

Attack leaves man without his best friend: Shih Tzu attacked by bullmastiff, dies

By Rachel McCormick

RACINE - Edward Hoffman and Smokey have gone for two walks a day for the past four years. One walk early in the morning and another walk in the afternoon.

They're the best of friends.

Smokey was Hoffman's Shih Tzu dog, considered one of the family. Smokey and Hoffman lived together in the 2000 block of Slauson Avenue ever since Hoffman's granddaughter found Smokey wandering the streets.

Hoffman, 79, fell in love with Smokey and decided to keep him.

Just after 8 a.m. Tuesday, during Hoffman and Smokey's morning walk, a neighbor's bullmastiff named Kuno attacked Smokey.

Smokey died Wednesday around 8:15 p.m. from his injuries. He was at the Animal Emergency Center in Glendale.

Smokey underwent surgery Tuesday. He had broken ribs, lung damage and two puncture wounds, Hoffman said. He was on life support much of Wednesday and died when veterinarians removed the support.

"It's like losing my right hand. He was just like my little boy ... ," Hoffman said.

The attack Smokey usually chose the path he and Hoffman walked. Tuesday wasn't any different, Hoffman said.

The two turned a corner when Kuno came from behind a fence and attacked Smokey.

"My dog's whole stomach was in the other dog's mouth," Hoffman said. "Once he got him he didn't want to let go." Hoffman broke his toe trying to get Kuno off Smokey, he said. Kuno finally ran away.

Understanding Although Hoffman lost his best friend, he said he doesn't blame the Rangels.

"My neighbor was no way at fault. It happens," Hoffman said. "It was unavoidable. Our neighbors didn't know the gate was open."

Hoffman said he would bring Smokey home today to bury him.

Early Wednesday, neighborhood children came by the home to check on Smokey. The children usually come every day to see the dog, Hoffman said.

"Š I'll have to put a sign up that says `Smokey's in heaven,' " Hoffman said.

Saying good-bye Hoffman said he went to see Smokey Wednesday morning at the hospital.

"He's in ICU," Hoffman said "I was up in Milwaukee this morning. He didn't know I was there but I talked to him anyway."

Hoffman said veterinarians

didn't have much hope for Smokey without life support, nor could Hoffman afford to keep his friend on the machine.

"So far, the vet bills are up to \$5,000," he said. "It (cost) \$2,000 a day to keep him in the hospital.

"If they could guarantee me that he was going to survive I would borrow money to save him," Hoffman said before Smokey was taken off life support.

Denise and Sammy Rangel own Kuno. Rangel said she was shocked when she learned her dog attacked Smokey.

"I feel bad for (the Hoffmans) because of their dog. We don't know what will happen to their dog," Rangel said hours before Smokey died.

Rangel and her husband, Sammy, have offered to pay Smokey's veterinarian bills, she said.

Kuno and the Rangel's other dog, Gandolph, who is a Great Pyrenees, are kept on the Rangel's property, which is fenced. Rangel's husband did not close the gate all the way when he left for work Tuesday.

Kuno was recovered by police officers almost a mile away from the home. Gandolph is still missing, Rangel said.

The Rangels have not been ticketed by police, the report shows. Police await the return of Gandolph even though Kuno, who is now at home, attacked Smokey.

Rangel operates First Impressions Family Certified Childcare out of her home, which is next door to Hoffman's home.

Rangel said parents are not concerned about Kuno and Gandolph being around their kids because the dogs have never had problems with biting.

"The dogs are very protective of the children," Rangel said.