

Dog bite leads to 4-hour surgery

By Aaron Morrison
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HAYWARD — A local mail carrier who has never owned a dog in her life is sure she never wants to own one after she was attacked while on the job last month.

Virginia Joaquin, a U.S. Postal Service letter carrier and Hayward resident, is recovering after a pit bull attacked and bit her on July 20 while she was delivering mail on Schuykill Avenue.

Her injuries required a four-hour surgery to repair a torn tendon in her right hand, according to the USPS.

Joaquin, 46, who is on paid leave for an undetermined time, said she had never, in her eight



VIRGINIA JOAQUIN, a U.S. Postal Service letter carrier, holds up her right hand after a four-hour surgery that repaired damage from a July 20 pit bull attack that occurred on her route in Hayward

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Postal worker severely injures hand in dog attack

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years with the Postal Service, had a problem with a dog.

"I saw this pit bull running toward me very fast," she said. "That's all I remember. It happened very fast."

In mere seconds, the dog locked onto her right hand. Joaquin began to scream and eventually received help from neighbors, who beat the dog back with a piece of wood.

Before surgery, Joaquin said, she was left with puncture wounds in her right pinkie finger and right palm.

Steve Bettcher, president of the Dog Squad, a Bay Area dog training and obedience school service, says there usually are two things that cause dogs to act badly.

"Poor early socialization and a lack of any training are two things that cause dogs to act this way," Bettcher said. "Any dog can bite, in the right situation, but

often these attacks are based on territory."

Dogs often develop hate for mail carriers specifically because the carrier arrives, the dog barks and the carrier leaves, Bettcher said. Dogs are rarely socialized or trained to behave differently when a carrier or delivery person comes around.

Bettcher, who has trained dogs for more than 10 years, tells dog owners that incidents like this can be avoided before they happen.

"Don't wait until the dog is 6 months old to start training," Bettcher said. "Start early, when it is a puppy."

Paul Sanchez, animal services manager for the city of Hayward, suggests dialing 9-1-1, among other things, anytime you have been attacked or feel you are in danger of an attack.

"Don't make eye contact with the dog, be as still as possible, and move away slowly," Sanchez said. "If the dog is

coming at you full throttle, use purses or backpacks to fend it off."

If it has a grip on clothing or a body part, hitting the dog can distract into eventually letting go, Sanchez said.

"Sometimes it will scare the dog, sometimes it won't," Sanchez said. "It depends on how aggressive the animal is."

Joaquin hopes other employees in the Postal Service hear her story and are more careful.

"There are lots of people who have been bitten," Joaquin said. "But not a lot with damage like mine."

The Postal Service reports that medical expenses, worker's compensation, legal costs and carrier replacements associated with dog bite incidents nationwide cost the agency more than \$25 million annually.

For more information about dog obedience services, visit www.dogsquad.biz.

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