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Boy, dog's owners left shaken in aftermath of attack

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By **CHRIS COLLINS**
Of the Baker City Herald



Six-year-old Mitch Lemmon remembers seeing something black out of the corner of his eye as he walked to school Feb. 9.

The next thing he knew, the black thing — a large black dog — knocked him to the ground where he bumped his head.

"He bit me and dragged me," Mitch said. "He put me on the ground, and I was trying to escape."

Six-year-old Mitch Lemmon returned to his kindergarten class at South Baker School Wednesday without the stitches and bandages that have covered the injury he sustained when he was attacked by a neighborhood dog on his way to school Feb. 9. Baker City Herald/S. John Collins

The dog came from the home of Homer Relaford Jr. and Jodee Endicott at 1120 Dewey Ave. and has since been held at the Baker Animal Clinic.

Relaford has been cited on charges maintaining a dangerous dog under a new law that went into effect Jan. 1, and fourth-degree assault for the injuries Mitch sustained in the attack.

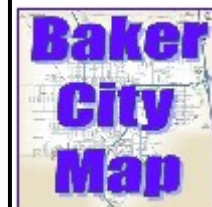
While the dog owners are concerned for the little



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boy, they also are concerned for themselves and other dog owners in light of the new law.

A week after the incident, Mitch's 20-some stitches are gone and the bandage is removed, showing a large red gash on his left wrist that is slowly healing.

His father, Arin Lemmon, has spent the past week trying to help ease the fear his son feels when he sees a dog or hears one bark as they walk through the south Baker City neighborhood where Arin grew up. Arin will return to Iowa soon where he is serving in the National Guard after having completed a tour in Iraq.

Then it will be Leec Lemmon's turn to walk her son from the home of his grandmother, Margaret Elliott, at 2025 Myrtle St., to the sidewalk that takes neighborhood students over the traffic of Highway 7 to the schoolyard.

Ironically, it was while traveling to the safety of the overpass that Mitch was attacked by the black Lab mix, Dugan.

Dog got out of kennel

Jodee Endicott says she and Relaford thought they were acting as responsible pet owners when they left their home that day.

She put the dog in the kennel before leaving for work, and called her neighbor to warn her that he might bark through the day. It was the first time the dog was to stay in the kennel without his companion, Bear, a schipperke-chihuahua cross. Endicott said she found a new home for Bear because when he was out of the kennel he would try to bolt out the front door when it was opened.

"I thought, 'I cannot have a dog like that around the school,'" she said. "I was trying to be the responsible person and found a home for him away from the school."

Later that morning her neighbor called to say Dugan was out of the kennel and might have bitten a kid, she said.

The dog originally was taken to the Animal Clinic where he was to be kept on a 10-day rabies hold, but Endicott said she later found records to show that his rabies vaccination was up-to-date. The couple had planned to have the dog put down, but now he is being held as evidence in the pending case against Relaford.



Endicott said she was not aware of the new state law regarding "dangerous dogs" until the incident Feb. 9.

"I think every pet owner in this town needs to be aware of that," she said. "We did the responsible thing. We had a dog, we put him in a kennel and he got out. I don't know how he got out."

Endicott said Dugan did not roam the neighborhood. He was kept on a leash or a chain on the front porch if he went outside unattended or when he wasn't in the kennel next to her house.

"He is not a bad dog," she said of the 5-year-old dog that joined her family three or four years ago. "But there is no excuse for what he did."

After learning that her dog had attacked the little boy, Endicott said she went to the emergency room to ensure that Mitch was going to be all right. She offered her sympathy to his aunt, Tisha Bass, who was there with him while his mother traveled home from California, where she had been caring for her sick mother. Mitch's father traveled to Baker City from Iowa.

The families have stopped talking over the past week, however, after publicity about the incident, she said. The Lemmons have retained an attorney to work with the insurance companies to ensure that their medical expenses are covered.

"My heart is just broken for everybody," Endicott said. "It was just a bad thing that happened, and I don't know how I could have foreseen it."

"I want to do the responsible thing. This little boy comes first," she added. "I want to help them any way I can and take care of what I need to take care of."

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