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Dog euthanized after attacking 5-year-old boy

The dog that bit and seriously injured a 5-year-old boy on a Palo Alto playground Dec. 2 was euthanized Tuesday at the Palo Alto Animal Shelter at the request of its owner.

The 3-year-old Australian Shepard mix was held the legally required 10 days to make sure it did not have rabies, according to Sandi Stadler, superintendent of animal services for the city.

Sean Martin, 5, was playing at Hoover Elementary School with a group of Cub Scouts when the dog, which was off-leash, bit him in the back of his neck. The dog had to be pulled off the boy by other Scouts and a nearby soccer player.

The neck wound required 8 staples and 1 suture to close. The bite also fractured a vertebrae in Sean Martin's neck.

"My son could have been easily killed," Greg Martin, the boy's father, said. He was thankful for those who helped pull the dog off his son.

Sean Martin is a kindergartner at Barron Park Elementary School.

Dog attack could have been fatal, father says

The Dec. 2 attack on Martin was "very, very close to being fatal," the boy's father said in an e-mail to friends.

If the dog had bitten the front rather than the back of Sean's neck, the deep incisions could have broken the artery or trachea, he said.

Martin elaborated on his conclusion in a posting on [Town Square](#), the community forum at [www.PaloAltoOnline.com](#), which has logged more than 50 postings on the dog attack.

"My son could have easily been killed," Martin said after thanking those boys and men who helped rescue Sean Martin from the mixed-breed female dog. "As it is, he has 8 staples, 1 suture, a fractured vertebrae, numerous puncture wounds, and bruises all over his head, neck and knees.

"For now, only time will tell as to how much emotional damage was done to him and the other children who had to witness the unprovoked attack," he said.

As for the young rescuers, "All of these boys are either Cub Scouts or Boy Scouts, and I am quite proud of the actions they took in trying to minimize the severity of the attack. Despite facing the risk of personal harm from the attacking dog, they did what they could to pull the dog off of Sean," Martin said.

He especially thanked a nearby soccer player who helped pull the dog off Sean then called 911. Other adults, including the dog's owner, helped pull the dog off.

Martin was critical of the online posting leading off with the dog facing death for the attack and an implication in comments by the city animal control supervisor that children should always be under close supervision by parents.

Noting that he was only about 50 yards away from the site of the attack, Martin said, "Had I been closer, maybe I could have helped pull the dog off of Sean, but I doubt I could have prevented the attack.

"Also, let's not lose perspective -- it was the dog owner's duty to prevent the attack, not mine," he said.

"If our kids aren't safe on our school playgrounds, where can they go to be safe?"

Sean, a kindergartner at Barron Park Elementary School, is recovering from his wounds but has developed a fear of dogs, his father said earlier.

The dog, at the owner's request, was scheduled to be euthanized on Tuesday. The as-yet-unidentified owner of the dog may be charged with a misdemeanor leash-law violation, according to Sandi Stadler, animal control supervisor.

The man had let his two dogs off leash in an enclosed play area, police Sgt. Sandra Brown reported. One boy opened the gate to the play area but was chased by the two dogs and was unable to close the gate, Don Verplanke, a Cub Scout leader whose son was also involved, told the Weekly via e-mail.

Sean was treated at Stanford Hospital.

The dog's owner, whose name was withheld by city officials, apologized and said he felt quite badly about the attack, Martin said. The dog, a spayed female about 3 years old, did not have a history of violence, Stadler said.

Although she may be part pit bull, the dog "actually looks more like an Australian shepherd cattle dog, also truly one of your Heinz 57 (varieties)," she said.

Martin initially identified both dogs as pit bulls: "I'm definitely a supporter of dogs in general but it's completely irresponsible to have two pit bulls in a school area (off-leash)," he said.

"I love dogs, and until recently owned two myself, Martin said in his Town Square posting.

"They were great dogs, and in their 15+ years of life, they never bit anyone. Nonetheless, I never lost sight of the fact they were dogs and were to be treated as such.

"So, for everyone out there with a dog, pit bull or otherwise, that thinks your dog is 'special' and the leash laws don't apply to you, I urge you to think again and keep your dog on a leash when you are in public.

"Had you heard the screams of pain from my son as they were stitching him up, taking x-rays and such, it might have convinced you that the leash laws are there for a reason and no matter how special your dog is, you aren't above the law," Martin concluded.

— *Don Kazak*

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