

THE COURTNEY TREMPE INQUEST: Day five deals with the dead dog's behavioural patterns

Investigator finds surprise evidence about dog

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dog. There was nothing in his history to make me categorically believe he would bite a person," Reybroek said. "I would never have thought he would have harmed a child."

When asked by the Trempe family's lawyer, Christine Zablocki, if Reybroek ever saw his dog display any aggressive behaviour to people or animals, he said, "No."

"I never saw him be aggressive to people in any way," he said, adding later that "the dog wasn't perfect, he was a dog."

Zablocki also asked Reybroek if he had ever told anyone that Mosley had been abused as a puppy, to which he also answered, "No."

LEGAL ISSUE

The inquest adjourned early yesterday when a legal issue arose following Reybroek's testimony.

After asking the jury to leave the room, Zablocki presented evidence

about Mosley's history gathered by a private investigator hired by the Trempes.

But the information came as a surprise to both the coroner's counsel, Mary Lou Dickie, and the Reybroeks.

Coroner Dr. Barry McLellan must now decide whether to allow the jury to hear the new evidence. He listened to arguments from the lawyers involved, then reserved his decision until today.

Pending that decision, McLellan requested that the media not publicize details of the new evidence.

The inquest, being held in Sharon, is examining the circumstances of Courtney's death as well as the training of dogs and breeds of dogs kept as family pets, in addition to current legislation governing dog ownership responsibility.

During his testimony yesterday, Reybroek told the jury that he and his wife, Kelli, chose the bull mastiff breed because they believed it was bred to be a "guardian" but not a guard dog and was "fearless and confident, yet docile."

"We bought the dog to be the family's companion," he said.

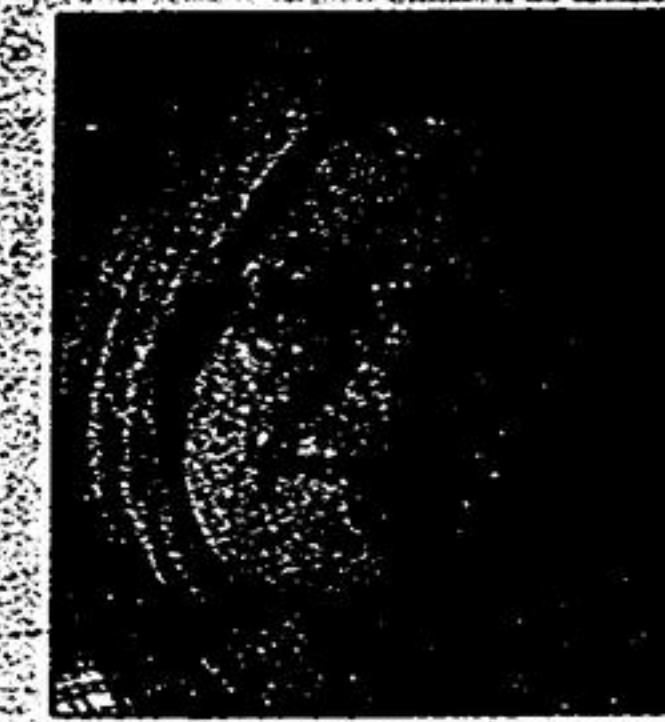
Reybroek recalled the day he went to the animal control office in Georgina, where the dog was taken following the attack on Courtney. He had agreed to have Mosley destroyed, and was visiting with the dog before it was put down.

Eleven days after the attack, Reybroek said the dog showed no change in personality from before he killed the little girl.

"I went through some of the sit, stay, up and down with him and he did all those things. And then they put him down," said Reybroek, adding that he and the canine control person shed some tears when the dog died. "That's the eerie part. I thought the incident would change him but he didn't seem any worse for wear — he was fine."

When asked if he owned a dog now, Reybroek said no, that he would never trust another dog again, given all the training and time spent ensuring Mosley would be suitable for his family.

"If you can't predict what that dog was going to do, how can you predict what any dog would do?" he said.



Joan Ransberry

Inquests crucial, but painful for family

"We speak for the dead to protect the living," is a coroner's motto.

This motto matters a great deal to special families. While inquests are painful for the families of the deceased, they're crucial to the well-being of the community. Because of this and because of the need to seek the truth, the families endure them.

As a community, we should be forever grateful. The inquest into the tragic death of Courtney Trempe is now under way. The little girl was killed by a bull mastiff one year ago. This is a painful and an enlightening time for Courtney's parents. We don't know the outcome of this inquest, but one thing is certain: Courtney Trempe was loved.

I spoke with Donna Trempe and her mother two weeks ago. Donna is caring, fair-minded and very likeable. I was especially touched by Courtney's grandmother. To her, Courtney was simply everything. I couldn't imagine losing one of my eight grandchildren. It would be a pain beyond description.

Donna hopes the inquest will focus on responsible dog ownership. I agree, but I'd go one step further to include a ban on certain breeds of dogs. I'd start with bull mastiffs.

Whatever the outcome of the Courtney Trempe inquest, the family needs to be commended for wanting to protect others.

As well, I expect an inquest will be called into the death of the 10-year-old girl killed three weeks ago while riding a horse at Wagon Wheel Ranch in Musselman's Lake. Elizabeth Hader fell from a horse, got her foot caught in the stirrup and was dragged 150 metres to her death. Elizabeth was not wearing a helmet.

Elizabeth's death brought back painful memories for a Toronto mother. Also, it triggered yet another call for mandatory helmets and protective foot gear.

When Patricia Shaw learned of Elizabeth's death, her first thought was "not again." In 1985, Patricia's 12-year-old son Jamie was killed after being thrown from a horse.

One of the recommendations from the Shaw inquest was to make helmets mandatory. Even though Patricia endured a painful inquest, the recommendation wasn't acted on.

Today, she wonders what it would take to get helmet and proper foot gear laws in place.

When I spoke with Patricia, she stressed that, like Elizabeth, Jamie died after being dragged by a horse.

"Like her, my son was dragged for a great distance. His foot was caught in the stirrup. He was not wearing a helmet. His injuries would not have been as severe had he been wearing protective head gear," Patricia said.

A coroner's inquest makes recommendations. It does not make laws, stressed deputy chief coroner of Ontario Dr. Bonita Potter.

Recommendations from coroner's inquests are forwarded to the provincial government for consideration. That's the end of a coroner's responsibility.


If a coroner speaks for the dead to protect the living, why isn't the government isn't listening?

DECKED OUT FOR CHARITY

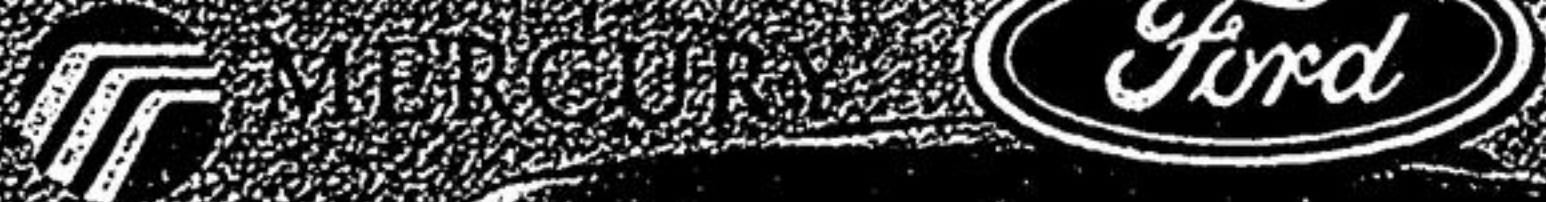


PHOTO/LORI EMMERSON

The local Heart & Stroke Foundation held a fashion show Sunday at Oakwood Terrace. From left, back row, are Heather King, Jean Barkley, Gillian Brown, Marion Hodgson and Nancy Lehman, and in front, Wendy Brown and Karen Piper of Peppertree Classics. The women, except Piper, are members of the committee who participated in the show.




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