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Gayla Holmes recounts being attacked by the family dog from her room in OSF St. Mary Medical Center Friday evening. With her are her son David Quick, and granddaughters Madelyn Quick, left, and Cora McNeal. Holmes required 1,000

stitches for her injuries.

Oneida woman mauled by family pet

Doctors use 1,000 stitches to close wounds

Saturday, March 17, 2007

BY TOM LOEWY

THE REGISTER-MAIL

Twenty-one minutes.

Gayla Holmes set her cell phone down at 8:25 p.m. Monday night and grabbed a few treats for Captain.

It was the start of a ritual that took place almost every day between the 60-year-old Oneida resident and the Australian shepherd.

But something was wrong with the dog who was, according to Gayla, a "beloved member of our family" for three years.

The next time Gayla picked up the cell phone, it was 8:46 p.m. She was covered in her own blood and barely conscious.

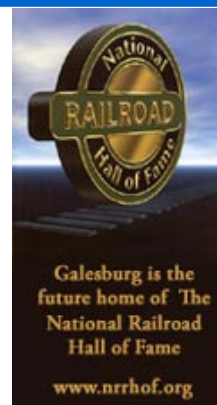
Gayla called her husband, Dick Holmes.

"I picked up my cell phone and it was Gayla," Dick said Friday as he stood in his wife's room in OSF St. Mary Medical Center.

"She said 'Captain attacked me. I'm bleeding to death. Call 911.' Then she hung up."

Captain's teeth shredded Gayla's arms and lower legs. Two doctors worked for 2 1/2 hours and used 1,000 stitches to close approximately 100 wound sites.

"Captain really was a friend," Gayla said from her hospital bed. "I don't know what happened that night. It was like he was



possessed. He was crazy."

Gayla recounted the 21-minute struggle from her hospital bed.

She was surrounded by her husband, her son David Quick, granddaughters Madelyn Quick and Cora McNeal and flowers sent by well-wishers.

Her arms and lower legs were heavily bandaged.

"Dick and I got home Monday night at just after 8 p.m. David had asked me to take Captain in and put him down in the basement where we keep his bachelor's pad," Gayla said. "I talked to my son Darren on the phone and then I grabbed some treats for Captain."



KENT KRIEGSHAUSER/The Register-Mail

Cora McNeal holds the bandaged hand and arm of her grandmother, Gayla Holmes, Friday at OSF St. Mary Medical Center.

Gayla left her cell phone on the floor next to where the treats were kept. She went outside the portion of the yard where Captain was tethered to a 50-foot line.

"I walked out and I said 'Hi, Captain, I've got some treats for you.' Captain started to growl and when I walked over to him, he lunged at me and knocked me down."

Captain showed his teeth and snarled at Gayla. Then he attacked in earnest.

"He sunk his teeth into my arm," she said. "I remember yelling, 'Captain, it's Mommy. Why do you want to hurt me?' But I could tell he didn't even hear me. He wanted to kill me. His teeth felt so big."

Gayla said the dog tried to reach her face and neck, but she warded off the bites with her arms.

"I started screaming for help, but I realized no one was coming," she said.

During the attack, Gayla managed to start to roll away from the dog. She grabbed Captain's jaw and pulled his ears back. The dog turned his attention to her legs.

"He ripped one of my shoes off and got his teeth into my ankles," she said. "The pain was horrific."

Gayla recalled thinking the dog was going to kill her.

"I was screaming and then I just called to God. I prayed. I was just saying prayers and finally I said that I just wanted to see my kids and my grandkids again."

Toward the end of the attack, Captain lunged for Gayla's upper body again. The dog took a chunk of her left forearm.

"Finally he got a mouthful of my forearm and tore it loose," she said. "I was able to roll away."

Unable to walk, Gayla crawled into the house. The batteries in the phone nearest to the door were dead. She crawled into the house, tried to use the wall phone and failed.

"Finally, we think she just fell down," Dick said. "She was near the dog treats and there was the cell phone."

Gayla and her entire family are at a loss to explain the suddenly violent behavior from a dog they described as "social, smart and was always good around the kids and other animals."

David Quick owned the dog and had it euthanized Tuesday morning. Preliminary tests showed that Captain was current on all his vaccinations and did not have rabies.

David is left with guilt over the attack on his mother.

"Captain was a great dog," he said. "He never, ever attacked anyone before. I took him with me to parties and social gatherings. He was a great Frisbee dog. He loved playing and always wanted to play."

Gayla said there may have been some warning signs the family didn't notice.

"Captain's behavior had changed slightly, now that we look back on it," she said. "He had maybe been a little more irritable. I would just encourage people to pay attention to the little changes in their pets."

Gayla said she didn't know how long her recovery would take. She said she may be released from the hospital Monday.

"I'm just glad to be alive," she said. "I really thought Captain was going to kill me."

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