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PUPPY MAULED TO DEATH

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A Plymouth family have been left heartbroken after their seven-month-old puppy was mauled to death by a giant dog.

Claire Ford, aged 36, and her daughter Stephanie, aged 12, were out walking their Parson Jack Russell Terrier, Jake, when a bullmastiff suddenly pounced from a garden and sank its teeth into Jake's body.

"I screamed and the next thing I knew the dog had knocked me to the ground and I was on the floor wrestling it," Mrs Ford said.



Stephanie tried to kick the dog to break its grip on Jake and Mrs Ford tried to prise its jaw open. In the process it took a chunk out of Mrs Ford's finger.

"The thing didn't go for me, it went for my dog but I grabbed hold of it and tried to prise open its mouth. My finger got caught and then it clamped down," she said.

"I looked down the road and screamed: 'Help me! Help me!' I was screaming: 'It's biting my finger!'

"A couple of cars stopped and the next thing I knew three blokes were on top of the dog."

The attack happened at just after 2pm last Friday in Alexandra Road, Mutley.

Mrs Ford and Stephanie, who live in Lipson, were walking with Jake along the pavement.

Mrs Ford said: "I saw something move out of the corner of my eye so I looked over my shoulder and thought 'that's a massive dog in that garden'. It was three feet tall and all muscle.

"The next thing I knew it was coming down the path and through the gate and went for Jake, who didn't see it coming.

"It was growling really loudly when he had hold of our dog and poor Jake was screaming," Stephanie said.

"He had huge bite marks all down his back and was bleeding a lot. I had blood all down my hands and on my coat."

Mrs Ford said the bullmastiff's owner ran out of his house and muzzled the dog.

Jake had suffered four puncture wounds and was taken to Estover Veterinary Hospital by a woman who witnessed the attack.

Mrs Ford was taken to hospital by ambulance and left with a split finger and three cuts. The wound was not stitched up, which is normal practice for a dog bite, and Mrs Ford now has to look out for signs of infection.

"My finger is really painful but a lot better than I thought it was going to be. I thought I'd lost it," she said.

"I'm so grateful to the people who stopped and helped us. If it wasn't for them we'd never have got the dog off. If it had happened in a side street I don't know what would have

happened," Mrs Ford said.

The bullmastiff was initially impounded but is now back with its owner. It is not one of the four breeds of 'dangerous dog' prohibited in this country.

On the Friday the Ford family, including Claire's husband Andrew, aged 37, and son Darren, aged 11, were told Jake's wounds were superficial and he should survive, but early Saturday morning they had a call to say his condition had deteriorated.

They went to the hospital and Jake had to be put down.

Mr Ford said: "The vet told us he had died from liver trauma from being shaken around."

Pc Roy Linden said: "We know that four or five people assisted and we have only spoken to a couple of them. We are keen to speak to anyone else who can provide us with information.

"The incident has been reported to the Crown Prosecution Service to consider whether or not a charge will be brought.

"As it is not one of the four breeds of dangerous dog it cannot be destroyed at this stage. That would depend on the outcome of any court case."

Mrs Ford lost her mum last summer and the family got Jake to help Mrs Ford cope with her grief. It is the first dog they have had but they said they might consider getting another in the future.

"If I get another dog I'll be so conscious. I'm going to be petrified if I see another bullmastiff," Mrs Ford said.

"It shouldn't be out in a public place without a muzzle on or not restrained.

"I feel upset and traumatised. The kids are as well, with shock. I don't want this to happen to anybody else."

Mr Ford added: "If he doesn't get charged we will look at taking it into the civil court.

"Jake was a pain but now we're really going to miss him."

Witnesses should call the police on 08452 777 444 or anonymously via Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111, quoting crime reference EL/08/152.a
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