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Former county attorney fights for her dog's life

Neighbors say pet should have been put down long ago as vicious

By Michelle Beaver, STAFF WRITER
Inside Bay Area

Former Alameda County Deputy District Attorney Deborah Streicher looks at her dog Sasha and sees a calm, loving animal. Several of her neighbors, however, see a snarling beast that should have been put down a long time ago.

Sasha was removed from her owner and has been impounded at an Alameda County shelter for more than 18 months in connection with several alleged attacks, but she might come back to the cul-de-sac on Castro Valley's Wooster Court, pending a Feb. 24 hearing.

Or she could be euthanized. Several outcomes are possible, according to a lawyer for Alameda County.

Sasha, 4, is about 60 pounds. In court documents she is described as a Labrador mix and or a shepherd mix. Several neighbors refer to her as being "part pit bull."

Even Streicher is not sure. She got Sasha at the pound when the dog was

6 months old and says Sasha has been a phenomenal "family dog" ever since.

Sasha has been accused of biting two men, one woman and two dogs.

Streicher, who served as a deputy district attorney from 1985 to 2004, claims neighbors and authorities have lied and "twisted the facts." Her neighbors and some authorities say the same about her and also think she has gotten special treatment because of her legal background.

Streicher has been through four animal control hearings, Superior Court hearings and an appeals court review, and has hired an animal rights attorney to defend her dog.

What the county says

The entire situation is highly unusual, said Sgt. J.D. Nelson, of the Alameda County Sheriff's Office. He recently took over the case and says most owners would have given up long ago.

"This case is more the exception than the rule," Nelson said. "I can almost guarantee that."

Richard Winnie, an attorney in the county counsel's office, agreed.

"There is a procedure, and I think the procedure was followed, but the owner of the dog is clearly exercising every right that she possibly can envision," Winnie said.

"We're very concerned about this dog," he added. "It has repeatedly shown a violent tendency. The owner may use every procedural twist and turn she possibly can, but we're going to act in an appropriate manner to protect the public. The facts show that this dog has time and again caused some serious harm to people."

Not so, according to Streicher.

What the owner says

Streicher claims her neighbors antagonized Sasha. Particularly guilty, she says, is the Lee family. The Lees lived next door and shared a fence with her. They moved last June after 16 years on Wooster Court, according to Mr. Sung Lee, because the family couldn't tolerate the situation with Streicher.

"The (Lees) antagonized Sasha," Streicher said. "They used to spray her with a hose and throw things at her. Anyone who is attacked and antagonized like that is going to lash out. (Sung) would walk out with a parrot on his shoulder over to where her kennel was on purpose and antagonize her.

"That's why I am fighting so hard for Sasha to stay alive," she said. "She doesn't deserve to die because people are so cruel."

Sasha got out of the yard several times. Streicher and her daughters admit fault on at least one occasion, but the other occasions are a mystery, according to her.

"Sasha is innocent in this," she said. "She is extremely intelligent. Extremely gentle. Very laid back. Friendly. Obedient. She's just a very loving, gentle dog."

When the county first took Sasha, Streicher visited her in the shelter every day and sat on the concrete floor with her in a 4-by-5-foot pen. Sometimes her daughter would go, too.

"We'd play with Sasha, and I'd bring her treats," Streicher said. "She'd go to sleep with her head in my lap. We wanted Sasha to hear our voices and know we were there. The last time I went I completely fell apart. I just couldn't deal with it. It just breaks my heart to see her locked up like that. I love her so much, and I know she loves me. She wouldn't try to hurt anyone."

What the neighbors say

The dog should not be in Streicher's custody, said William Skaf, who was bitten by Sasha. He plans to testify at an Alameda County animal control vicious-dog hearing on Feb. 24.

"In a way I'm glad this happened to me and not anyone else, because if it would have been a kid, I can guarantee that kid would have been dead," he said.

"I'm a tall guy and weigh 240 pounds, and that dog pushed me to the ground," he added. "She almost pulled my knee cap out. She jumped at me the first time and bit me and then charged a second time. I was just scared. (Streicher) was yelling at the dog but it didn't even care. It didn't listen."

Streicher claims Skaf received one puncture wound. Skaf says there were two and that he still has the scars. The next day his whole knee was inflamed, he said. He got a tetanus shot.

"(Streicher) tried to get me to lie to (the authorities)," he said. The long friendship that he claimed to have with her was over.

Another neighbor, who did not want his name used, said life on Wooster Court has been much better without Sasha.

"My first experience with that dog was when it came up to me as I was in my own driveway, and started barking, but not like most dogs at 6 months," he said. "This had a serious bark to it. I could see that this dog was playing for keeps. I told my daughter to get in the house. I was upset because this dog was so aggressive for such a young dog. It displayed all the behavior of a dog that was about to bite. I've been around dogs all my life, and I knew something was up with this one from that day on."

He said he saw Sasha run loose many times and felt his children were in danger, so he started keeping a baseball bat handy just in case.

Former neighbor Sung Lee said his Pomeranian and Yorkshire terrier dogs and his wife all were attacked by Sasha. The Pomeranian needed 12 stitches after an attack, he said.

"That damned dog should have been euthanized a long time ago," Lee said of Sasha. "It shouldn't be returned. We called the cops many times, and animal control. Deborah does not take responsibility for what her animal does. Dealing with that dog was a living hell."