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## Boy, 4, attacked by pit bull

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Arisja Jacobs

Secunda – A 4-year-old boy had parts of his scalp ripped off, his ear nearly torn off, and his left arm broken, when he was attacked by what is believed to be a pit bull terrier on Friday.

While the owners of the house where the attack took place apparently stood by and watched, Fanie van Rensburg, a neighbour of little Xander van Zyl, managed to save the child from its jaws.

“Man, what a horrible thing. The dog was dragging the boy back and forth, picking him up and letting go over and over. Each time the little boy reached out for me to pick him up, the dog would take hold again,” Van Rensburg said on Sunday.

Xander’s mother, Cornel van Zyl, said the family had only been living in Secunda for four months.

“Xander and his little sister, Shantelize, 2, were playing in our yard. I went to the bathroom and while I was there, Shantelize came to me in tears, saying her brother was being bitten by a dog.”

Van Zyl suspects that Xander climbed through the palisade fencing around their house to join one of his friends across the road. The dog, which belongs to a family member of Xander’s little friend, was kept in that yard.

### Naked and covered in blood

“I found Xander naked and covered in blood in the kitchen while the people were just standing there staring at him. I grabbed my child and screamed at them to bring a towel and phone the ambulance. I had to give them my cellphone since they didn’t have any airtime.

“The woman gave me a small blue towel which I wrapped around Xander. I held him tightly so he wouldn’t lose more blood,” said Van Zyl.

“If it wasn’t for that man (Van Rensburg), my child would be dead.”



Xander van Zyl recovers in hospital after being attacked by a dog. (Arisja Jacobs, Beeld)

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Van Rensburg's son Jan, a paramedic, took over from Van Zyl and started to clean Xander's wounds.

A friend of the Van Zyls, Bernadette Nortjé, also showed up and tried to comfort her hysterical friend and little Shantelize. "She was crying and kept repeating that her brother was bleeding."

Nortjé accompanied Xander in the ambulance. "I thought he was going to die there because he was so cold. His eyes rolled back and he was very drowsy," she said.

Xander was admitted to the Highveld Medi-Clinic in Trichardt. According to his father, Michael van Zyl, he will have surgery this week.

### **Dog to be put down**

The dog will be put down by the SPCA on Monday. "The brain must be sent to Onderstepoort for rabies tests," said Marilé Nieuwoudt of the SPCA. While the brown dog looks like a pit bull terrier, Nieuwoudt was not yet able to confirm the breed.

The Van Zyls are considering legal action against the dog's owners. They have no medical aid, and Xander's father's employer paid for his hospital admission.

Beeld made several phone calls to the dog's owner, HF Koen, but received no answer. The people who live on the premises where the dog was kept were also not available for comment.

- Beeld



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### Boy may lose use of fingers



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Arisja Jacobs

Secunda – The 4-year-old boy who was attacked by a dog on Friday might have lost the use of some of his fingers.

Xander van Zyl will probably be discharged from the Highveld Medi-Clinic on Tuesday. His doctors were still cleaning and closing his wounds on Monday.

The boy was attacked by a dog kept in a neighbour's yard last week, leaving him with a broken and gashed left arm, parts of his scalp ripped off and his ear nearly torn off completely.

"The doctors think the dog damaged some of the nerves in Xander's arm, which could mean that he won't be able to use some of the fingers on his left hand," said his mother, Cornel van Zyl.

"Luckily the wounds are clean. He'll have to come back every week for further treatment."

#### Dog put down

The dog was put down on Monday afternoon and its brain sent to Onderstepoort. According to the SPCA's Marilé Nieuwoudt, the test results might be available by Wednesday.

Jaco Knoesen, who owns the house in Suikerbosrand Street where the dog was kept, told Beeld on Monday that the dog belonged to Hennie Koen, a friend of his mother-in-law, Engela van der Merwe.

"He asked us if Rambo could stay with us since he had lost his house. It was only supposed to be for a week, but that stretched into months," said Knoesen.

"It [the attack on Xander] wouldn't have happened if Koen had come to fetch his dog like he had repeatedly promised.

Knoesen says Rambo wasn't aggressive, and his children often clambered all over and wrestled with him.

However, Rambo clearly didn't like being limited to a cordoned-off part of the yard, and chewed off the pegs of the palisade fencing.

"We pray for Xander every day. I sat next to his hospital bed praying and crying," he said.

"Koen also promised to help with Xander's medical expenses, as far as his income allows."

Knoesen said his mother-in-law moved out of the house on Sunday.

#### Dog owner arrested

Beeld has since confirmed that Koen had been held in the Trichardt police cells from Friday night until Monday morning, after being arrested near his tent at the Trichardtsfontein Dam Resort for reportedly being drunk in public. Thus far he has been unreachable.

Meanwhile, Xander is excited about going home, as he misses his labrador, Boela.

After the attack he wanted to know whether he'll ever be able to play rugby with his father again, since he's practising to become a Blue Bull.