

Toddler Stable After Attack; Pit Bull to Die

By MARJORIE HERNANDEZ, TIMES STAFF WRITER

Family members crowded into the pediatric intensive-care unit of UCI Medical Center in Orange on Monday to show support for a critically injured 2-year-old boy mauled by a pit bull over the weekend. Authorities said the dog's owner has agreed to have the animal euthanized.

John Michael Macias-Drisner of Orange remains in stable condition after three hours of surgery Saturday night following the mauling that day in La Habra.

"I really want to thank the neighbor and the roofers who were able to help," Suzette Macias, the boy's mother, said of those who pulled him from the dog. John Michael was attacked as he and his grandmother returned with other relatives from a garden shop Saturday afternoon.

"If it weren't for them," the mother said, "this miracle would not have happened. The doctors said the dog was set to kill him."

Boy Has Nightmares

Though responding well to their voices, relatives said, the toddler is having nightmares. "He's just very clingy to me right now," Macias said.

The boy was expected to be transferred to the hospital's pediatric ward within two days; doctors said the greatest danger now is infection.

Witnesses said the dog ran past several adults and straight for the boy. Annette Briers of Huntington Beach, John Michael's aunt, said grandmother Rosalie Macias tried to protect her grandson by lifting him above her head, but she lost her balance and fell as the dog ran between her legs.

The dog sank its teeth into the boy's head, tearing away part of his scalp.

The toddler also suffered lacerations to his forehead and right cheek, and punctures to his chest, legs and eyelids, said Dr. Jay Calvert, UC Irvine assistant professor of clinical surgery in the division of plastic surgery.

He said a CAT scan of the boy's skull showed bruising, but no evidence of brain damage.

"The injuries were of a very vicious nature," Calvert said. "Based on the amount of dead tissue, and the extent of the injuries

"Pit bulls kill people; we know that," he said. "It's not a big secret."

The dog was subdued by neighbor Don Beaman and two roofers working nearby.

The dog's owner, Jonathan Beasley, 21, relinquished ownership of the animal, which is being held for four days in mandatory quarantine before being put to death, authorities said Monday.

No Charges Filed

No charges have been filed against Beasley pending further investigation, officials said.

"We'll continue to see if there are other circumstances, such as whether the dog was trained to attack," said Cindy Knapp, La Habra police spokeswoman.

"The greatest [impact] may not be so much criminal liability but civil liability."

Beasley could not be reached for comment Monday, but family members expressed shock at the dog's behavior and denied that it had ever been aggressive.

"This has never happened before," said Beasley's cousin Jennifer Kenison of Norwalk.

"My family is just really heartbroken, and our prayers go out to the little boy and his family."

3,000 Bites This Year

About 3,000 people have suffered dog bites in Orange County this year, and about 4,000 were attacked last year, said Kathy Francis, Animal Care Services spokeswoman.

"We haven't seen a huge increase," Francis said. "We seem to go seasonally. It generally peaks in the summer months and declines in the winter."

Dog lovers in the La Habra neighborhood Monday worried that this latest attack will add to the reputation for viciousness the pit bull breed has earned in recent years.

"You hear it on the news that the breed is vicious, but it's really all about the owners," said neighbor Michael Beaman, Don's son, as he patted his own 2-year-old pit bull, Jake. "They really are beautiful dogs. I love them."

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Times staff writer Kimi Yoshino and Times wire services contributed to this report.

Boxerworld Forum Board

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<http://www.boxerworld.com/forums/other-pets/28930-pit-bulls-news.html>

Two-year-old John Michael Macias-Drisner sat quietly on his mom's lap, blinking at the sight of stuffed animals and television cameras.

"He's usually talking all the time," said his mother, Suzette Macias, 26, of Orange. "But I don't think he's used to this much attention."

Doctors at UCI Medical Center released the boy to his family Thursday, six days after he was severely mauled by a pit bull outside his great-aunt's home in Placentia.

The dog bit into John Michael's skull, fracturing it. Hundreds of stitches were needed to close the deep cuts on the boy's scalp, forehead and face.

Dr. Jay Calvert, who performed plastic surgery on the boy Saturday, said John Michael probably will be left with only a permanent scar over his eyebrow.

"This little guy is incredible," Calvert said. "He has made amazing progress."

During his hospital stay, John Michael constantly said he wanted to go home, his mother said. He also asked for soda, candy and his Bob the Builder toy.

A psychologist was called in to help John Michael cope with any fears of dogs. The family owns an older mutt named Spice, who is the boy's best friend, Macias said.

La Habra police are investigating whether charges should be brought against the pit bull's owner, neighbor Jonathan Beasley. The dog was running loose when it encountered the boy and his grandmother.

Beasley signed a release to have his pet euthanized by Thursday. Police spokeswoman Cindy Knapp said she did not know whether the city's animal control department had killed the dog.

John Michael's mother thinks the animals are too violent to be domesticated.

"Pit bulls shouldn't be pets to begin with," she said. "It doesn't matter how certain you are that the dog is leashed or locked up, there is always a 1 percent chance it can hurt (someone)."