

# it really happened to me!

Sometimes extraordinary things happen to ordinary people. Check out these girls' amazing real-life stories.

## once bitten, twice shy

Kelly Voigt, 12 Palatine, Illinois



The day my life changed started just like any other day. I was walking around my neighborhood with my twin sister, Meghan, and big brother, Kevin. We passed a house and saw a dog standing in the driveway. He was a Siberian husky I had pet before. I ran up to him and put my hand out to pet him. But instead of being friendly like he'd always been, the dog attacked me. He bit my cheek and throat. I was totally shocked—all I remember thinking is, "Why is he doing this?"

I squeezed the dog's stomach and he jumped off. Then I turned and ran. The dog lunged for me and hooked one of his claws on my coat. I had to wiggle away before I took off running again.

My brother, sister and I were speeding down the street toward our house screaming. Kevin got home first and my mom ran out as soon as she heard the screams. He said, "Kelly is in big, bad trouble!" That's when I ran around the corner with my hand on my face. When I took my hand away, my whole face just fell down, and there was blood everywhere. My sister was screaming and I was crying hysterically.

My mom grabbed an ice pack and a bunch of paper towels, then rushed me to the hospital. I had stopped crying by that point, but I was still afraid. I was wondering what I was going to look like now. I just kept saying, "I don't want stitches! I just

want a Band-Aid!" I was so freaked out about how much the stitches would hurt.

When we got to the hospital, everyone was swarming around like on *ER*, so I knew I was hurt pretty badly. I heard a doctor say that if there was any muscle damage, my smile would always be crooked. My mom says my face looked like ground beef—all the insides were showing on the outside.

I was shaking and felt like I was in shock. Once the plastic surgeon arrived, I had to get about 50 shots to numb my face—it hurt so much! I was crying and screaming, "Stop! Stop!" Then I got about 100 stitches. They had to give me stitches inside my face on the muscles. The doctor told me it was like putting together pieces of a puzzle.

When I got home, I looked in the mirror. I had a lot of bandages all over my face and I was puffy and swollen. I was worried I would look like a freak forever.

The next day, I told my mom I wanted to visit my school. We went to my classroom and everyone asked me about how it happened. One boy said, "I don't care what happened to you, Kelly, you're still the cutest girl in class!" That made me feel really good.

Even though people were supernice to me, I had a really hard time after I was bitten. I was depressed and walked around like a zombie. I'd put my hand over my face so people wouldn't look at me. I threw up every time I got into a car because it reminded me of the drive to the hospital. Any time someone mentioned a pet, I thought about the dog. I was terrified of dogs now. I didn't think my neighborhood was safe anymore.

My mom was so worried that she took me to see a psychologist. I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. During one

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visit, the doctor hung up a picture of a dog on the wall and let me throw bean bags at it. While I was hurling the bags, I screamed, "I hate you for making me look so weird!"

About a year after the dog bite, I told the psychologist everyone stared at me now and whispered about me. The doctor said maybe they're whispering about the fact that I'm a survivor. When she said that, something inside my head just clicked. That's when I got the idea to do safety presentations at my

school. I said, "I want to help other kids!"

It was the first thing I cared about in more than a year. My school counselor put me in touch with Nancy Skeffington, who works with therapy dogs that help kids with special needs. The first time I met one of her dogs, I started to back away because I was scared. But Nancy said it was OK, so I slowly approached the dog and finally pet it. That was the first dog I had touched since I'd been bitten, and I felt so happy. My fear just melted away.

We started doing presentations at schools. The first one was in my class and I was nervous because I wasn't sure what to say. I just told everyone my story. It came pouring out and I felt better than I had in a very long time. Then Nancy and I told the class what to do to make sure they don't get bitten. First, you never approach a dog that's not on a leash and with its owner. Even if a dog is with its owner, we teach the WASP method:

**Wait:** Wait and see if the dog looks friendly.

**Ask:** Ask the owner if it's OK to pet the dog.

**Stop and sniff:** Curl up your hand in a fist by your side, then let the dog come to you and sniff you.

**Pet:** Pet the dog on the back.

If you see a stray dog, stand like a tree. Cross your arms, curl your fingers in a fist and look down. Never look a dog in the eyes because that could provoke it. Stay that way until the dog is far away. Another thing you can try is the rock method: Lie down on the ground and curl up in a little ball like a rock. Curl up your fingers and cover your ears. Put your face in your chest so it's not exposed. All of this will help you from getting hurt like I did.

It makes me feel awesome to know I'm preventing someone else from going through what I've been through. More than 4 million people get bitten by dogs every year, and I just want to help decrease that number.

Since starting our organization, Prevent the Bite, four years ago, I've given hundreds of dog safety presentations all over the country. I've also been featured on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *The Today Show*. Our goal is to have a dog safety program in every school in the country. We are working on a dog safety video now, which will be available on our Web site, [PreventtheBite.com](http://PreventtheBite.com). And, most importantly, I love dogs again. I'm no longer afraid.