

Mauled by a Dog

by Steve Reiman

The Pediatric Life Specialist met me at the door to the Pediatric wing. “We’d like your help with a special case” she said.

She took me to the room of a two year old boy who had been **mauled** by the neighbor’s dog. His arm was broken, his head bandaged and his face had sustained serious nerve damage. His mother sat with him on the bed. Lily & Jordan were dressed in Tai Quan Do outfits with black belts and sweatbands. It could not have been worse! Why didn’t I dress them as cows, or zebras, or as clowns?

The boy saw the two German Shepherds and screamed in absolute panic so I backed them well away from his room. It was obvious that he was traumatized by dogs after having been so badly bitten.

I then released the dogs, as I always did on that floor, and they began to play with the children who came out of their rooms. Soon, a tennis ball and small Frisbee were flying up and down the hall being chased by the two therapy dogs. This was followed by the laughter of children who were temporarily forgetting that they were in a hospital.

Youthful curiosity is a wonderful thing at times. The two year old was soon absorbed in the commotion and eventually left the side of his mother and walked to the doorway of his room. For a few moments, he watched all of the fun in the hallway, and then he did something wonderful. He stepped out into the hall – he stepped back into the world. When he did, Lily ducked behind him and he threw up his arms and screamed . . . but nothing happened.

The next time Lily came near, the boy reached out and touched her back. Then, he patted her, and then he hugged her. His mother was delighted to see that her son had lost his traumatic fear of dogs.

As a post script to this story, I called the mother about 7 months later to see how the little fellow was doing. She told me he was fine except for facial damage which kept him from smiling on the left side. Thankfully, he had no fear of dogs. Yet, his three year old brother who had witnessed the attack was still traumatized by them. I wish he would

have been there at the hospital too because I am sure we would have then helped them both through this difficult situation.



Therapy Dogs
OF VERMONT
UNLEASH A SMILE