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## Dog-attack victim fought back

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Chico Enterprise-Record

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Among the many things Tracy Hon learned from being savagely attacked by a dog: the most important may be a reminder of something she knew very well.

No matter how much people love dogs, consider them their friends and even their "children," dogs are, in fact, animals.

Hon was well aware of that. She blames herself for momentarily forgetting it.

Two weeks after the mauling, Hon is grateful to be alive. She's amazed at her own resilience. And she thanks God for what seem to be miracles — fortunate things she can't really understand.

The 62-year-old Chico grandmother has been a lifelong dog lover, a dog trainer and, for the last 15 years, a rescuer of unwanted boxers and other dogs. She runs Canine Retreat, a boarding kennel for dogs in north Chico.

A few months ago, Hon and a friend, Patricia Vaughan, rescued a 4-year-old female American bulldog.

The dog had lived a hellish life, Hon said. Her owner hadn't given her heartworm protection, and she developed a bad case of heartworms. Also, she was part of a pack of dogs, and the other dogs, realizing she was ill, picked on her constantly.

The bulldog seemed gentle enough, and Hon and Vaughan had hoped to find a new home for her. Then they discovered she had terminal cancer.

Their goal became to make the bulldog's life as pleasant as possible in the time she had left. Hon kept the dog at her kennel.

"She loved to play," Hon said. "She'd nap with me. She loved me and would kiss me."

Canine Retreat is in the middle of an orchard, and Hon took her new friend out to run in the orchard, as she does other dogs. "She loved to go out and loved to run and play," she said.

On the morning of June 7, Hon was working alone at the kennel. When she went into the bulldog's pen, she said, the dog went wild for some reason.

With her teeth, she grabbed Hon by the foot and pulled her down. And once she had her on the ground, she attacked, biting again and again.

"It was horrendous," Hon said. She couldn't get away.

The dog bit her face, legs and arms. It kept going for her left arm, she said. "My arm looked like a bowl of hamburger meat."

Hon said she kept talking to the dog, telling her, "You have to stop," but it made no difference.

The biting was ferocious and relentless.

The bulldog grabbed her by the throat, and Hon said she heard her trachea crack. She realized if she couldn't stop the attack, she would be killed.

With the dog holding her by the throat, Hon tried to pry the animal's jaws open but couldn't.

So she bit the dog — twice, as hard as she could.

"Something told me to bite her," she said. "Something told me, 'If you're going to win at all, get on her level.'"

The biting worked, Hon said. "She backed off, but then renewed the attack."

"All of a sudden, I found myself outside the gate," she said.

She was outside the pen, holding the gate shut, but the dog kept hitting the gate with its head and biting Hon's hands.

The gate had a latch that had to be lifted up, turned and pulled down to lock it in place.

In the shape she was in, it didn't seem possible she could do that, Hon said. But finally she managed to latch the gate.

Then she had to crawl about 40 feet to a phone.

She succeeded in that. With her hands bitten and bloody, she didn't know how she was able to dial 9-1-1, but she did.

And even though she had a crushed trachea and larynx, she was somehow able to talk on the phone and ask for help.

"I'm just that kind of person who doesn't give up," she said.

"She's an amazing woman," said her daughter Tammie Scrima of Chico.

Hon spent about a week at Enloe Medical Center, at first in the intensive care unit.

"Enloe was awesome," she said.

When a hospital staff member told her a doctor would "try" to fix her neck, it was pretty scary, Hon said. But in fact, the doctors were able to save her voice.

"She's doing really well at home now," said Scrima. "She recovered a lot faster than we anticipated."

Hon isn't able to use her left arm very well yet, Scrima said. "Her brain and muscles need to get reacquainted."

Hon has some scars and may need to have plastic surgery, her daughter said. "Her spirits are really good."

Hon said she's eager to return to working with dogs at her kennel. She's not sure if she'll continue her work rescuing dogs.

After the attack on June 7, animal control officers had the bulldog euthanized.

Hon said she thinks the dog's disease probably caused the attack.

She said a veterinarian told her advanced cancer can sometimes go to a dog's brain and cause it to lose its mind.

Hon said she blames herself for not seeing that the time had come to put the ailing dog to sleep.

The dog was losing weight and was starting to become a little aggressive, she said. But somehow she failed to acknowledge what was happening and do what was necessary.

"I learned a valuable lesson," Hon said. Next time she won't let her attachment to an ailing dog keep her from recognizing that it's becoming dangerous.

Besides training and caring for dogs, Hon said she tries to educate pet owners.

"I make sure they understand it's healthy to have respect for dogs," she said. "People can lose sight of the fact that they are animals."

Her knowledge as well as her toughness saved her from the attacking bulldog, she said. "Thank God I knew enough about dogs to fight her. Thank God I won the battle."

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**BACKGROUND:** Tracy Hon, a Chico kennel owner, was attacked June 7 by a dog she had rescued. After being hospitalized, she's recovering at home.

**THE DETAILS:** The dog that attacked Hon was an American bulldog, a breed developed as a guard dog. Luckily, it was relatively small, only about 55 pounds. American bulldogs can be twice that big.

**WHAT'S NEXT:** Hon is eager to return to work at her boarding kennel. She's not sure if she'll continue rescuing boxers and other dogs.

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