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Port Alberni girl recovers after dog attack

By Susan Quinn - Alberni Valley News - May 22, 2008



A plastic surgeon needed 40 stitches to close up seven puncture wounds in Sheridan Barkhouse's face after the girl, 10, was attacked by a dog.

SUSAN QUINN/Alberni Valley News

A Port Alberni man has turned his dog into the SPCA after a 10-year-old girl was bitten Friday while delivering newspapers.

A plastic surgeon in Victoria General Hospital needed 40 stitches to close seven puncture wounds on the girl's face. The bites missed her right eye by an inch and a half, but one of the dog's teeth punctured her left cheek and knocked a baby tooth loose.

Sheridan Barkhouse, 10, was delivering papers in the 2700-block of Eighth Avenue when she bent to pet the shepherd-chow cross, which was tethered in front of its house.

"I said 'hi, Belle' and petted her head, and when my hand came off her head she jumped at me," Sheridan said.

When Sheridan first started her paper route with the Alberni Valley News nearly four months ago, she had asked the owner if the dog was friendly, and if it was OK to pet it, and was told yes, it was all right for her to pet it. "I had made friends with the dog," she said. "Well, I thought I did."

She said she had never seen the dog tied up before Friday.

Sheridan's mother, Christine Barkhouse, was across the street delivering to another home when she heard Sheridan scream. "She called 'Mommy!' and I turned around. There was blood everywhere. Fortunately, I knew somebody on the street so I took her there."

Barkhouse's friend rushed the girl and her mother to the hospital, while her husband phoned the police about the dog. An RCMP officer came to the hospital and took photos and a statement before Barkhouse was instructed to drive her daughter to Victoria.

The RCMP turned the case over to the SPCA, Staff Sgt. Lee Omilusik said.

Barkhouse and her husband Garnet both want the dog put down so it won't bite another child. Sheridan, however, doesn't feel the same way.

"I personally think the dog shouldn't be put down," she said. "Even though she bit me, I still love her."

The dog's owner voluntarily surrendered his pet to Port Alberni SPCA manager Irene Towell on Wednesday.

There was no agreement to have the dog put down, she said, adding that a court would have to make that decision. She also said there haven't been any charges laid in the past for the dog being vicious.

The owner declined to speak to media.

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