

Dog's owners deny fleeing scene after dog bit boy

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The owners of the dog that attacked a four-year-old boy last week said they are deeply despondent and apologetic on behalf of Gilmour, their young border collie/golden retriever.

Yesterday The Examiner sat down with owners Melissa Knott, 18, and her boyfriend Sam Ferguson, 19, at Ferguson's mother's house where 18-month-old Gilmour is being kept in quarantine for a week.

"We're still really shocked about what happened," Knott said. "And we're a little unsure if we want to keep (Gilmour) now."

On Thursday, four-year-old Austin McLean's face and rib cage was badly mauled by the dog while standing outside the Mister Convenience on Monaghan Road, just a couple doors down from the family's apartment.

Austin's mother Kristin McKibbon said she was inside the store at the time and did not see what happened leading up to the attack.

Knott, who also did not see the attack, said she was inside the store with Ferguson, her two-year-old sister and her three-year-old brother.

Her 14-year-old cousin Gracie Knott was standing outside with Gilmour on a short leash, she said.

While inside the store, Knott said, she remembers Austin asking his mom if he could wait outside while she finished her shopping.

"We don't know if Austin asked to pet Gilmour or if the dog was trying to play," Knott said.

Ferguson said Austin had a plastic toy sword with him at the time, which was left at the scene.

"After the bite, we heard this terrible scream just as we were about to pay," Knott said. "We had no idea what was going on.

"We all went outside and saw Austin bleeding. I just started crying."

Originally, McKibbon said the dog and its owner had left the scene after the attack.

But Ferguson said he walked Austin and McKibbon back to their apartment and assisted in tending to Austin's wounds by wrapping the boy's shirt over his bleeding face.

"The whole thing happened so fast, about five to 10 minutes," Ferguson said. "It's possible (McKibbon) was just frantic and scared for her son and didn't realize I was the owner of the dog."

Ferguson said he did not identify himself as the owner of the dog at the time.

Immediately after the attack, McKibbon said, a neighbour ran back to the store to find the owners, but they were gone.

"If a neighbour came back to find us, there's no way anyone could have missed us," Knott said. "We did not run away. We were right there."

McKibbon could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Austin was treated for his injuries at Peterborough Regional Health Centre Thursday night, where he was given about 20 stitches to his face and a couple more to his rib cage, McKibbon said.

On Saturday, after reading The Examiner's story, Knott said she called police that night.

The couple also went out on Saturday and purchased a muzzle for Gilmour, Knott said.

"We're still really shocked," she said. "This has been a big eye opener for us. We feel so sorry for what happened."

Brad Algar, general manager for the Peterborough Humane Society, said he will be asking the courts to issue a control order for the dog.

A control order would stipulate conditions the owner must adhere to whenever the dog is out in public, such as having a muzzle on the animal, a short leash and not allowing the dog near anyone under 18, Algar said.

"There doesn't appear to be any history of attacks with the dog," Algar said.

Knott and Ferguson will be likely be charged under the "dog at large" bylaw, which states that the dog must be under control to prevent biting or attacking, Algar said.

"Because the dog attacked the boy, it obviously wasn't held firmly enough to prevent an attack," Algar said. "Even though it was on a leash, it still attacked."

Although the fine could be as high as \$5,000, he said, when dog owners are compliant the fine is often reduced.

Before the control order is issued, he said, he must prove why the order is necessary.

"The child's face is proof enough," Algar said. "If the owners are co-operative and remorseful, which looks to be the case here, then there won't even be a hearing. It will take five minutes."

The first court appearance could still be a while down the road, he said.

"These matters are only heard once a month," Algar said. "If the day is full, then they will bump the case to the next month."

The earliest possible date is Sept. 22, he said. The next possible court date after that is Oct. 27, then Nov. 24, he said.

Algar said the Peterborough Humane Society also got a fax from the Peterborough County-City Health Unit yesterday advising him that the dog's rabies shots are up to date.

On the advice of her doctor, McKibbon said, Austin started seven treatments of rabies shots, which get injected into his face.

Algar did not know if rabies shots could be stopped before completion of the treatment series.

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