
News

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Dachshund slain by police dog was not the aggressor, owner says

By **Rusty Marks**
Staff writer

NITRO, W.Va. -- A Nitro police dog attack last week on Helen Burdette's pet dachshund Gracie was unprovoked, Burdette said Thursday.

A police dog named Bullet fatally bit Gracie on Oct. 2 as Nitro police were looking for two men who tried to break into a house on 31st Street.

Lt. Joe Savilla of the Nitro Police Department said Wednesday that Gracie apparently jumped Bullet as officers were trying to make sure the suspects weren't hiding in Burdette's back yard. Although Bullet was on a leash, Savilla said, the German shepherd police dog instinctively bit at the smaller dog, wounding her in her chest.

Savilla said Bullet's handler immediately ordered the dog to stop the attack, and that Gracie was bitten only once.

However, Burdette said the veterinarian who treated Gracie said the dachshund was bitten more than once. A veterinarian's report on the incident refers to "wounds" on Gracie's chest and withers and describes several punctures, one of which apparently pierced her lung. Gracie went into cardiac arrest while veterinarians were trying to save her and was declared dead at 3:10 a.m. on Oct. 3.

Burdette said she was in her house when she heard the two dogs scuffle. "I heard the dog fight, and it just kept going on," she said. She ran outside to find Gracie coming up the back porch steps.

"She had blood squirting out of her side," she said. "I got her in the kitchen, and blood was everywhere." She said two officers who were on the back porch "just stood there."

Burdette's boyfriend, Stan Harrison, drove the dog to the veterinarian.

Burdette said Bullet attacked Gracie, not the other way around. "Gracie was scared to death of big dogs," she said.

City officials have offered to pay Gracie's \$700 vet bill and find Burdette another dog.

Although Harrison agreed that the police dog attacked Gracie, "It was just a freak accident," he said. He said he and Burdette are trying to put the attack behind them.

"They have come down and apologized to her," he said. "[Gracie] was our baby, but she's gone and we've got to move on.

"I'm satisfied with the city," he said. "They're trying to do the right thing and I'm trying to do the right thing."

"We've done everything we can do to make things right," Savilla said. He said city officials already have been in contact with breeders to find Burdette another dog.

Reach Rusty Marks at rustyma...@wvgazette.com or 348-1215.