

“Local Cockapoo Killed at the D.O.G. Boarding Facility in Putnam Valley”

Letter by Susan Kahn Berman
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Dog Obedience Girl, LLC, d/b/a The D.O.G. Corrections & Clarifications April 30, 2012

Note: Information developed and distributed by others often requires amplification, correction, clarification, and sometimes commentary. Analyses like these ensure that the most accurate, complete, and clear perspective is available to those who are interested in, engaged in, and care about our work and purpose.

Text in bold in the left column is the subject of clarification, correction, or commentary in the right hand column.

	Article	Corrections & Clarifications
1	Local Cockapoo Killed at the D.O.G. Boarding Facility in Putnam Valley	Joanne Willard, co-owner of The D.O.G., has provided the following statement: “Our hearts go out to Susan Kahn and her children on the tragic loss of their family dog Coco. This tragic death occurred while their pet was in our care. We feel an intense sense of responsibility for what happened. We are terribly sorry. In the coming days, we will make every effort to help the Kahn family deal with their grief and suffering. We have carefully studied what happened and have taken important steps to preventing something like this from ever happening again.”

	Article	Corrections & Clarifications
2	<p><i>This heartbreaking tale was submitted by Susan Kahn Berman, a resident of Edgemont and New York City.</i></p> <p>On March 15, I sent Coco, our cherished 6 year-old, 17 pound cockapoo to “The D.O.G.” in Putnam Valley for boarding and for help in acclimating her to other dogs, as she was fearful and intimidated by other dogs.</p>	<p>Coco came to The D.O.G. for three weeks of Training Camp to address her “anxiety around other dogs”.</p> <p>We accomplish this by creating a safe and positive environment that fosters trust in the dog. As confidence improves we introduce the dog to small, supervised play groups with dogs that have a history of playing well.</p> <p>Over time, the dog’s sense of confidence increases and carries over to every facet of life, providing both the dog and those around a happier, less stressful life.</p>
3	<p>The D.O.G. claims to specialize in anxiety, fear and other behavior issues and came recommended by another dog lover.</p> <p>Eleven days into her stay there I received a horrifying call in which the trainer’s husband explained that my dog had been attacked. To socialize my dog, the owners of the D.O.G. made the decision to put my dog with a pit bull mix and the pit bull sunk his jaw through Coco’s skull. She died several hours later, covered in blood and suffering from cranial bleeding and heart failure after enduring horrific pain.</p>	<p>Coco and Ella (a <i>female</i> pit mix) were part of a small group of 4-5 dogs under the direct supervision of our Manager/Senior Trainer and another D.O.G. Counselor. After 15-20 minutes of playing well together, Coco became scared and growled at Ella. Ella responded immediately and attacked Coco.</p> <p>Although this horrible event lasted only seconds before the dogs were separated, fatal damage was inflicted.</p>

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4	<p>The D.O.G., a facility that prides itself on its specialty in behavior training, not only refuses to accept responsibility for Coco’s senseless death, but refuses to disclose any information about the dog who killed her.</p>	<p>The D.O.G. freely acknowledges this tragic event occurred while Coco was in our care. While we are happy to discuss the dog involved in the attack, as a matter of policy, The D.O.G. does not disclose client information without prior written permission.</p> <p>Once Susan and Joanne had the opportunity to talk the day following publication of this letter, Joanne provided details about Ella and the circumstances surrounding Coco’s death.</p>
5	<p>There is no telling whether this dog has killed before and if a community is now at risk.</p> <p>And no safety or regulatory agency is interested in justice for Coco or in protecting future victims, canine or human – not the police, not County departments, not lawyers.</p>	<p>Ella’s adoption paperwork indicates “no bite history”, “no problems with leash behavior, jumping, mouthing, shyness or other dogs”, and “Danger: No.”</p> <p>The NYS Agricultural and Markets Law, Article 7, Section 121, provides a procedure for making a complaint about a dangerous dog.</p>
6	<p>I have spoken to veterinarians and other behavior experts who maintain that a small, fearful dog should never have been put together with a pit bull mix, much less any dog who could overwhelm a small, fearful cockapoo, and have the capacity to kill her. Common sense would indicate this as well. That this happened in the care of people who claim to be experts in dog behavior, including “anxiety, fear, aggression and temperament” is unconscionable.</p>	<p>Coco’s death will forever change our approach to dog care. We are reviewing all our operations to prevent a similar situation from happening again. These are the immediate steps we have taken:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dogs of such different size and strength will always be kept separated. 2. Overall staffing has been increased and playgroups have been reduced to a 1:8 ratio. 3. Staff training has been increased and made more rigorous. 4. We are also employing for our staff a continuing education program in canine behavior and body language. 5. Dogs are now physically inspected more often and given additional care and attention. <p>Coco’s death has created a legacy of greater caution for all pets in our care.</p>

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7	<p>The owners of the boarding facility state on their website that they only take dogs they have personally trained. They had not personally trained my dog before.</p> <p>These representations upon which people are relying are misleading – and for my family, heartbreaking.</p>	<p>Our website states that we only <i>board</i> dogs that we have personally trained. Coco was in training rather than boarding.</p> <p>Heartbreaking, absolutely. We have been reviewing the language we use to describe our services and will do our best to assure more clarity and transparency.</p>
8	<p>I have been unable to find any reporting, investigatory, or regulatory mechanism where an incident involves dogs. The various people I spoke to at the County level, including the police, and the County legislator’s office suggest I contact a lawyer. Lawyers aren’t even interested because the law views animals as property and provides only for recovery of the cost of the dog in a civil suit, which would be far less than the cost of the lawsuit.</p> <p>More importantly, a civil suit would not address the larger issues that should concern us all. So many people rely on a bevy of dog helpers including boarding places, but who watches the watchers?</p>	<p>We also believe that family pets are so much more than “property”.</p> <p>We have already covered all expenses incurred directly, given an immediate and full deposit refund, and are prepared to cover all remaining expenses including travel costs.</p> <p>We are hoping to sit down with the Kahns and explore other ways we can help them through this tragedy.</p> <p>In terms of credentials, we are members of both the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) and the Animal Behavior Society (ABS) the leading professional organizations in their respective fields.</p>
9	<p>Wouldn’t you want to know about this incident if you were entrusting the safety of your dog to a boarding facility? If you had children and lived in the same neighborhood as the dog who killed? Though it is true that a person was not involved, one very well could be at any time. A dog is among us with blood on its jaws. No other family should have to suffer a loss as or more devastating than mine.</p>	<p>Ella has been returned to a rescue shelter in Philadelphia.</p>

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<p>10</p>	<p>Footnote:</p> <p><i>In addition to dealing with this terrible loss, Kahn, her two children, ages 11 and 15, and her husband have been saddled with veterinarian bills of almost \$10,000. D.O.G. has not made an offer to compensate the family in any way.</i></p> <p><i>In speaking to Kahn today, she said “The bottom line is, when you take your dog to be boarded, you expect to get your pet back, regardless if [sic] what may occur there.” Have you had an experience with D.O.G. Boarding Facility in Putnam Valley? If so, please share your thoughts below.</i></p>	<p>This footnote was appended to the original version of the article. It was removed the day after publication, without any indication the revision was made.</p> <p>From the start, The D.O.G. accepted liability for all expenses incurred as part of this tragic incident, including associated travel costs.</p> <p>To date, The D.O.G. has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid a \$3,846.15 deposit for Coco’s care at Katonah Bedford Emergency Animal Hospital. • Issued a full refund for Coco’s deposit. • Offered to reimburse all other expenses related to Coco’s passing. <p>We are continually expressing our regret, sorrow, and responsibility for what happened to Coco. It is our hope that by demonstrating the lessons we have learned, and publically acknowledging the profound suffering we have caused the Kahn family, that at some point in the future perhaps they can share some level of forgiveness for what happened.</p>
<p>11</p>		<p>This article was pulled late Friday night, April 6, and we do not have a copy of the final version for clarification and correction.</p>