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Mauling victim gets flowing locks

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Eight months after being mauled by her family's pit bull and losing most of her scalp, 4-year-old Emily Paige Stinnett yesterday took her first trip to a beauty parlor, where she was fitted with a long flowing wig.

"You look pretty cute," parlor owner Chris Rabeneck told Emily after curling her new hair and putting it up in ribbons and pony tails.

"Like a princess," said Emily, admiring herself in the mirror.

Emily underwent a rare scalp transplant after she was attacked by the family's 80-pound pit bull in her father's yard in LaRue County. Sheriff's deputies recovered four pieces of her scalp from the dog's stomach after it was put down.

But the scalp died two weeks later because of vascular problems, said Dr. Mark Chariker, who performed the surgery. So he transplanted skin from her back to her head, which means she will never be able to grow hair.

Yesterday, Emily was fitted with a \$500-plus wig made of real European hair at the Cottage Salon in St. Matthews. It was provided by Jacquelyn Wig Co. and the Woman's Personal Health Resource Inc., both of New York, Chariker said.

Emily giggled as Rabeneck trimmed and fit the wig to her head. "That tickles," she said.

Chariker and Emily's mother, Melissa Strong, said the girl has adjusted remarkably well to the trauma - including a five-week stay in the hospital, followed by 10 additional outpatient surgeries.

Chariker had predicted Emily's greatest problems would be psychological. He said she initially was angry about what had happened to her, and she wasn't allowed to look into a mirror for a month. But he said she has recovered nicely, and Strong said a therapist decided she didn't need counseling.

"As tragic as it was, she is fortunate to be alive," Chariker said.

Her mother said Emily has been remarkably unselfconscious about her condition. "She takes off her hat and bandana at school and in Wal-Mart and tells people about what happened to her." She was able to return to preschool in October.

Strong, who lives in Bardstown, is divorced from Emily's father, who owns the home in LaRue County where the attack occurred. He has visitation every other weekend, she said.

No charges were filed, said Deputy Sheriff Russell McCoy, who called the mauling an accident. Emily was playing near the dog when it was able to pull a tie-down out of wet dirt.

Kosair Charities paid for the costs of Emily's care at Kosair Children's Hospital, where she was hospitalized from April 26 to June 1, said Chariker, who donated his services.

Rabeneck instructed Emily how to care for the wig, which she said probably will last for about two years.

"You're not going to throw it on the floor or leave it on the driveway, are you?" she asked.

"No," Emily said.

Photos by Pat McDonogh, The Courier-Journal

Emily Paige Stinnett, 4, put on lip gloss while Chris Rabeneck, owner of the Cottage Salon, styled her hair. Last year, Emily was mauled by her family's pit bull and lost most of her scalp.

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