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Great Dane attacks, kills beagle in Lower Township

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LOWER TOWNSHIP - It seemed like a normal meeting of two dogs at a public park, but it quickly turned violent and deadly.

The Great Dane tore into the tiny beagle at Lower Township Rotary Park off Bayshore Road, grabbing it by the back and shaking it.

"I thought they were going to sniff, but she just clamped on. I hit the dog once, but I can't do anything. It's a Great Dane," Bob Epaldo said, recounting the Oct. 13 incident.

Actually, Epaldo and the elderly man walking the Great Dane both fell over during the one-sided dog fight in which the Great Dane grabbed the beagle and tore the skin from one of its legs.

Epaldo, 58, and Jim Schultz, 68, of Ohio Avenue in the Villas, ended up losing their beloved beagle, Snoopy, a few hours later after a veterinarian said he was beyond hope. She pulled off the oxygen mask long enough for them to say their last goodbyes.

They had taken their dog for a Saturday morning walk in the park, and suddenly their companion of seven years, a dog they rescued from a shelter and doted over, was gone.

"It took about a minute, and you don't believe its happening," Schultz said. "I'll tell you, it's a tremendous loss. He was a very special dog. We lost a loved one," Schultz said.

Now the two are on a campaign to at least make the public aware that there is plenty of danger that two dogs will fight, even if both are on a leash. They believe this is something to think about as many towns in the area open dog parks.

Schultz said owners of aggressive dogs have to control them. He worries the attack could have been on a child at the park.

"This is a big dog, and the guy was old. He couldn't control him," Schultz said.

The Lower Township Police Department is looking into the history of the Great Dane and awaiting a report from Middle Township. The Great Dane is owned by Middle Township resident Karen Honold, but according to Schultz it was being walked by a friend that day, Richard McGarry, of Shawcrest.

Police said the dog was on a leash, so this did not violate an ordinance to prevent dogs from running free. Schultz and Epaldo signed a complaint that could go to court alleging destruction of property, Detective Sgt. Thomas Keywood said.

Snoopy's owners do not intend to pursue a civil case. They note Honold paid the veterinarian bills and the cost to cremate Snoopy.

"She paid the bill and seems real concerned," Schultz said.

The urn filled with his ashes is on a mantle at their home that they turned into a makeshift memorial to Snoopy.

"He's in doggy heaven," Epaldo said.

Schultz said another precaution he took was bringing pepper spray. He did this when walking Snoopy on the beach where there are a lot of dogs but didn't think he needed it at the park. He noted there was no growling or other warning signs before the attack.

Epaldo and Schultz, who are both retired, haven't ruled out getting another dog, probably a beagle, but just aren't ready yet. They said Snoopy ran the household and was loved by the mailman, the local gas station attendant and all the neighborhood children. Snoopy was abused in his first five years of life, and he still grew scared at times by certain noises.

"We're walking around in a daze. Snoopy was part of our family. In fact, he was our family," Schultz said.

Epaldo and Schultz hope they can at least raise awareness in dog owners to keep their pets under control. Another warning is for pet owners to keep a tight leash in those first moments when two dogs meet.

"We want to make people aware. If they take their dogs out, keep them under control," Schultz said.

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