



Siberian husky may face death after shih tzu killed

Posted by By Emily Monacelli | Special to the Gazette February 23, 2008 11:00AM

MARCELLUS -- To one family, he is an endearing, loving pet. To another, he is a killer.

Cass County officials have determined that Rogue, a 6-year-old white Siberian husky, is dangerous, and they could destroy him within a month if his owner does not comply with county rules governing such dogs.

Rogue was designated a dangerous dog after he attacked and killed Buddy, a neighbor's black-and-white shih tzu, in November.

Rogue was running loose when he went into Buddy's yard and pulled the dog out of its collar, which was attached to a tie-out cable, said Patrick Fetherston, director of Cass County Animal Control. Rogue brought Buddy back to his own yard and, in the process, Rogue killed the dog, Fetherston said.

The only eyewitness to the Nov. 20 incident was Ben Fisher, Buddy's owner.

"I saw their dog carrying our dog to their property," said Fisher, who called the authorities. "I didn't see him (Rogue) actually kill him."

Fisher said his two daughters, 10-year-old Sydney and 9-year-old Madison, were very attached to Buddy.

"Both girls grew up with him," Fisher said. "My youngest daughter took it the hardest. He was her friend."

When an animal-control officer arrived, Rogue was tied up in the yard of his owner, Deb Coker. Rogue had blood on him, and Buddy was found dead nearby in the yard, Fetherston said. Cass County Animal Control filed a civil complaint against Coker alleging that Rogue was a dangerous dog.

Attacks not unusual

Thomas Miller, president of the [Michigan Association of Animal Control Officers](#) and animal control director in St. Joseph County, said instances in which one dog kills another happen "more often than you would think."

Miller estimated that at least 500 times a year in Michigan one dog attacks another dog, but many of those attacks go unreported.

Miller said that although huskies are beautiful, intelligent dogs that work well with people, they are not for everyone.

When an individual or a family is interested in adopting a husky from his shelter, Miller said he tries to understand why they want the dog to make sure it will be a good fit.

"We'll tell them that huskies tend to like to run, and they're usually not going to like little animals," he said. "We tell people that up front."

Cherie Wagensomer, a volunteer with the Northwest Ohio Siberian Husky Rescue, said Rogue may have acted more with instinct than with malice.

"Siberian huskies are prey-driven, much like your hunting dogs that go for small, furry things," Wagensomer said. "It's very common in a lot of prey-driven dogs, killing small, furry animals. And a 12-pound dog, unfortunately, in the heat of a hunt, could be mistaken for a rabbit."

Dangerous dog defined

Cass County's ordinance defines a dangerous dog as "any dog, which, when unprovoked, in an aggressive manner commits a severe attack on any person or another animal."

Coker refused to sign a paper saying that Rogue was a dangerous dog, so the case headed to court for civil proceedings. Coker, who was home when the authorities said the incident occurred, said Rogue was tied up the entire time. She said she doesn't believe Rogue killed Buddy.

Fetherston said most cases in which a dog attacks another dog do not end up in court.

"Probably 60, 70, 80 percent of the time, the owner doesn't want to go through a court situation or doesn't like that the dog did that, and will release the dog" to animal control, Fetherston said.

The case went before Fourth District Court Chief Judge Paul E. Deats on Jan. 22.

Fisher, Coker and Fetherston testified. Evidence submitted included photos of Rogue and Buddy after the incident, and Buddy's necropsy report.

Deats ruled that Rogue was a dangerous dog and gave Coker 30 days to comply with the county's dangerous-dog ordinance if she wanted to keep him.

The compliance period ends Sunday.

What happens next

The next step would be for a Cass County assistant prosecutor to submit paperwork to the court to euthanize Rogue.

The prosecutor's paperwork would likely be submitted Monday, Fetherston said. On Friday, Coker said she has asked her lawyer to seek an extension of time from the court.

According to the county's ordinance, a dangerous dog must be housed in a cage at least 7 feet tall, with a wood or wire roof and a cement or brick floor.

The door must be locked with a padlock, and when the animal is taken out of its cage, it must be muzzled and leashed.

A dangerous dog also must wear a special tag issued by animal control, and the owner must post signs on the property announcing the dangerous dog.

Fetherston said that just because Rogue is a husky, it does not automatically mean he is dangerous. The county looks at each situation on a case-by-case basis, he said.

"There's been a whole lot of talk about making animals dangerous just because of the breed," Fetherston said. "We don't believe that. We believe that you hold an animal responsible and hold an owner responsible for those actions." Coker said she cannot afford the cost of putting up the special kennel for Rogue. Although she is a nurse by profession, Coker lives on less than \$900 a month through Supplemental Security Income.

Coker said she has not worked much lately in order to care for her 17-year-old son, Dylan, who has Asperger's syndrome. Dylan is particularly attached to the dog, and since Rogue has been out of the house, Coker said, "He's nervous about him, very nervous about him."

Help sought

To save Rogue, Coker has reached out to the media, several dog rescues and humane societies and attorneys.

Coker first contacted Wagensomer in January. Wagensomer, who lives in Monroe, volunteers with the Northwest Ohio Siberian Husky Rescue, which finds foster homes for dogs.

Wagensomer said she was willing to take Rogue, test his temperament and try to find a new home for him. But that plan came to a halt when Deats ruled that Rogue could not be transferred to a new home. A representative for Deats said he was unable to comment on his ruling.

Wagensomer is now trying to help Coker meet the requirements of the dangerous dog ordinance so that Coker can keep Rogue. Wagensomer has a kennel Coker can use and can help her lay patio bricks down as the flooring.

Fisher said a dog like Rogue needs to be housed properly.

"I think when you have a pet like that you assume the responsibility of knowing that animal is a dog that might attack," Fisher said. "Just because you own an animal and haven't had any problems with it doesn't mean he won't go back to his original purpose in life."

Fisher thinks Rogue is dangerous, but he does not necessarily want to see him killed.

"I don't want it dead, but I don't want her to have it back," Fisher said. "I don't hold a grudge against that animal. It did what it was designed to do."

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