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Dog Held for Killing Puppy

By Glenn Barr

A 4-year-old bull mastiff is in county quarantine today, awaiting its fate after attacking and killing a 6-month-old puppy and injuring two women as they walked on a residential street in Running Springs on May 6, sheriff's deputies reported.

The incident occurred around 7:15 p.m. as the puppy's owner was walking at the corner of Fernside and Oak Leaf Drives with her dog, its female litter mate and two other women.

Witnesses told Deputies Miguel Placencia, Ishmael Diaz and Kevin Fries that as the women passed the corner house, the mastiff, in a kennel in the garage, began barking through the open door.

After the women, all in their early 30s, rounded the corner, the dog, named Flash, bolted from the kennel, left the garage through a rear door and broke through a six-foot wooden fence, deputies were told.

Contacted by The Mountain News on Tuesday, one of the women, who asked that none of them be identified, said she had been walking hand in hand with the daughter of one of the other women. She picked up the girl as the mastiff approached, she said, and told it to leave.

'HE JUMPED ON ME'

"The dog came at me and jumped on me," she said. "I turned my back to protect the child." Though the mastiff stood on its rear legs in an apparent effort to reach the child it failed, the woman said, scratching her back instead.

Next, she said, the dog turned to the second woman, holding the female puppy, a bichon frise-poodle mix. The mastiff bit the smaller dog's hind quarters and pulled her from her owner's arms. As the dog fell, the woman said, its leash came off. The puppy took off running toward home, she said.

The second woman was injured, and was treated by paramedics at the scene. She "had a lot of bandages on her at the scene, and a lot of blood on her, too," said her friend. It was not immediately clear whether the blood belonged to her or the dog, she added.

Finally, the mastiff turned toward the third woman, holding the male puppy. He pulled the little dog from its owner's arms and its leash came off, the first woman said. The puppy got away at first, but the mastiff chased and caught it, killing it in its owner's front yard. The puppy's owner was not injured.

An Animal Control officer transported the bull mastiff to the Devore Shelter, where it is quarantined, said Doug Smith, a department investigator.

The man at whose home the mastiff lived seemed baffled on Monday when asked what caused the attack.

NO IDEA WHY

"I have absolutely no idea why this transpired," said Dan Teter, who said he is caring for the bull mastiff for his daughter.

Teter said the dog has lived with him for nine months, since his daughter and her husband "lost their home to Countrywide. He's never been aggressive in his life. There's never been a growl or a bite."

Teter said the next day a neighbor told him she had seen several women take "shovels and brooms from the back of my pickup truck and were slamming at my dog." He said that neighbor told him the male puppy was off leash just before the attack.

A second eyewitness, who also asked not to be named, said a neighbor visiting her when the attack occurred had a dog killed recently by a larger dog. When that woman observed the attack, "it kind of flashed back for her."

The eyewitness said she's now concerned for the safety of the numerous children in the neighborhood.

At the time of the attack, Teter said, the mastiff, which he called "a \$3,000 breeder," was about to be mated. He speculated the puppies' appearance just then may have set his dog off.

Teter said that during the winter, when five feet of snow blanketed his property, the bull mastiff never tried to hop the remaining one foot of fence around the yard, and "would stand near the fence and woof at people as they came by."

DOG ON 'LEGAL HOLD'

Smith said Monday he was "at the beginning stages of the investigation." The fawn-colored dog is on a "legal hold."

Under that status, the animal cannot be claimed by its owner, adopted or destroyed during the investigation, which he said will take "from one to two weeks."

At the investigation's end, the dog could be declared dangerous, triggering legal requirements on its housing. Or, Smith could recommend the dog be destroyed. In either case, the decision would be up to a hearing officer, and the owner could appeal.

"I didn't want to surrender the dog but I was told at the time I had no choice," Teter said. On Monday, Smith said, the dog's owner called and stated a desire to get the bull mastiff back.

Males of the species can reach 130 pounds, according to an Internet website. A well-known bull mastiff was "Butkus," Sylvester Stallone's dog in the 1976 film Rocky.