

NORTHERN LIFE

BY HEIDI ULRICHSEN

A Sudbury man is being treated for a possible case of rabies after being attacked by a coyote outside of the Watershed Restaurant near Gogama earlier this month.

Pierre Dupuis and friend Marcel Lavoie were on a weekend fishing trip in the area, and had stayed overnight Friday, June 2, in the bunkhouse at the back of the restaurant.

At around 5:45 am the next morning, Lavoie left the bunkhouse to go for breakfast in the restaurant. Dupuis left about 15 minutes later.

"As I was walking from the back of the building, I turned around the corner, and the coyote was about 30 feet from me with his back facing me. He was looking towards two motorists that were in their car," says Dupuis, a Canada Post worker.

"The driver of the car rolled down the window and asked me from afar, 'Isn't that a coyote?'...I said, 'Yeah, it is a coyote.' That's when I startled him. He circled around me. I thought he was coming from behind to sniff me like most dogs do.

"My back was facing him. You always hear never put your back to a wild animal. You face it. You have to confront it. But I wasn't thinking this animal was actually going to do anything. That's when I felt his fangs right in my rear end."

Dupuis ran into the restaurant, hoping the animal wouldn't lunge at him again.

"There were about seven or eight guys there gawking, and they said 'Did it bite you?' I said, 'Sure did.' They said, 'Go check if it's bleeding.' Everybody's thinking rabies because this is a crazed animal," he says.

"I went into the bathroom, and sure enough, I was bleeding. That knocked the appetite right out of me. I didn't want breakfast anymore."

The coyote stayed close to the restaurant for another 15 minutes.

"Another group of motorists came in - a family of about four people. Myself and my friend, we walked out to warn the people that there's a coyote in the yard, and to be careful."

The OPP were called, but they didn't show up for around 90 minutes. By that time, the coyote was gone, and could not be killed and tested for rabies.

The friends decided to go to the medical clinic in Gogama to ask for advice, but it was closed.

Since the wound wasn't swelling, Dupuis covered it with a large dressing from a first aid kit, and they went fishing.

Dupuis caught a 23-inch walleye.

"That was my reward for going through all this," he says. "We didn't catch many fish, but I caught that big one. That made my day."

The next day, Sunday, Dupuis went to a Sudbury walk-in clinic, and the Sudbury & District Health Unit was alerted he'd been bitten.

On Monday, his family doctor injected 20 needles containing rabies vaccine directly into the wound, and told him to come for four follow-up treatments.

Rabies affects the central nervous system, and if left untreated, is almost always fatal. It can occur in any warm-blooded animal.

The virus is transmitted through close contact with the saliva of infected animals, most often by a bite or scratch.

The modern rabies vaccine, which has been around for about 40 years, prevents the virus from developing by building up antibodies after the victim has been bitten. The vaccine has never failed in Canada or the United States.

According to Health Canada, there have only been two reported cases of human rabies in the country since 1985.

Dupuis has been researching the subject, and could only find a few cases where people have been treated for rabies after coyote attacks.

Commonly, rabies has been transmitted to humans from dogs, cats, foxes, raccoons, skunks, monkeys, wolves and bats.

Dupuis is trying to keep a sense of humour about the incident.

"At work, people were teasing me a bit. It's normal. I got bit in the butt. There's all kinds of little jokes that are flying around. I just joked around with the people because it's just one of those freaky things that will probably never happen again," he says.

"It was like getting hit by lightning. I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time."

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