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# Tragic playtime for 6-yr-old Manorville girl

## Manorville girl, 6, accidentally strangled after family's golden retriever drags her in backyard by her scarf

BY JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER AND SUSANA ENRIQUEZ

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There was something about the blue scarf tied around Kaitlyn Hassard's neck that cost the 6-year-old her life.

Shortly after the girl returned to her Manorville home from kindergarten Tuesday afternoon, the family's 70-pound golden retriever began playfully nipping at Kaitlyn's scarf, Homicide Squad Det. Lt. Jack Fitzpatrick said.

The dog, named Jesse, apparently grabbed hold of Kaitlyn's scarf with its mouth and dragged her a short distance in the backyard, strangling her, Fitzpatrick said. Kaitlyn, who weighed about 40 pounds, was slim for her age, Fitzpatrick said, and it did not look like the dog attacked her. "It was playing with her," he said.

The Hassards were in seclusion Wednesday, too distraught to talk about their daughter's death. In the afternoon, family friend James Talamini, 34, stood at the bottom of the Hassards' driveway and read a prepared statement.

"Kaitlyn Dorothy Hassard was an energetic and beautiful young girl who always had a smile on her face, a skip in her step and a heart full of love," he read.

Fitzpatrick said that before the tragedy, Kaitlyn's mother had ushered the dog into the backyard after it began to play with the scarf around Kaitlyn's neck. Later, Kaitlyn asked for permission to play in the backyard with Jesse, and her mother obliged, Fitzpatrick said.

At about 4:30 p.m., when her 11-year-old brother Kevin went to get Kaitlyn because they were going to the post office with their mother, he found her unconscious on the lawn, the roughly 3-foot-long, soft-cloth scarf tangled around the girl's neck, Fitzpatrick said.

Their mother, Korey Hassard, a registered nurse at Dayton Avenue Elementary School, where Kevin is in sixth grade and sister Kelsey is in third grade, tried to perform CPR on Kaitlyn, a

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kindergartner at nearby South Street School. But Kaitlyn was pronounced dead about an hour later at Brookhaven Memorial Hospital Medical Center in East Patchogue, Fitzpatrick said.

Dr. Marc J. Shapiro, chief of general surgery at Stony Brook University Hospital, said it would have taken about eight minutes with blood flow cut off to put the girl in a state from which she couldn't be revived. "If it's wrapped around the neck and the ends are pulled, it acts like a vise," Shapiro said.

At Kaitlyn's school, students and staff mourned, discussing their grief with counselors and social workers.

Robin Barbera, the principal at Kaitlyn's school, remembered watching Kaitlyn walk to the bus after school Tuesday with the bouncing pigtails she wore her straight brown hair in almost daily. When Barbera heard about the death later that night from a teacher, she called the parents of the other 17 children in Kaitlyn's class. "That was probably the hardest thing I've had to do," she said. "I would cry with them and then have to hang up and call the next family."

Last Thursday, for Kaitlyn's birthday, her mother brought snacks of gummy candies floating in blue Jell-O for a classroom party, teacher Kristin Scharf said. Scharf said she remembers Kaitlyn's love of art, the meticulous way she was able to color mostly within the lines. "It was very serious stuff to her," Scharf said of Kaitlyn's coloring. "She took a lot of pride in her work."

Jesse, who lived with the Hassards for about a year, was taken to the Brookhaven animal shelter. "The family didn't want the dog in the house, which is understandable," Fitzpatrick said. Deputy town supervisor Mark Grossman said he didn't know what will happen to Jesse, but that adoption is a possibility.

Talamini said funeral plans were not finalized as of last night.

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