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## Stray Dog Attacks Flint Girl

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The father of a Flint girl who was attacked Saturday by a 170-pound Bullmastiff is asking for Smith County residents to push for a leash law.

Saturday afternoon, Emily Bayer was walking to her friend's house on Autumn Woods Trail, when a neighborhood dog named "Gunner" leapt on top of her, held her head in his jaws and shook.

The small-framed 11-year-old screamed and tried to protect her face with her hands as the dog's teeth became entangled in her long, blonde hair.

Her friend, Miranda Lohr, who she was going to visit, saw the attack from her front door.

Miranda yelled for Gunner to stop, but the dog kept his grasp on Emily.

"He still wouldn't get off of me so Miranda grabbed the harness he wears and pulled him off," Emily said. "She saved me."

The Lohr family, with their emergency flashers on, sped to the hospital, where Emily received a total of 20 stitches to her head; seven on the side and 13 to the back.

Emily's father, Cody Reed, said this was not the first time wandering dogs in his neighborhood have turned.

"If we don't do something about not having a leash law, someone is going to get killed and it will be a blemish to Smith County, a shame to the County Commissioners and it's going to be a shame to the people of this area who let this happen," Reed said.

Currently, Smith County does not have a leash law, and a dog wearing a collar is not considered a stray.

The Reed family said Gunner wasn't the neighborhood's big scary dog. He was the dog many of the children played with, fed or gave an occasional belly rub.

He was described as a gorgeous animal, but at 170 pounds he looked more like a lion than a dog.

Reed said he wasn't really anyone's dog because most everyone in the neighborhood fed or played with Gunner at one point.

"He just hung around and mooched off everyone. No one expected anything like this," Reed said.

Gayle Helms, executive director with the Smith County Humane Society, said attacks are just one problem that comes from not having a leash law and feeding strays.

"The problem can also be compounded by indiscriminant breeding, and with that animals can become feral," she said.

The Smith County Humane Society receives around 11,000 dogs and cats a year, many of which are strays.

"On average, that's 1,000 animals a month. It's out of control," Helms said.

Smith County is divided into two animal control districts, one north of State Highway 64 and the other south.

Officer Natalie Smith covers the entire southern area of Smith County and being only one person, it can be hard to keep up. She is responsible for animal control of more than 99,000 people.

Smith said the Reed case was unfortunate because the dog had been socialized and was familiar with children.

Some pet owners can feel like they are being kind to their pet by allowing it to run and not keeping it confined in a fence or chain.

This is not the case, Smith said.

"Dogs can get hit by cars, picked up or attacked by other dogs. Your chances of them being seriously injured or killed increase exponentially if you let them run," Mrs. Smith said.

If a dog does cause property or physical damage to a person, the owners or person feeding the dog is held responsible.

"If you feed it it's your dog. You have taken custody and control of the dog," she said.

Instead of feeding a stray dog, Smith suggests calling animal control to have the animal picked up.

"Oftentimes the dog isn't a stray, they just happened to wander into a neighbor's yard. Feeding the animal can prevent it from returning to their home," she said.

*Malena Ogles covers nightside police, fire, and Gregg County. She can be reached at 903.596.6284. e-mail: [news@tylerpaper.com](mailto:news@tylerpaper.com)*