

“Lawsuit: Pit bull mix killed smaller dog”

By Michael Risinit
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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	Attack was at obedience camp, owner says	
2	Going to a Putnam Valley dog-training camp was supposed to cure Coco the cockapoo of her issues. Instead, it killed her, according to a lawsuit filed this week by her owner, and in the way Coco apparently feared the most: at the jaws of another dog.	“Our hearts go out to Susan Kahn and her children on the tragic loss of their family dog, Coco,” Willard wrote in an email. “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 that this occurred. 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 prevent something like this from ever happening again.”

<p>3</p>	<p>“Without provocation, the pit bull mix sunk his [sic] locked jaw through Coco’s skull causing Coco severe pain, lacerations, blood loss, skull fractures, brain damage and ultimately lead to her painful death,” Susan Kahn of Greenburgh asserted in her court papers filed Wednesday in state Supreme Court in White Plains.</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>
<p>4</p>	<p>The dog-on-dog violence sparked Kahn, who also lives in Manhattan, to hire an attorney and a press agent. While Kahn posted her story of Coco’s demise on several pet web sites shortly after her death last month, she wasn’t giving interviews this week, according to her publicist Nina Reeves.</p>	<p>.</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>In an email to The Journal News on Wednesday highlighting her lawsuit, Kahn spoke of Coco “being senselessly and brutally killed at a dog training and boarding facility in Putnam Valley.”</p> <p>The suit also said the same dog that attacked Coco later assaulted a child – a possibility supported by the Putnam County Sheriff’s Office.</p>	<p>Ella was in the custody of her new owner at the time of this incident.</p> <p>The Putnam County Sheriff’s report states that, at about 3:45 PM on April 4, “dog jumped the homeowner’s fence, ran around youth’s birthday party. Dog, Ella, grabbed [child] by the left wrist with her mouth. Left marks, no skin broken.”</p> <p>Later, both the child and the father expressed that they believed Ella was “just playing.”</p>

<p>6</p>	<p>“It is my hope that no other family should have to suffer a tragedy as bad or worse than ours,” Kahn, a mother of two, wrote.</p>	<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>In addition to taking responsibility for this tragic incident, 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>
<p>7</p>	<p>Known as Dog Obedience Girl, the Putnam Valley camp is owned by Joanne Willard, according to the suit, and the smaller dog was sent there for three weeks.</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>

	<p>At the end of that period, “Coco would no longer be afraid or anxious about other dogs and that Kahn would be taught how to keep Coco that way,” the suit states.</p>	<p>Our philosophy and training procedures are based on the understanding that dogs are not machines, that they are not simply programmable, and that as a result we cannot guarantee results.</p> <p>Our contract states that “some dogs can accept a great deal of training in 21 days, other are just getting started. The average adult dog needs at least 6 months of consistent training to become proficient.”</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>Willard on Thursday expressed regret over Coco’s death and said she had yet to be served with the lawsuit, which seeks legal, medical and dog-training costs plus \$100,000.</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>9</p>	<p>Kahn dropped Coco off on March 15 and “went on vacation for a few days with members of her family and friends.”</p> <p>On March 27, while still on vacation, Kahn said she received a phone call telling her a 40-pound pit bull mix attacked the 17-pound cockapoo and “it doesn’t look good.” Coco later died at the Animal Medical Center on the Upper East Side.</p>	<p>Ms. Kahn utilized our delivery service and has not visited our facilities.</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</p>

		<p>responded immediately and attacked Coco.</p> <p>Although this horrible event lasted only seconds before the dogs were separated, fatal damage was inflicted.</p> <p>Coco was immediately transported to Katonah Bedford Emergency Animal Hospital, “the most comprehensive advanced care veterinary hospital in Westchester County.” She was later transferred to the Animal Medical Center in Manhattan.</p>
10	<p>The larger dog, the court papers said, more recently harmed a child.</p> <p>Capt. William McNamara of the Putnam County Sheriff’s Office said a pit bull mix owned by Willard jumped over a fence and into a children’s birthday party on April 4, where she grabbed the wrist of a 4-year-old girl.</p>	<p>Ella was in the custody of her new owner at the time of this incident.</p> <p>The Putnam County Sheriff’s report states that, at about 3:45 PM on April 4, “dog jumped the homeowner’s fence, ran around youth’s birthday party. Dog, Ella, grabbed [child] by the left wrist with her mouth. Left marks, no skin broken.”</p> <p>Later, both the child and the father expressed that they believed Ella was “just playing.”</p>
11	<p>The dog “left light marks on the child’s skin,” the police report said.</p> <p>The pit bull mix was found to have all its vaccinations and was returned the next day to Willard.</p>	<p>Ella’s original owner was in Philadelphia. She adopted Ella, but asked if we could help find a new home.</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>Ella was adopted locally and was in the possession of her new owner when this event occurred.</p>
12	<p>The matter, McNamara said, was turned over to the Putnam Valley dog-control officer.</p>	

13	Neither Willard nor Patricia Smith, the Putnam Valley dog control officer, responded to telephone messages Friday.	“Our hearts go out to Susan Kahn and her children on the tragic loss of their family dog, Coco,” Willard wrote in an email. “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 that this occurred. 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 prevent something like this from ever happening again.”
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