



Published on Friday, December 28, 2007

Dogs attack child

By Nancy McCleary
Staff writer

BROADWAY — Melissa Rollins and her brother were playing basketball at their home on Rosser Pittman Road last week when three dogs appeared.

Before she knew what was happening, one of the dogs — a big red mixed breed — grabbed her by the back of her leg and began dragging her across a field toward some woods.

The other two soon joined in.

What followed that day, Dec. 20, was 10 minutes of horror for the 12-year-old.

The dogs bit her repeatedly on her legs, feet, arms, back, neck and scalp and nearly ripped an ear off as they dragged her halfway across the field.

“I was just crying for help,” Melissa said Thursday. “I was screaming as loud as I could.”

She had the presence of mind to curl into a fetal position, protecting her face and torso, said her grandmother, Lee Cook.

Had it not been for her brother, 13-year-old Kevin, Melissa likely would have been killed, Cook said.

“She thought she was going to die,” Cook said.

Kevin fought the dogs off his sister and was bitten a couple of times. He helped Melissa to her feet and helped her make her way across the field to their white farmhouse.

“He’s definitely my hero and Melissa’s,” Cook said.

Melissa was taken to Central Carolina Hospital in Sanford and then onto UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill, where she stayed for three days.

The clothes Melissa was wearing that day tell the story.

The legs of the faded blue jeans are tattered and ripped to shreds. Dried blood can be seen along the hemline.

Melissa’s dark blue T-shirt has two big holes in the back, and the jacket she was wearing is torn.

“When I first laid eyes on her, I thought she’d been in a knife fight,” Cook said.

The dogs were looking for food, said Tino Medina, Harnett County Animal Control supervisor.

“Most dogs don’t drag (people) away.”

Medina said he has conflicting stories about how the mixed breed dogs got to the sparsely populated rural area off Barbecue Church Road.

Melissa, a fifth-grader at Benhaven Elementary School, and her brother said they saw a man in a truck drop the dogs off about an hour before she was attacked.

A nearby farmer told Medina the dogs had been around for a while. He'd run them off from his chicken house.

Animal Control officers set traps and caught two adult dogs and four younger dogs, Medina said.

One was the aggressive red dog that attacked Melissa, Medina said.

The dog was in a trap when Medina checked Dec. 21. What Medina didn't know was that a second red dog was lying behind the trap. He didn't see it until the trapped dog moved.

The second dog came after Medina, forcing him to shoot it, he said.

The trapped dogs were taken to Animal Control and euthanized, Medina said.

That's small comfort to Melissa, whose legs are covered with deep red cuts, some stitched shut, as well as scratches and bruises. She sports other bruises on her back, neck and arms.

She and Kevin are being treated for rabies, Cook said.

But Melissa's deepest scars are to her psyche, Cook said. They are the ones that will take time to heal.

"She's having some hard nightmares," Cook said. "She'll be crying in her sleep and fighting."

Melissa is getting counseling to help her deal with the trauma, Cook said.

But Melissa is a fighter, Cook said. She has battled back from a congenital heart defect that still requires treatment, and her spirit hasn't been broken by the attack.

"I'm tough," Melissa said, a big smile on her face.

Staff writer Nancy McCleary can be reached at mcclearyn@fayobserver.com or 486-3568.

Copyright 2007 - The Fayetteville (NC) Observer