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Fatal dog attack pulls neighbors apart

SUSAN HUNTER, *Editor*

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ANSONIA - A dog attack that left a Pomeranian puppy dead has resulted in heartbreak for one family and an ever-widening rift between neighbors.

Elmer Sulkowski Jr., of 138 Benz St., said he is in the process of finding a new home for Mia, his Italian mastiff that was one of two dogs involved in the attack.

But Brian Francione, the owner of Sammy, the Pomeranian, wants to see both dogs, the mastiff and Guinness, a black Labrador, removed from residential areas.

"Who's to say these dogs won't attack another dog or a person?" Francione asked.

The dogs would be more suited on a farm or as watchdogs at a warehouse, he said.

Francione, who purchased Sammy, a purebred, three months ago, said he can't buy another dog as long as Sulkowski's dogs are next door. He and his family are "scared for our safety," he said.

The events of the morning of March 25 are all too clear in his mind, he said. He and his girlfriend heard screeching noises coming from the backyard where Sammy was tied up, and they ran outside to see what was happening.

"We saw the neighbor's two dogs mutilating our 10-pound, 6-month-old puppy," said Francione.


He said he tried to push the larger dogs off Sammy, but each time he picked up his dog, the bigger dogs would rip it out of his arms. The struggle lasted between 10 and 15 minutes, according to Francione.

Finally, with neighbors' help, he got the dogs separated and took Sammy into the house.

They rushed the dog to Shoreline Veterinary Referral & Emergency Center in Shelton, where a veterinarian determined Sammy had a torn trachea and broken ribs, Francione said. Blinded as well, the dog lapsed into a coma and died two hours later.


Losing Sammy has been "tough," he said. "It's very hard to swallow."




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Francione, who lives at 136 Benz Street, said Sulkowski's dogs were a problem even before the attack.

"They have been a big nuisance" with constant barking, he said, but he didn't complain about it.

Details of the attack

On the day of the attack, Mia the mastiff and Guinness the Labrador escaped from the pen in Sulkowski's yard.

Ansonia Police Lt. Wayne Williams said it appears a child may have unlocked the gate to the pen.

Sulkowski said that after his dogs got out of the pen, they dug through soft ground to get under the chicken wire fence that divided the properties.

Another of his dogs, Dakota, was not involved in the attack and stayed in the pen.

Sulkowski's recollection of the attack differs from Francione's.

"The dog was not mauled," Sulkowski said. His 80-pound dog would have done far more physical damage to the 10-pound puppy if it had mauled him, he said.

"The dog was not even bleeding," he said. "The two dogs involved are big dogs. They play with each other. It was a heavyweight against a featherweight. The dogs I'm sure were just playing.

"My dogs have been around people since they were puppies. We've never had a problem like this."

Mia broke free once before, he said, and ran right past a dog in a neighbor's yard without bothering it.

Sulkowski said he put up a new six-foot fence between his yard and the Francione's this past weekend.

Files complaint

"We're not talking to the people next door," he said. In fact, he has filed an harassment complaint against Francione.

Sulkowski said his wife was driving down the street with their children in the car when a woman from the Francione house ran out in front of the car and screamed "murderers" and "killers."

Ansonia police say the complaint was settled, with an agreement that no more harassment would take place.

"No arrests were made," said Lt. Wayne Williams. "The issue was resolved."

But Sulkowski said he never heard back from the police and in his mind, there has been no resolution.

He also claims the Franciones are blowing the incident out of proportion.

"They're making this into a money-maker," he said, asserting that they have inflated the amount they paid for Sammy.

Sulkowski said he is liable for the cost of the dog and for the veterinary bills incurred because of the attack. His attorney, Mark Healey of West Haven, sent a letter to Francione March 27 asking him to forward bills and receipts.

"We feel badly," Sulkowski said. "We were friendly before the incident. It was an accident. No one planned it."

Sulkowski said he offered to take Sammy to his veterinarian after the attack, but the Franciones refused.

Afterward, police issued Sulkowski an infraction for failure to have dogs licensed, allowing them to roam and harboring a dog to create a nuisance.

There is no state statute that authorizes police to force the owners of a dog who attacks another dog to remove the animal from their residence, Williams said.

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