likely to occur. For example, an aggressive dog may growl or snarl in places like food areas when he is eating, bedrooms when someone tries to remove him from the bed, when a child pulls at parts of his body, when he sees another dog or when he is startled by sudden movement.

Unfortunately, more often than not, the problem of aggression is only addressed after a dog bites someone. “From time-to-time we all read about the sensational cases that create newsworthy headlines and they are tragic and awful. But on a daily basis, I talk to dog owners who ignored the aggressive signs exhibited by the family dog and are faced with the unthinkable – their own dog attacked their own child. Almost without exception, the comment from the parent is ‘I didn’t think my dog would attack a family member.’ How negligent is this?” According to this expert there are thousand of these cases that are not reported every year and never make the headlines. “It is unfortunate that the stories that wind up in the news tend to be sensational because they involve large dogs. This has led to anti-breed lists among insurance companies, municipalities and anti-anything groups. The

people I speak with about dog attacks are just as likely to have breeds like Pomeranians, Cocker Spaniels, Schnauzers and others that are not on negative lists. Aggression is not breed-specific,” according to Margolis.

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### **If Used, Please Credit**

Matthew “Uncle Matty” Margolis, is a dog trainer, aggressive dog expert, best-selling pet author and host of the PBS Series, *Woof! It’s a Dog’s Life*. Learn more about aggressive dog behavior at <http://www.unclematty.com/training/dangerdogs.htm>

### **For an Interview**

Matthew “Uncle Matty” Margolis is available for telephone interviews and personal appearances about this and other dog-related topics. To set up a time or inquire about availability, please e-mail K. Golay at the following address and put *Uncle Matty Interview* in the subject line: [mediarelations@unclematty.com](mailto:mediarelations@unclematty.com) or 480-609-3582.

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## **Can Most Dog Attacks Be Prevented?**

*Los Angeles, CA* – Dog Trainer, author and aggressive dog expert, Matthew “Uncle Matty” Margolis, is on a mission to educate dog owners and people who work with dogs about canine aggression. “The signs are always there if a dog has the potential to harm humans and animals,” says Margolis. “Owners and many professionals play canine roulette by ignoring the obvious indicators.”

About 20% of total homeowners' insurance liability payouts in the United States each year are dog bite related. In 1999 that amount was \$310 million. The total annual cost of dog bites is well over a billion dollars. “I don’t agree with banning breeds to reduce these costs because I have seen aggressive and non-aggressive temperaments in every breed,” emphasizes Margolis, “but dog owners and untrained professionals have created this problem by not understanding dog behavior and ignoring obvious signs that trouble is on the way.”

Matthew’s list of obvious signs of aggression include

- **Growling**

- **Snarling**
- **Curling lips**
- **Mounting people**
- **Lunging**
- **Snapping**
- **Blocking your path**
- **Barking aggressively**
- **Biting (even if it does not break the skin)**

“I have never understood parents who put their children including infants in harms way day in and day out by exposing their families to dangerous dogs,” says this often outspoken, sometimes irreverent trainer. “I know this is an epidemic because I get the phone calls and e-mails every day from people who ignored the problem until the family dog attacked a child or someone older. Then it’s too late and the system takes over.”

A perfect example is a woman who called Uncle Matty about her adult Beagle. The dog had been allowed on the bed and eventually the bed became the dog’s territory. Whenever the woman moved the dog off the bed, the dog growled. This should have been an indication of things to come, but the signs were ignored. Eventually the dog bit the woman in the face, not once but twice. This will not be the last time this dog attacks and next time it could be someone else.

Of course, the key problem is the pain and suffering of the victim, not to mention the financial exposure, loss of insurance and loss of the dog faced by the dog’s owner. There are many types of aggression according to Margolis who admits some can be helped and some cannot.

According to Margolis, if dog owners paid attention to good breeding, selected dogs with non-aggressive temperaments, chose early training and took appropriate action when the signs of aggression appeared, most dog bites could be prevented.

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## **ARTICLE**

### **Tooth or Consequences**

By Matthew "Uncle Matty" Margolis

Ruby Sharum, the 91-year-old Orange County, California woman who lost both of her arms after she was attacked by her great-grandson's pit bull in 2004, had this to say to a reporter about the dog: He was "the perfect pet . . . we never thought he would wind up doing anything like that." Her neighbors reported that they had felt constantly threatened by the dog. But the love some people have for their pets is dangerously blind.

I'm a dog trainer and I recall a phone call I received from a woman who was more curious than hysterical. Her nine-year-old Golden Retriever had just bit her baby in the face in a move that was obviously aggressive. The mother wanted to know why the dog had done that. But this wasn't the first time. This family had been living with a problem canine for years and had seen it growl and even bite previously. The warning signs couldn't have been clearer.

Now, the family is part of a frightening group of statistics. *Children under the age of twelve are attacked by dogs more than any other age group*, and more often than not, it's by the family dog.

It became obvious after a few minutes on the phone, that this dog would bite again and that this family had more of a problem than a biting dog. I told the mother that the dog could not be trusted around the baby and should never be around children again. Her response floored me: She said she could not get rid of the dog --- because it was her first baby.

What is going on here? Have we humanized dogs so much that we've forgotten they are canines? Have we come to believe that a dog's motivations and ability to learn are just like a child's?

It's true that you can easily teach child not to hit someone. But telling a dog not to bite doesn't mean the dog will obey. Canines have drives that are different than human drives and more basic. But a lot of people seem willing to put their children in harm's way because they are so devoted to their dogs. I call that child endangerment.

Don't get me wrong. I love dogs. They are my life and my passion. My wife and I live with three of them, and I train them professionally. Our home is safe for us and visitors, including children, because we are realistic about what our dogs can and cannot do. Twenty years ago, only about 10% of my calls were from dog owners seeking help with aggressive dogs. Today, at least 60% of callers have dogs with some form of aggressive

behavior, and a great number of them have children in the home. I speak with a hundred or more dog families a week and have been doing this for 30-some years. You do the math! That's a lot of children in harm's way.

So why the big leap in the number of aggressive dog calls? Yes, the dog population continues to increase, but I have my own theories. Two are at the top of my list.

First, it goes back to the humanization of dogs. When you think of them as children, not canines, you fail to learn their language, behaviors and needs. If you don't understand dog behavior how can you recognize dog aggression? Worse than that, you are not able to deal with it and are more likely to ignore it, deny it and ultimately, regret it.

A second problem is with well-intentioned people misguidedly trying to provide solutions. There are large numbers of rescue groups, shelters and caring individuals whose mantra is "Save the Dog," and for that we are grateful. But a great number of these people are volunteers without the tools or training to recognize the many forms of aggression. And many owners won't reveal the dog's aggressive behavior because they just want the dog to find another home, regardless.

As I was writing this article, I took a call from a woman who brought a mixed breed home from a shelter last week. All she wanted was a dog for her family. It never occurred to her that the dog might be aggressive. The dog bit her son viciously on the hand. The woman had not considered aggression in selecting a dog and the shelter had not revealed the problem to her. They probably were not even aware of it.

There are other problems -- bad breeding and breeding dogs for dog fighting. These dogs often wind up in the general population.

There are what I call "yard dogs" that are confined to a back yard without socialization or training. They become super territorial and spend their days barking at neighbors and passers by. When they get out, they bite.

Lack of training is a big problem. Training puppies early on can help prevent aggressive behavior or modify it before problems become habits.

But instead, dog owners don't take responsibility and parents don't equate the signs of dog aggression with child endangerment. Often, they don't even consider the possibilities or they don't want to believe that their dogs would hurt their own children, but they do. It's that humanization thing again.

If you have an aggressive dog, check the California Penal Code (section 273a), which declares it a crime to allow a child to be in a situation where his or her "person or health is in endangered." If that doesn't cause you to consider the consequences, check with the company that writes your homeowner's liability coverage. Maybe the prospect of losing your homeowner's insurance will cause you to find an alternative solution for the dog, regardless of how long it has been in your home.

It's a tragedy that Ruby Sharum lost her arms to the jaws of her relative's dog. She didn't deserve that. The woman's son was quoted in a Times article as saying "Maybe this is

something I could have prevented." The answer is no doubt, "yes."

There are always signs of aggression. Always. Growling, snarling, nipping and aggressive barking to name a few. In the beginning, owners tend to apologize, saying things like "he only growls, never bites." But the day will come if the signs are ignored.

Some may think of their dogs as children, but they are not. They never will be. Let's recognize that, and then perhaps we can begin to reduce the outrageous number of children and adults as well, who are traumatized, maimed and injured each year by the family dog.

Printed with permission. © 2004 Margolis Enterprises, Inc. *Matthew Margolis is host of the PBS series, WOOF! It's a Dog's Life! and co-author of 18 books about dog behavior and training including GRRR! The Complete Guide to Understanding & Preventing Aggressive Behavior in Dogs, (Little Brown & Company, 2000). You will find Mr. Margolis' aggressive dog educational reference on line at <http://www.unclematty.com/training/dangerdogs.htm>*

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