

7/14/10

Pit-bull owner found guilty on most charges

Sitting on the stand at a summary trial for the Hanover man whose pit bulls attacked an 8-year-old boy, the boy's mother cried as she testified about the attack that left her son missing a part of his scalp and pieces of ear, and identified pictures of those injuries.

"They were trying to eat him," said Elizabeth Brown, of Groton, Conn., whose son Ajia, was attacked June 1.

Brown was one of 11 witnesses who testified before Magisterial District Judge Dwayne A. Dubs about the dogs belonging to Chester L. Little, 47, of 415 Pleasant St. Little eventually was found guilty on most counts, and told to pay more than \$2,000 worth of fines. The surviving dog was deemed a dangerous dog and must now be muzzled and leashed at all times.

On the night of June 1, Brown said, she had returned to the apartment building with Little's mother, who also lives there, and Ajia had stepped outside to catch fireflies as she put on her pajamas.

Next thing she knew, she said, she heard screaming and ran outside to see the dogs "ripping at his face."

Brown said she tried to pick up Ajia and get him away, but the dogs kept coming after her, jumping and trying to get him.

As she made her way out of Little's backyard, Brown said the dogs continued to follow, and by that time neighbors Robert and Margaret Beckner had arrived.

Robert Beckner testified that he ran out once he heard the screaming and saw Brown rolling on the ground with dogs as she tried to shield

her son. He grabbed a hose from Little's mother, and started beating the dogs. His wife arrived with two pieces of molding, and the couple beat the dogs as Brown escaped with her son.

"I lost all fear," Robert Beckner testified. "I beat them, and beat them, and it didn't faze them.

"I made up my mind they weren't going to take that little boy. They were going to take me before they took him."

Next door, Lamar and Janice Laughman had called 911. Hanover Police Officer Tony Little played the Laughmans' four-minute 911 call, and the boy's mother and two witnesses sobbed as screams could be heard in the background of the tape.

By the time Officer Little arrived, the dog's owner had taken one of the dogs, Angel, inside the home. The other dog, Midg, short for Midget, was "still going at people," the officer said.

Midg was circling the cars and no one was trying to secure her, Officer Little testified, so he ordered other officers to shoot the dog.

The dog was shot twice, once in the side and once in the head, said Pamela Bruen, who also lives in the apartment building and testified on the dog owner's behalf.

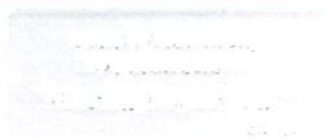
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Bruen and another tenant testified that the dogs were loving, and spent a lot of time around other children.

After Ajia and his mother were taken to the hospital for their injuries, Officer Little said the dog's owner approached. The officer said he told him about quarantine procedure, and asked for the dogs' licenses and vaccine information. The owner said he didn't have the licenses or vaccine information on him, Officer Little testified.

Little never provided police with the information, and after the fact, licensed and vaccinated the surviving dog, said Officer Barry Hockley, state dog warden for Adams County.

Officer Little said he went back to the home the next day and that the owner said he had taken the dog to another location for isolation. The owner agreed to bring it in for police to keep the dog during the quarantine, but Officer Little said the owner later said he didn't have to comply and would keep the dog at the other location. Hockley testified that the owner later told him the dog never once left the home.

Throughout testimony by the prosecution's witnesses, Chester Little was able to cross-examine people. He asked the boy's mother if she had closed the gate as she left the backyard during the attack. She said she didn't, and later during his testimony, Chester Little said if the gate hadn't been left open the dogs would have never escaped the yard.

Chester Little said he found the situation terrible, but that he felt the boy agitated his dogs, and opened the gate to let them out.

In closing, Officer Little said the owner made no effort to follow requirements - there were no vaccinations, no licenses, and that a 4-foot-high gate wouldn't keep the dogs in.

In his closing argument, Chester Little said his 24-inch dogs couldn't escape the fence on their own, and that there was no proof they were dangerous. He added that because the attack occurred in the yard, that they wouldn't qualify as dangerous according to dog law.

Dog law does say that if a dog attacks another animal it can only be labeled dangerous if the attack occurs off the property, but for dog attacks on humans, it doesn't matter where the attack occurs.

Judge Dubs found Chester Little guilty of two counts each of failing to license the dogs and failing to vaccinate the dogs. He was found not guilty of failing to confine the dogs.

Dubs also ruled Little was guilty of one count of harboring a dangerous dog - meaning Angel now must be muzzled and leashed at all times when in public.

"No evidence was shown they were provoked," Dubs said. "Regardless of how they escaped, they attacked and continued to attack."

He added that Angel has shown that she has the propensity to attack again.

Thomas Newell, who is handling the personal-injury claims of Brown and her son, said later Tuesday that his client's main reasons for making the six-hour drive to Hanover for the trial were to stand up for her son, and to do what she could to make sure this type of attack doesn't happen again.

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Newell said some of the Littles' neighbors have expressed their concerns about bringing their own grandchildren to the neighborhood because of the dog.

Little has 30 days to appeal the ruling to York County court. For the citations he was found guilty of, Little will pay \$2,624.50 in fines.

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TO HELP

Ajia Brown had part of his scalp and ears torn off during a vicious pit-bull attack in Hanover. While many of his wounds are healing, his mother Elizabeth Brown, said Tuesday he still has a number of procedures to go - including stretching his remaining scalp to cover what was lost, and removing cartilage from his ribs to repair his ears.

Thomas Newell, who is handling the Browns' personal-injury claim, said Tuesday that Ajia is at step two in what could be a nine- or 10-step recovery process, which could take years.

He is undergoing medical treatment at Yale New Haven Hospital, and his family anticipates that significant medical bills will not be covered.

Anyone who wishes to donate to his trust fund should contact Chelsea Groton Bank, 409 Poquonnock Road, Groton, Conn., 06340, by calling (860) 448-4252. For further information, contact Thomas J. Newell, Esq., by calling (215) 257-4842 or e-mailing thomasnewell@comcast.net.

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