

NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

(Ed note: We were asked to withhold the author's name to enable readers to concentrate only on the point of the story)

This article, if printed, will not be a popular subject, but something needs to be said and done in regards to Mastiff temperament, and our willingness to breed from animals that have problems of shyness or aggression.

My Mastiff bitch had 2 puppies; I kept the female, and sold the male at a young age to become a member of a large family (the youngest child was 8 years old). When the male was 6 months, I started receiving distressed calls from the buyers, asking for advice on how to handle their dog that was becoming unmanageable. He was very gentle and cooperative most of the time, but would go crazy (attack or become aggressive) under certain circumstances, and not predictably! I had stressed the importance of extensive socialization and obedience training in large dogs, and they were doing both to a limited extent. As time went on, the problem worsened. They paid a trainer to observe the normal family routine at their house. The dog was easily controlled by the father, but no one else. They restricted the dog, so that he had access to only certain parts of the house, and was free only when the father was with him. In other words, these people took reasonable care of the dog, and tried to raise and control him in a normal manner.

There were incidents of the dog nipping the children, but nothing serious. During a walk at 6 months old, he nipped at a person bending over to pet him. As he grew, he occasionally lunged at people on the street. When older, the dog got out of the fenced yard once, and attacked a neighbor man. Later, a family friend sat on the couch petting him (he was friendly), then he suddenly lunged and bit the woman without provocation. Then their 10 year old son was bitten on the stomach which while not severe, drew blood. We talked, but they said he was "usually such a nice dog" that they didn't want to give him up.

Finally, they called to say their 8 year old daughter had been bitten in the face. This happened while she was giving the dog a hug (as she'd done numerous times before). She required about 30 stitches with plastic surgery yet to come.

This was really hard to believe, so I went over to see what had happened. I expected to find either a mistreated dog or a vicious one, but found neither. I wanted to see if the dog was friendly or unfriendly, so the owner had him on a long sturdy leather lead. I sat down and conversed with the owner. The dog seemed friendly, wagging his tail after he finished barking a few times. He was placed on a down stay. After 15 minutes or so, the dog was allowed up, and he came to sniff me and check me out, which he did. He allowed me to pet him, and give him some dog treats. The owner still had him securely on lead. The dog was again put on a down-stay and he relaxed, almost asleep. Suddenly, in the middle of our conversation, he lunged for me! This dog was serious! Fortunately, the owner was able to prevent another catastrophe -- this time.

I went with them to put the dog down, although this was not an easy thing to do. Some will say there was not enough socialization, not enough obedience training, too many children in the family, he should have been neutered, he should have been placed as an attack dog, or these people should not have a Mastiff, or the child was abusing the dog, etc. etc. etc. Maybe that's true, but I think not. There could be many attempts to excuse or place blame. Whatever the reason, this dog was unbalanced, and no amount of anything would cure him. From a quiet, gentle dog he could (without provocation) go into an attack, and on a family member. They dearly loved their Mastiff, and he was such a part of the family for many months. But he simply could not be trusted.

The littermate, a bitch of nice type and size, had problems with shyness beginning around 5 months. No amount of socialization got her out of this problem either, with reasonable time spent. She has been shown and has championship points. Honestly, I have to admit I've wrestled with the idea of breeding her, because I've seen so many people breed Mastiffs with flawed temperaments and heard all their excuses. But I spayed my bitch because I just refuse to be a part of it.

I can hardly live with the thought of the irreparable damage done to their little 8 year old daughter. I watched her cry while she tried to tell me of her attack, and I never again want to see the face of a child who was bitten by a Mastiff. Her face will always be with me, as I breed other Mastiffs.