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Woman attacked by neighborhood dog

By Tanya Berkebile,
Cadillac News

CADILLAC — Sherry Holliday sat in her home and cried waiting for help after she called 911.

During what she felt were 30 minutes it took for help to arrive, she did what she could to keep her mind busy and pass the time. She put rubbing alcohol on her wound and her mind raced with worries of what if her leg would become infected? Or worse — if she was bit by an animal that had rabies.



Jeff Broddle | Cadillac News
Sherry Holliday enjoys a quiet moment with her dogs, Star and Lady, at her home outside Cadillac. Holliday was recently attacked by a neighbor's dog.

Just minutes earlier, the 55-year-old woman had been carefree. She had a question about a house, and planned to talk to her neighbor, who is a real estate agent. She walked down the road to her neighbor's house and stepped onto her property.

While she was walking to the door, all of a sudden she stopped dead in her tracks.

A vicious looking dog came out of nowhere, heading toward her. At that moment, everything seemed to be in slow motion — everything except for her pounding heart and the dog that was running toward her.

She tried to get away from the dog, but it pounced on her. Its first bite to her lower leg cleared her mind and the world around her suddenly went back to the brutal reality. Before she was able to get out of the yard — and out of the dog's reach from its long chain nailed to the house — the dog bit her thigh and shredded her jeans in the process.

"I never saw the dog. It was on a long wire that was nailed to the house and goes all the way to the woods — where the dog was," she said. "I never saw the wire — and there was no fence and there isn't even a beware-of-dog sign."

Since the incident in early October, all that is left are the black and blue marks and scars. The pain has subsided, but it isn't all gone.

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"They wouldn't give me stitches for dog bites because they are prone to infection," she said. "They did give me a tetanus shot and cleaned it up. Every time I walk, the pain still is there. And pain pills haven't helped."

Although the incident has put some fear in her, she still has an affection for dogs — which shows, because she has English springer spaniels of her own.

What bothers her most about the incident is that she was told that nothing could be done because a dog has to viciously attack or bite three times first. She said she was also lectured that Missaukee County residents should vote for a dog warden.

"I just don't think it was handled well — there should be something that could have been done," she said. "Later when I called I was told the dog was in its own yard protecting the house. What if it was a child who walked into the yard selling cookies or something? I would hate to think of what could happen."

With regard to dog bites, Wexford County Prosecuting Attorney Mark Smathers said the topic is bigger than a person might expect.

"Dog bites have been a subject for negligence/tort lawsuits for a thousand years or so. There is a lot of case law on the subject," he said. "Michigan does have a dog bite law that in essence says there is not a free first bite. The general rule is that if I am legally on your property, you are responsible if your dog bites me, unless I provoke the dog."

There are state laws that say dogs must be licensed and leashed. These are misdemeanors and are charged by the prosecutor's office many times each year.

There is also a provision in the state law, according to Smathers, that a dog can be seized and held by animal control if it is dangerous and then the owner can be ordered to show cause why the dog should not be penned or euthanized.

Michigan State Police Trooper Marc Moore, who makes many visits to residences on the job, said he always takes extra caution when approaching a home.

"Even if a dog looks friendly, that isn't always the case," he said. "And if there is no dog visible, look for signs that a dog might live there."

Those signs could include a dog house, toys in the yard, a leash or chain or a bowl of water.

Moore said when he gets out of the car, he shuts the door and leaves it unlocked and waits for about 30 seconds to give time for a dog to come out. If a dog does run toward him, the open car door allows him quick access to safety.

With Halloween coming up, Moore said it is important for parents to be on guard for animals when going door-to-door for trick-or-treating. He added that it is important that homeowners keep dogs away from the door or yard, because they can scare the children.

"The responsibility falls on both the dog owners and the person entering private property," Moore said. "Always be cautious and don't approach animals you aren't familiar with."

Your local connection

Dog safety

A lesson in dog safety can help prevent bites

Every year, more than 4.7 million Americans are bitten by dogs, with more than half of all victims younger than age 14. Following are tips to help parents protect their children from an encounter with canine teeth:

- Pick a good match. Collies and Labrador retrievers are some of the animals recommended as generally safe with children. Consult your veterinarian for details about the behavior of different breeds.
- Socialize your pet. Gradually expose your puppy to a variety of people and other animals so it feels at ease in these situations; continue this exposure as your dog gets older.
- Train your dog. Commands can build a bond of obedience and trust between man and beast. Avoid aggressive games like wrestling or tug-of-war with your dog.
- Vaccinate your dog against rabies and other diseases.
- Neuter your dog. Neutered dogs are less likely to bite.
- Never leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.
- Teach your child to see if the dog is with an owner and looks friendly. Then ask the owner for permission to pet the dog. Let the dog sniff your child and have your child touch the dog gently, avoiding the face, head and tail.
- Tell your child not to bother a dog if it is sleeping, eating or caring for puppies.
- Tell your child not to run past a dog.
- If you're threatened by a dog, remain calm. Avoid eye contact. Stand still until the dog leaves or back away slowly. If you are knocked down, curl into a ball and protect your face with your hands. If a dog bites your child, clean small wounds with soap and water and seek medical attention for larger wounds. Contact the dog's veterinarian to check vaccination records.

American Academy of Pediatrics

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