

MAULED MAN: I WARNED DOGS OWNER / TESTIFIES HE SAW PIT BULLS ACTING VIOLENTLY

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A man who was mauled by pit bulls in July testified yesterday that he had seen the dogs behaving belligerently months before the attack, and had warned their owner.

Richard Robbins of Melville said he frequently walked his dogs around the field at Birchwood Elementary School in Huntington Station. He said he had seen the three pit bulls in Mary Graham's backyard fighting with one another and charging at the fence separating Graham's property from the school yard.

"I expressed my concern to Mary about the aggressive nature of her pit bulls," he said at Graham's criminal trial in First District Court in Central Islip. "Mary said they're pit bulls and this was the way they are. It's normal for them."

On July 13, Graham's pit bulls mauled Robbins, 45, and Gina Marie, a mixed Siberian husky, one of three dogs Robbins was walking.

Graham, 50, is charged with reckless endangerment and third-degree assault, both misdemeanors. Prosecutors say she knew her dogs were dangerous but allowed them to roam on school property, making her responsible for the attack. If convicted, she faces up to 1 year in jail. Judge John J. Toomey Jr. will decide the outcome of the trial.

Robbins said yesterday he has received \$200,000 from Graham's insurance company to settle a civil suit.

He said he still has pain in both hands from the attack, and lost peripheral vision in his right eye. His right tear duct no longer functions correctly, he said.

Graham's attorney, Michael Brown of Central Islip, spent more than an hour cross-examining Robbins, who acknowledged biting Dutch, one of the pit bulls, in trying to stop him from harming Gina Marie.

Brown asked Robbins if he had been attacked by the dogs before biting Dutch. Robbins said another of Graham's three pit bulls, Eve, had bitten

him, and Dutch joined in the attack. He was not sure whether Graham's third dog, Sable, attacked him.

"I was going in and out of consciousness" during the attack, he said, adding that he remembers a passerby, David Meitz, throttling Dutch with a chain to control the dog.

Brown repeatedly pressed Robbins on whether his dogs had been leashed that day. Robbins said only his smallest dog was unleashed. That led Brown to question Robbins about his license plate, which reads NOLEASH.

"You're a dog fanatic?" Brown asked Robbins.

"Yes, sir," Robbins replied.

"You're a fanatic," Brown said.

"I don't know how you're defining fanatic," Robbins answered.

Robbins' testimony yesterday came after two other Huntington Station residents, Arthur Crouch and Joseph Needham, said their dogs had been previously attacked by Dutch.

Crouch said he had let his 5-pound Chihuahua, Cosita, onto the grass by the school when Dutch climbed over his backyard fence, picked up Cosita by a small jacket the dog wore, and ran away with her. Crouch said he chased the pit bull and kicked it, forcing it to let Cosita go.