

Dog attack

"He didn't walk. I didn't clue in right away to why he wasn't walking," she remembers.

Once she got all the children safely into the house, she dialled the operator

and contacted police and an ambulance to get the child to Lindsay's Ross Memorial Hospital.

Doctors there decided almost immediately that Christopher's injuries were too serious to be treated on the spot, and they arranged an air ambulance to take him to Toronto's Sick Children's Hospital. They advised Mrs. Bryans that she should go along and be prepared to stay for about two days.

"I thought they meant he'd be well enough to come home in two days," she said. "Now I know they thought he'd be coming home in a body bag or a coffin."

Indeed, Christopher's injuries were massive and he will carry the scars for the rest of his life.

It wasn't until after they had dealt with the child that medical personnel saw that Mrs. Bryans' foot had turned black with frostbite and she was in shock. She had not noticed, herself.

The attack occurred at 10:15 in the morning. By 7 that evening, Jan. 15, 1992, Christopher was undergoing surgery in the burn unit of Sick Kids. At 9 p.m., doctors told his anxious mother that he was "not out of the woods," that he could still "die at any point in time."

That was Mrs. Bryans' first realization that her son's injuries were life-threatening. He had lost most of his right hip. There were over 100 puncture wounds from hip to knee in his right leg. The bone was nicked and virtually all of the muscle was gone, as well as the fat. There were two bites on his penis and one on his anus.

Doctors told her that the injuries to the penis and

anus came close to being of a permanent nature, but that they hoped of them healing normally. All the jagged, torn flesh had to be implanted with tubes

to drain infection and allowed to heal as jagged, raised purple scars.

In the three weeks that she spent by her son's side at Sick Kids, often

sleeping on the floor beside his bed, Mrs. Bryans watched the early phases of his recovery, including the daily changing of dressings which was

"an hour and a half of pure hell."

Because there were no phones in the rooms at Sick Children's, it was 10 days before Christopher was able to talk to his traumatized sisters at home. His mom wheeled him to a phone in the hall in a bright yellow, "banana cart."

Then, the mother learned that Courtney had believed all this while that the "dogs had eaten" her twin brother. She had witnessed the horror in the front yard, seen Christopher dragged, torn and bleeding, into the house and then into an ambulance. But, she had been in the care of other family members and friends as well as her dad, while her mother alone had gone with Christopher to hospital in Toronto.

But, for all she had seen, and because she had not heard from her brother again, she had believed in her own mind, that he was dead — eaten by the terrifying dogs that had appeared so suddenly from behind a neighbor's house.

While his parents know that Christopher's gait has been affected by the injuries he suffered, it is not apparent to a stranger meeting him for the first time. Most of the cuts on his face, suffered at the time of the dog attack, came from sharp edges in the snow and they healed quickly, leaving no traces.

But, it took weeks of physiotherapy to teach the boy to walk again, using muscles other than the ones that are now missing.

"He can't play competitive sports, or do any manual labour when he is older," said Mrs. Bryans. He tires too quickly because of the muscle loss. However, he is doing "100 per cent better than the doctors first thought."

"In summer he wears clothes, even swimsuits, that come down to his knees, because of the scarring.

"It was the second-worst case they'd ever seen" of injuries inflicted by dogs, Mrs. Bryans comments. "They believe the thick padding in his brand-new snowsuit saved his life."

After a court battle, the dogs that inflicted the injuries on Christopher were finally destroyed. Because the owner refused to have them destroyed immediately, they could not be tested for rabies and Christopher had to be monitored closely, in case he had contracted the fatal disease from the animals.

Mrs. Bryans says the dogs who attacked her son did not live in the same small subdivision of 30 or 40 homes, but came from about half a mile away. She is still upset that people continued for some time after the incident to phone her home and call her "dog hater," for insisting that the dogs that attacked her child be put down.

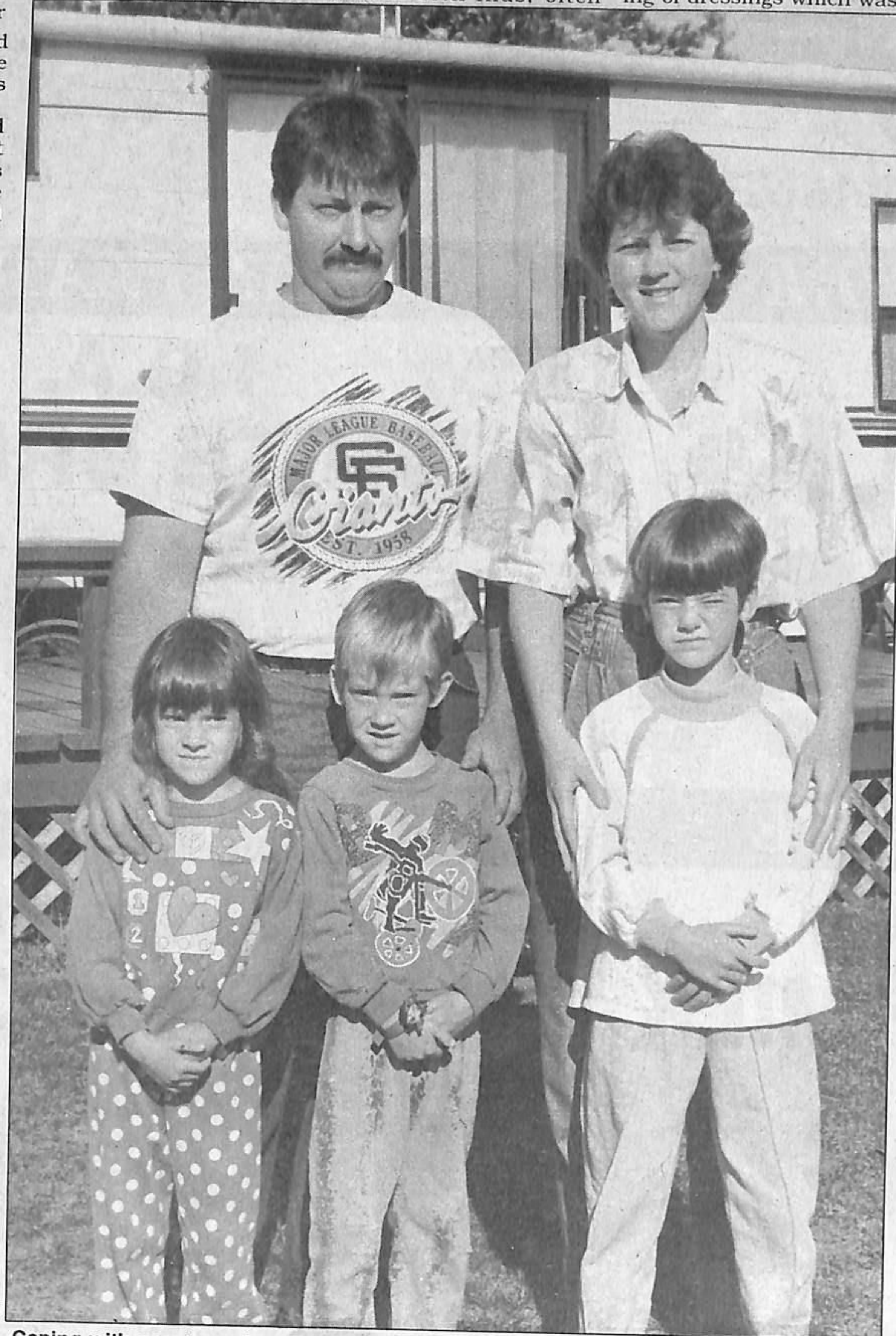
"I like dogs. My sister has a Rottweiler. But I can't deal with it anymore, because of the flashbacks.

"All three of the children are frightened of dogs, especially large dogs running loose. People don't realize the damage that loose dogs can do. I don't expect special treatment, just common sense treatment."

At KB Trailer park, the dogs are all on leashes, and there are many in the park. But, it is easy, knowing their story, to understand why the Bryans children have special fears, nightmares, about big dogs running at large.

It is against the law in Cramahe Township for any dog to be at large off the owner's property, just as it was in the municipality where Christopher was attacked.

Knowing this family's history, it is hoped the people of Cramahe will not allow history to repeat itself with these children, or any others.



Coping with near-tragedy -- The Bryans family of Castleton, owners of KB Trailer Park, daily deal with physical and emotional after-effects of dog attack. In back are parents Ed and Mari. The children, from left, are twins Courtney and Christopher (who was attacked) and older sister, Tiffany. Photo by Eileen Argyris