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Attack scars: Mauling leaves emotional, financial issues

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LINDEN — A dog ripped open 8-year-old Lawrence Martin's face and nearly took off the end of his nose in January.

Now his face and psyche are scarred and his family is struggling to pay his medical bills.

"He still won't ride the school bus and it's been hard to get him to play baseball because for some reason a dog showed up on the baseball field," said Lawrence's mother, Jaime Martin, on Tuesday.

Lawrence gets frightened even when his own family's dogs come in the house, Martin said. "He gets up on top of a table or gets up on a chair," she said.

Martin estimated that Lawrence has accumulated \$25,000 in medical bills. The insurance company refuses to pay most of the bills, Martin said, because Lawrence was attacked while he was at a baby sitter's house.

The baby sitter is Bernadette Pickett.

The Martin family is suing Pickett and two other women, Carol McDonald and Tanisha Harris. According to tax records, McDonald and Harris own the home where Lawrence were attacked. The Martins hope to get money for Lawrence's bills so far, plus money to cover upcoming counseling and plastic surgery.

Jaime Martin said she quit her job at a moving company to stay home with Lawrence after the incident.

To bring in extra money, Jaime Martin said, her husband Terry Martin changed jobs. He's a truck driver and his old job allowed him to come home every few days; his new job pays more, but he's home only on the weekends.

"Because our finances are like, way out there, and you get all these threatening phone calls for doctor bills and stuff, you got to do something. You got to eat," Jaime Martin said.

Pickett and the Martins live near one another in a small subdivision off U.S. 401 near Linden in northern Cumberland County.

The dog attacked Lawrence on the afternoon of Jan. 18.

As he had through most of the school year, said Martin, Lawrence got off the school bus after school and walked to Pickett's to wait until Martin got home from work in Fayetteville.

Lawrence played a video game in the living room, Martin said, while Pickett went outside to check on a section of her backyard fence that had blown down in that day's high winds.

When Pickett opened the back door to enter the house, Martin said, "a dog ran in the house and attacked my son."

It went for his face, she said.

Pickett told animal control officers that she grabbed the dog, pulled it off of Lawrence and threw it out the door, Martin said.

Treatment

Doctors used at least 200 stitches to put Lawrence's face back together, Martin said. He still has scars on his cheek and under his nose. These will need plastic surgery, Martin said.

He also received rabies shots.

Lawrence doesn't like talking about the incident. Sometimes he says a little, but then he stops and says, "I don't remember."

He said the dog lived in a cage or kennel on a screened-in back porch. He saw it "lots of times" before the attack. "Every time I went over there," he said.

Pickett told county Animal Control officers and television station WTVD that the dog was a stray. It may have been a boxer. Animal Control put out cages to try to catch it.

In court papers responding to the lawsuit, Pickett, McDonald and Harris deny that the dog was theirs and deny that they are responsible for it.

Pickett did not respond to an interview request left at her home. Her lawyer, Richard Craven, declined to comment.

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