

CUJO And Other Myths (Addendum to the article “Mean Dogs & Martial Artists” by Sam Honnold, published in Black Belt Magazine Vol. 61 No.2 Spring 2023)

On a deep dive to study the basest, most instinctual and visceral human fears about dogs, I reviewed the movie *Cujo*, based on the novel by horror master Stephen King. Like *Jaws* before it, this thriller brings those fears to the surface even forty years after its making. The viewer feels like the scared rabbit in



Cujo's opening scene, totally helpless as the rabid monster pursues. Clutching onto a tub of popcorn in a darkened theater, the mind imagines the worst possible scene: “What if *Cujo* got me? What if I were on my back and that slobbering beast were on top of me...dripping hydrophobic slobber off of his blood-caked hide?” Not so different, really, from the prospective martial arts student. When someone shows interest in studying self-defense, I do a short demonstration and generally ask what type of situation they would like to be able to get out of. This question has a thousand answers, but one dreadful thing is repeatedly brought up by children and older adults, petite female athletes and burly, bearded men,

“I want to be able to escape if a bad guy pins me on my back!”

In wrestling contests and many fighting arts, the bout is over in the event of a “fall.” Modern Jujitsu has made a valuable contribution to the martial arts by proving that a “fall” is not the end of the world. A person can continue to fight after being swept, thrown, or pinned, and some fighters actually *prefer* to fight up from the ground!

This basal fear of being pinned was one of the things that got me started in the martial arts in the 80s. At a church youth group, I met a student of Quad Cities Kung Fu legend (and Guinness World Record holder) *Sifu* John Morrow. Morrow's Academy included rolling and falling along with calisthenics and basic agility. I was amazed that this kid could fall to the ground and pop right back up somewhere else, in a solid stance from which he could run, fight, or roll again in another direction. Progressing in the martial arts, I learned these techniques to recover from a fall, fight back from a disadvantage, or avoid getting put there in the first place. Jeremy Horn and I were young Bussey Black Belts together in the mid-1990s. He went on to the Octagon, where he famously fought over one hundred bouts without being knocked down! I went on to preach the gospel in the jungles of Latin America, rife with crocodiles and howling beasts unknown.

A predator, whether he be a criminal, a wild animal, or a common dog, will capitalize on your fears, falling most of all. He wants you to be fleeing, then cornered, then grounded, then dead. Each step puts him at a greater advantage. As the prey is run down, the predator feeds on its fear. These techniques

are designed to prevent him from ever getting started down that path with you and address the root issue: our primal fear, which is not entirely logical. Years ago, I spent a summer living in the Arizona desert next door to famed magician and lion tamer Jonathan Kraft. Where I slept, the night air was often pierced with shrieks and ground-shaking roars, as his



facility was home to a captive wolf pack and numerous big cats. My cousin had constructed the facility and arranged a private tour, where Jonathan taught me how much hype there is in the mindset of fear. He told me, "There is no such thing as a 150-pound wolf. There is no such thing as a one-hundred-TWENTY-pound wolf. Have you ever seen one wet? They look like a drowned rat!" Jonathan knew what he was talking about...in 2019, at 73 years of age, he survived an attack by a captive tiger named Bowie. Lions, tigers, and bears can all weigh 400 pounds or more and have the muscle to carry a cow or horse in their mouths, sometimes for more than a mile. Their ability to pounce and tackle a human is given, yet Jonathan survived a 10-minute battle with one by skill and resolve. Unless you come to visit me in the jungle, the most serious threat you'll face is an attack dog, and 80 pounds is a BIG one if fit

[dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6958015/Tiger-attacks-founder-Arizona-nonprofit-animal-rescue.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6958015/Tiger-attacks-founder-Arizona-nonprofit-animal-rescue.html)

By ASSOCIATED PRESS and MATTHEW WRIGHT FOR DAILYMAIL.COM
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A Bengal tiger has attacked a nonprofit animal rescue center's founder in northwestern Arizona but will not be put down after the man said it was his fault.

Keepers of the Wild said Wednesday on Facebook that founder Jonathan Kraft was working to protect animals from heavy rain, lightning and hail during a Monday storm when Bowie the tiger pushed a gate and attacked.

'Jonathan made the decision to shift Bowie's gates to allow him access to his den box area,' the center said in the post.

'During the process, the usually docile behaving Bowie exhibited unusual conduct by suddenly pushing the gates prior to Jonathan being able to secure the safety clips.



© Keepers of the Wild/Facebook
Keepers of the Wild said Wednesday on Facebook that founder Jonathan Kraft (pictured) was working to protect animals from heavy rain on Monday

and in his working prime (although sedentary Rottweilers and giant breeds weigh more). That is a a fraction of your weight and only a fifth the weight of a big cat. If you try to run more than a few steps, you present a juicy calf, hamstring, or *gluteus maximus* to his bite and give the advantage the smaller animal needs to take you down. More likely you will face a 20- to 40-pound suburban coyote or medium-sized dog. If you have suitable shoes on, face the danger, and use these techniques, you will be victorious without blood as I have been time after time.

The FEAR is worse than the BEAR. One of my best students is my mom. She is over 70 now, very small of stature, and not in the best shape. A few years ago, she bought a pistol for self-defense and determined to learn how to use it. Before long, she was safe and confident putting shots into paper at the range. She asked what was next. "If you really want to be solid in shooting self-defense, you need to hunt," I answered. She borrowed a rifle and I took her on several hunts, some successful. She wanted to go a step further...she bought a tag to hunt BEARS. She never killed the bear, but did face him down at night, looking through her riflescope at his glowing, green eyes. Now, no bully can intimidate her, even though she is not an athlete nor *karate ka*. So it is for anyone who confronts their deepest fears, proving them to be as irrational as they are innate. On some level, we all know this, even Stephen King, who achieved the legendary horror of *Cujo* by rolling together more mundane, logical, and present fears like divorce and car breakdowns...on top of everyone's fear of being pinned.

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