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Girl was severely bitten by dog owned by accused animal abusers

By Raymond Drumsta • rdrumsta@gannett.com • February 12, 2010, 8:20 pm

CAROLINE -- The snow outside the trailer home of accused animal abusers Courtney Cotter and Kevin Pierce was undisturbed on Thursday, and there was no sign of them or the animals they allegedly kept confined inside it.

Except perhaps the scars on 11-year-old neighbor Christina Davis' face -- left there, Christina's parents said, after Cotter and Pierce's Saint Bernard bit her last summer.

"She was lucky she had her glasses on," said Jay Davis, as his wife, Charlotte, displayed a picture of their smiling, blonde, bespectacled daughter. "They kind of protected her."

The Davis family lives near the trailer home of Cotter and Pierce on Creamery Road, where SPCA officers seized 100 animals in late January. Cotter and Pierce are facing numerous charges in relation to 39 of the animals. They didn't meet Cotter and Pierce until the day their Saint Bernard bit Christina, Jay said.

On that day, Christina was walking with her scooter to a playmates house, Jay recalled. When she passed the trailer home, the Saint Bernard came out from the yard and bit the left side of her face, he said.

Neighbor Dave Spaulding remembered the incident well.

"I saw her running up the road, screaming," Spaulding said. "I was surprised there wasn't more trouble after that."

As Charlotte rushed Christina to the hospital, Jay met with Cotter and Pierce to find out if the dog was licensed. Apparently remorseful about the incident, they told him that they had just obtained the Saint Bernard, and that the dog wasn't licensed, Jay said.

They told him to contact the Saint Bernard's former veterinarian in Binghamton, Jay said, and he later called Charlotte at the hospital with the good news -- the dog didn't have rabies. Still, Christina needed eight stitches, two of them near her eye, he added.

Their insurance covered all but about \$200 of Christina's medical care, but Christina still has three red scars -- one near her eye, one on her cheek and one near her lip, Jay said. Medical professionals advised them that the scars will fade, but may always be visible, he added.

Charlotte said she also has a facial dog bite scar, and she once pointed it out to Christina to pick up her spirits.

"I said, 'now you have a scar like Mommy,'" Charlotte recalled. It didn't help much, she added.

The mental scars may not have faded either, Jay said.

"It gave her some nightmares," Jay said of the incident. Abigail Smith, SPCA executive director, said the Tompkins County Sheriff's Office responded to the incident. A sheriff's office spokesperson couldn't be reached for comment on Friday.

Two days before Christina was bitten, he encountered one of Cotter and Pierce's pit bulls, Spaulding said -- at the base of his step, just as he opened his door.

"I almost jumped out of my skin," Spaulding said. The dog gave no indication of its temperament, so he was on his guard for a time, he recalled.

Cotter and Pierce moved in last spring, Spaulding said. Bad smells began emanating from their

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residence, and dogs could be heard barking, he added.

"The dogs, last summer, were barking all the time," Spaulding said. "All day long, and at night."

He saw a police car and an SPCA vehicle on the property the day the animals were seized, Spaulding said.

"It was an all-day operation," he said. "I haven't seen anybody around there since the animals were seized."

He suspects Cotter and Pierce may be physically or mentally disabled, Jay said. Cotter is partially blind, he and Charlotte added. They're both glad the SPCA seized the animals.

"Anyone who owns pets should have them licensed and neutered," Charlotte said firmly. "It's just common sense. It's like a member of the family."

Spaulding is glad as well.

"I hope it's taken care of," he said.

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