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Yvonne Ryans, Utah



Yvonne Ryans. Photo by Lori Teresa Yearwood

by Lori Teresa Yearwood

EVER SINCE THE Salt Lake City police dog attacked her son in April—biting into his leg while an officer told the dog, “Good boy,” according to a [recently released police video](#)—Yvonne Ryans says she has been a nervous wreck. Especially at night.

For the first time in her life, she is taking sleeping pills, she says. But her worries are stronger than the medicine; her thoughts about her son, who has undergone multiple surgeries as a result of the attack, never stop.

“I’m OK during the day,” she said, “But my fear comes at night. I start to shake uncontrollably.”

Ryans, 64, and her 36-year-old son, Jeffrey Ryans, are African-Americans. Before her son was attacked, Ryans says she never worried about herself or anyone else in her family being victims of possible police brutality.

“I remember that happening to John Lewis and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when they were fighting for our voting rights. But in this day and age—I had never heard of such a thing.”

An officer’s [body-cam footage](#) released earlier this month, shows that on April 24, a K9 officer ordered his dog to bite Jeffrey Ryans while he was kneeling with his hands in the air, then again while he was lying on the ground with another officer on top of him, as Ryans screamed in pain. The police had been responding to [a 911 call](#) regarding possible domestic violence, said Detective Greg Wilking of the Salt Lake City Police Department. The story about what happened when officers arrived on the scene has been shared by media outlets worldwide.

Jeffrey Ryans has taken steps to sue the Salt Lake City police after alleging that officers used excessive force when they ordered the police dog to repeatedly attack him, according to [an article](#) in the Salt Lake City Tribune.

A day after the release of the video, the Salt Lake City Police Department suspended the apprehension portion of its K9 program, meaning that the dogs are not being used for biting, but they are being used in other ways, Detective Wilking said.

“With the release of that video we had to react and we’re going to take a look at the procedures and policies,” Wilking said.

Meanwhile, the officer who ordered his dog to bite Ryans has been placed on administrative leave, Wilking added.

Yvonne Ryans, a retired sales assistant for Channel Four news station, said she watched the airing of the video with Jeffrey.

“I said: ‘This is you?’ There is yelling and screaming and the dog is still biting and the officer is saying, ‘Good boy’? Is this really my son? This is my son?”

But no matter how many times she asks herself the question, the shock remains as impenetrable as the night that Jeffrey called her to tell her he was in trouble.

“He told me, ‘Mom, I’m going into surgery.’ And I said, ‘What are you talking about?’ And then I heard a cop in the background yell: ‘Get off the phone!’”

“I just sat there, numb,” Ryans said. “I didn’t know what to do.”

Hours later, Ryans says she picked Jeffrey up at the jail—police took him there after his surgery—and brought him to her two-bedroom condo. He’s been living with her ever since, she says.

“He goes to the doctor every Thursday because it’s still an open wound and they have to scrape the dead skin and try to get new skin to form. The first time he went, I went with him. When they pulled the bandages off, it was just oozing blood and pus and water and it was just horrifying—horrifying. I was sick to my stomach.”

Ryans wishes that “all this was over,” but she has no idea what her new normal will look like, and that’s one of the main anxieties that wakes her throughout the nights. Her gut tells her that her son will

need to leave Utah to escape the public scrutiny and outrage that the attack has caused.

With her unwavering faith in God and the support of her friends, who regularly call her to go walking and golfing, Ryans says she has a substantial amount of support. She has noticed, however, that the friends who call her are Black. Her white friends haven't reached out, she says.

"I think they might be afraid to call me and I don't think they really know what to say. And I feel like they will never experience what I have experienced. Because I don't think they would put a dog on a white man."





Lori Teresa Yearwood. Photo: Cass Studios of Salt Lake City

Lori Teresa Yearwood's work can be found at loriyearwood.com