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5-year-old girl attacked by grandmother's dog

Diana M. Alba
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Saturday won't easily be erased from 5-year-old Natanya Esparza's memory.

By the end of the day, she'd experienced a dog attack, a three-hour wait for treatment in a local hospital, a trip to a trauma ward in El Paso and, finally, the stitching up of several wounds on her face.

It started when Natanya and her grandmother returned home from a trip to the grocery store Saturday morning, said Las Cruces Martha Esparza, Natanya's mother. The 5-year-old got out of the car and ran to pet her grandmother's dog in the yard. "She saw the dog tied up and she went up to pet him, and that's when she got bit," Esparza said.

Esparza said though the chow mixed-breed was a rescued stray, it hadn't shown signs of aggression during six months at its new home.

Natanya escaped with a split upper lip, four missing lower teeth and numerous gashes on her face.

Esparza said Natanya's grandmother rushed her to Memorial Medical Center, where the family waited for care in the emergency room. After about 20 minutes, she said, Natanya was seen by a triage nurse, who applied saline solution to the wounds.

But after that, the family waited nearly three hours before seeing a doctor, who decided Natanya needed to go to Thomason Hospital's trauma center in El Paso, Esparza said.

"That would have been nice to know prior to the three hours having to wait," she said. "It was really upsetting because she had open wounds on her face."

Kim Hollett, director of the Doña Ana County Humane Society, said dogs that have bitten people often end up at the shelter.

"Generally, bite dogs are put down," she said, but before that, they're quarantined and monitored for rabies.

Esparza said the dog that bit Natanya had been taken by animal control to the

animal shelter. Esparza said the dog that bit her daughter had its rabies vaccinations.

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