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Policeman hides his dog after attacks

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By KAY BLUNDELL

An Otaki policeman spirited his bull mastiff dog away after being told it could be destroyed for twice savaging a neighbour's pet.

Barbara Growcott is angry that the officer was able to save the dog's life by sending it back to its breeders – despite attacks that nearly killed her yellow labrador Blue.

"I am outraged that the owner, who happens to be a police officer, has not been made accountable for the vicious attacks on my dog," she said.

In the first attack on November 12, Blue was bitten repeatedly on the shoulder outside the police officer's home. Mrs Growcott was at work at the time and an elderly man was walking down the road with Blue.

"The dog rushed out and ripped into Blue when the owner opened the gates. I pulled them apart, the owner put the dog back behind the gates and drove off, and I took Blue home," a neighbour, who saw the attack, said.

Eight-year-old Blue suffered multiple bite marks and abscesses and needed surgery, stitches and drainage tubes. But less than a month later, on December 7, he was again mauled by the bull mastiff – which chased the labrador into Mrs Growcott's kitchen.

"I went out to the kitchen and saw the bull mastiff and a dobermann, which lived at the same address, standing there. The bull mastiff saw Blue and started attacking him.

"I was so petrified I ran into my bedroom, scared I was going to be set upon as well, and rang 111. When I went back out to the kitchen the two dogs had gone and there was blood and flesh splattered all over the walls and floor."

Blue had still been recovering from the first attack and his drainage tubes were pulled out by the two dogs.

Armed police arrived at the house – which is in the same street as the station – but the dogs had run off.

Blue went back to the vet for surgery, the wounds were stitched and the drainage pipes replaced. While Mrs Growcott was at the vet, her neighbour cleaned up the blood and pieces of flesh left around the house.

The vet's bill to treat Blue for the first attack cost \$518 and the second \$304.

Mrs Growcott said that after the second attack the policeman's children left flowers and candy in her letterbox. The children had also written letters pleading for the bull mastiff, called Jack, "not to be put to sleep".

Messages in the letters included: "I love my dog, we do not want him to go away"; "Jack the dog is best, lovable, makes mistakes yet still I love him"; "please consider us kids before you decide Jack's future" and "I cry, I weep and moan, Jack is going away from home, Why can't we get along?"

When Mrs Growcott contacted Kapiti Coast District Council's animal control division to complain about the first attack she was told she was partly responsible because her dog was unsupervised in a public place.

Council animal control officer Don Wolff also wrote to Mrs Growcott and said he would contact the owners of the offending dog, advising them that they were liable for the cost of the veterinary fees.

After complaining about the second attack, Mrs Growcott was told by Mr Wolff that the dog would now be classified as dangerous and would have to be kept muzzled at all times, and once again the owner would be responsible for the vet fees.

"My neighbour said, 'No way, we want the dog destroyed'.

"Victim Support rang and said the dog was in custody waiting to be destroyed, but after talking to Mr Wolff I realised this was incorrect."

Mr Wolff wrote to the policeman and his wife, in whose name the bull mastiff is registered, the next day, telling them Mrs Growcott wanted their dog destroyed.

A couple of days later the Growcotts received a letter from Mr Wolff, which said he had relayed their wishes to the owners and that the dog had "already been disposed of, it was now out of the area and back with the breeder".

If the Growcotts would not agree to the dog being neutered and kept enclosed, the matter would have to go to court, where the dog's future would be decided.

Otaki Sergeant Noel Bigwood – who had grabbed a rifle and attended the second attack on Blue – said the officer involved was on leave.

"We handed the issue over to the dog ranger, that is normal process when dealing with dangerous pets. Unfortunately dog attacks are quite common around here – we see stray dogs all the time. The officer got rid of the dog," Mr Bigwood said.

Mr Wolff said the policeman had agreed to pay for the first vet's bill.

THE DOMINION POST

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