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## Dogs hurt in attack

By Alexandra Bogdanovic  
02/21/2006

It started out just like any other Friday night.

Warrenton resident Kathy Kelliher said that she, her husband John Kelliher and her friend Cindy Nelson were walking their dogs on retractable leashes at the Vint Hill park around 5:30 p.m.

But the peaceful evening stroll quickly became a nightmarish experience as a dog that Kelliher described as a "mixed pit bull" came streaking toward them from the nearby baseball field.

A police report taken afterward does not stipulate what type of dogs were involved. The dog's owner, Coy Payton of Nokesville, said each is a boxer-Labrador retriever cross, commonly recognized as a "Staffie."

Payton said he has walked the dogs at the Vint Hill complex "hundreds of times" and that he has never had any problem with his dogs there.

"There are four gates (at the baseball field)," Payton said. "I usually check to make sure they are all locked. On Friday night I was trying to put a leash on the male. He just broke free and went through the gate. The others took off after him."

Kathy Kelliher said she saw the first dog as she, her friend and her husband rounded the corner of Kennedy and Vint Hill Road.

"To my right, I noticed a dog, low to the ground, running at us at top speed," Kathy Kelliher recalled. "He had found his way through the butterfly gate in the baseball field where our son played Babe Ruth Baseball for so many years. I remember thinking that, with the velocity at which this animal was moving, this could not be good."

She said her husband tried to bring their two dogs -- Sparkle (a terrier mix) and McTavish (a poodle/schnauzer mix) -- closer by shortening their leashes. As he did so, two more dogs of the same breed as the first darted out from behind the fence.

"Within moments they were on top of our dogs, leashes flying, legs flailing, coming at McTavish and Sparkle with such determination I feared for their lives. What seemed like an eternity happening before us seemed to unravel in slow motion," Kathy Kelliher recalled.

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Somehow, she said, her friend helped Sparkle break free. But the other dogs continued to attack McTavish.

Payton also intervened in the fray and was able to drag two of the dogs away, according to Kathy Kelliher. Her husband contained the third dog, but by that time, she said McTavish had been badly wounded in three places.

Kathy Kelliher said she was bitten when she tried to protect McTavish. She said the dog bit her so hard that its teeth went through her glove and she suffered a "deep puncture wound" on the top of her hand.

Payton also had a bloody hand, and claimed that one of her dogs nipped him in the fray, Kathy Kelliher said.

According to the police, everyone refused medical treatment at the scene.

When Deputy Lane Phillippe arrived, Kathy Kelliher said she told the animal control officer that the other dogs had not been contained when the incident occurred. But Payton said he had special harnesses to help control them, and that they were confined in the baseball field, she said.

Phillippe took information from everyone, but he did not take Payton's dogs away from him or issue a citation, Kathy Kelliher added.

All the dogs must now be quarantined for 10 days in accordance with state regulations, Kathy Kelliher said.

While his wife received treatment for her wound at the Fauquier Hospital Emergency Room, John Kelliher took their dogs to the 24-hour emergency treatment center in Manassas.

"Sparkle had survived without being scathed, but McTavish spent the next hour in surgery, repairing tears to her abdomen, underarm and leg," said Kathy Kelliher. "She is now facing a second surgery to repair a gaping hole at the site of one of the surgeries."

According to Kelliher, Payton has apologized and offered to pay the vet bill. She said she and her husband have accepted his apology, but not the reasons for what happened.

Kathy Kelliher also said she has unanswered questions about the county's leash law. She also wants to know why Payton's dogs weren't confiscated and why he didn't receive a citation.

The investigation is ongoing, according to Maj. Paul Mercer of the Fauquier County Sheriff's Office.

Kelliher said she plans to address her questions to county officials, including county supervisors Ray Graham and Bill Downey.

"Something like this stays in your mind forever. I will not let this go, as I am in education and fear the person holding the leash that afternoon could have very well been a child, with much more devastating results," she said.

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