

A weekend of horror

Farm friend mauled in second attempt

The screams are what we remember most.

A client and I stood in the horse barn Saturday, January 8, 2005, talking about the loose dogs that sometimes come in off of the nearby public bike trail. My children and I had just chased two interlopers off of the property.

We had seen the dogs running around in the goat pen where we keep our Nubian goats, Jack and Lawrence, age four. The goats provide weeding services and companionship for sick or injured horses at our boarding stable.

"We tried to catch the dogs," I told the client, "but they got ...". Screams interrupted us. "It's the goats," I said.



The dogs were captured and put in an outbuilding until the Humane Society arrived.



On his knees in our mud room, Dr. Allan Landes of Equine Medical Services works on Lawrence, shown here with his head on our son's lap; vet student Rachele Rorabeck assisted and Dr. Ragan Adams consulted. Our other goat escaped injury. The biggest injury was to the right hindquarter, below.

The client and I looked at each other in horror. We realized the dogs had come back. The two of us ran to the goat pen, also our back yard orchard, where a cream-colored dog and another with black and white markings milled around. Our daughter, who also heard the screams, met us at the north gate.

"Block the gates!" I yelled. Our client cornered the white dog, handed him over to me, and ran to help our daughter catch the black dog. It slipped away.

At first we thought the dogs had just scared the goats, but Lawrence didn't look right. The client and my daughter moved closer.

"Easy, Lawrence," said my daughter. "It's OK."

But she was wrong. A horrific sight met the humans when they got to the goat's other side. Lawrence's hindquarter had been peeled off.

My daughter screamed,



"Mom! Lawrence is hurt!" One glance told me we needed a veterinarian, fast. I ran to the house with the cream dog in tow and banged on the door for my son. "Give me the phone," I gasped. "Lawrence is mauled."

What would turn out to be Lawrence's greatest endurance test began. I called the office of our regular vet, but she was gone and her fill-in was not comfortable working with

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goats, according to the receptionist. This set off a series of phone calls to other vets, all of whom were out due to a weekend veterinary conference at our local university, or in the middle of other cases.

Amid the telephone marathon, the black dog, hovering on the periphery returned and began skulking around the goat pen. Our daughter caught it and put it in an outbuilding.

My son and our client struggled with Lawrence, who had collapsed. They half-dragged, half-carried his 100-plus pounds up the back steps and into the mud room of our 1897 farm house. Lawrence began groaning.

Our client placed damp towels over the goat's wound to keep it clean and moist for stitching. I sat on the mud room floor with Lawrence's head in my lap while I continued making phone calls.

Vet after vet was either unavailable or uncomfortable working with goats. I later learned that goats are very susceptible to shock, and they don't make successful patients.

Finally, I resorted to our church directory, and got through to the wife of a veterinarian. She contacted her husband, Dr. Allan Landes, of Equine Medical Services. He was on the road bringing in a load of hay for his own horses, but he would return to the clinic, get the medical truck, and come as soon as he could.

Lawrence's breathing had become rapid and shallow. His long, floppy ears were cold,

a sign of shock. The young goat continued to groan. We layered blankets over him, but he remained cold. Finally, we plugged in an electric blanket off of a human bed. Lawrence's gum color improved and his breathing deepened, but he still cried. Goats in pain sound like a small child crying.

Shortly before noon, Dr. Landes arrived. We discovered that what we thought was just peeled skin was much worse. The dogs tore Lawrence's muscle, and we also found several puncture wounds. One puncture was so deep that the veterinarian could stick his little finger into the hole.

We found teeth marks above the torn hindquarter, along Lawrence's rib cage and about an inch away from his jugular vein. Dr. Landes injected a sedative cocktail that would not quite knock Lawrence out.

Besides being shock-prone, goats are difficult patients for full-anesthesia.

Dr. Ragan Adams, a stable client and also a veterinarian, knocked on the door. She and Dr. Landes talked strategy. Lawrence's cries became louder, due to the sedative, I'm told. I imagined this is what somebody who was slowly being torn limb from limb would sound like.

During the procedure, Humane Society Officer Mary Condon arrived. She told us, based on the information on the dog's tag, that the black dog had killed chickens before. She gave us statement forms, and said the dogs would be treated as if they had hurt a human. Their owner would have to go to court to get them back. She and Dr. Adams left.

We knelt on the mud

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Lawrence nibbles hay the morning after the attack. He is patched back together with two drains in his hindquarter. The folks at Jax Farm & Ranch helped us design an emergency indoor pen using cattle panels, a stall mat, tie wire, and bolt cutters. Blankets provide bedding that won't irritate his wounds. His brother, Jack, joined him for moral support.

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room floor, clustered around Lawrence as Dr. Landes continued rebuilding the goat's hindquarter, stitch by stitch.

I marvelled at the veterinarian's graceful hands and persistence. I told Dr. Landes, who works only on horses, about my failed attempts to get other veterinarians.

"Why were you willing to come?" I asked.

Dr. Landes chewed on his lower lip a moment before replying.

"It's our job to help an animal in need. Period." He continued sewing. I knew our stable had found its new veterinarian.

More than three hours later, Dr. Landes rolled back off of his knees, stood up, and stretched. The veterinarian had done all he could and would return in 45 minutes with extra-powerful antibiotics from the clinic.

We brought Lawrence's brother, Jack, into the house thinking that since goats are herd animals, Lawrence needed a friend.

Except for his drug-induced "talking," Lawrence remained asleep. The goat could not hold his head up to breathe properly so we held it for him. Our entire family took turns watching him propped up on pillows until about 11 p.m. We found out the next day that we'd all been sneaking down during the night to check on our patient. About 2:30 a.m. Sunday, I noticed that Lawrence could hold his head up by himself. At 6:30 a.m., I turned on the lights and he struggled to his feet.



Jack, left, and Lawrence trim the crabapple tree. Lawrence still bears the scars of the attack, but is able to live a normal life.

The dog owner had called me the night of the attack. He apologized and offered to pay the vet bills. The man wondered what to do about the dogs, especially the black one, which belonged to his wife. He said it was ranch-raised, but had attacked a \$20,000 Alpaca.

The road to recovery

Four days after the attack, we moved Jack and Lawrence out of the house to the workshop. Dr. Landes prescribed twice-a-day flushing of the wound and moist hot-pack treatments, which we continued for more than a month. The goats lived under heaters as Lawrence continued to heal in the bitter Colorado winter.

More than a month later, on February 12, 2005, we released the goats back into their orchard pen. Six months later, all that remained of Lawrence's wound was a small hole where fluid still drained out.

Thinking back, I should have sent Lawrence to live at the vet clinic for about \$60/day until

Dog-bite facts

- **Between 1979 and 1994, the most recent year for which published data are available, dog bites resulted in the deaths of 279 people.**
- **Most dog bite-related fatalities occurred among children.**

***Centers for Disease Control (CDC)**

he recovered enough to go free. The dog owner refused to pay for our treatment time and costs, which we billed at \$35/day. He had agreed on vet costs only. He did pay the original \$890.17 bill and built a new dog fence.

I still wonder what would have happened if my niece, two years old at the time of the attack, had been in the goat pen or even the back yard when the dogs came. Would it be her screams I now remember?