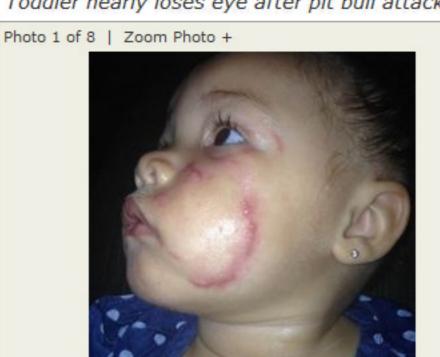
Life-altering dog bite for little girl

Toddler nearly loses eye after pit bull attack



Azaleigha Corbin was bit by a pit bull, which is owned by the boyfriend of her aunt. Photo provided Text Size: A | A | A Print this Article Email this Article Sign up for text alerts Sign up for e-mail headlines SHARE

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By Jenna Ebersole Pocono Record Writer

August 15, 2014

Azaleigha Corbin's first word was "dog" and she still loves to give her stuffed dog kisses. But a pit bull attack at her aunt's Saylorsburg house in June when she was 14 months old has left her with scarring and permanent nerve damage in her face that means her smile will never be the same, according to her mother.

Azaleigha nearly lost her left eye in the attack. She was sucking on a lollipop and other family members were not looking when the pit bull latched onto her cheek, said her mother, Venishia Corbin.

Venishia was not at her sister's home at the time of the attack, but said another relative rushed to force the dog to release her daughter. Azaleigha's father called an ambulance but then raced to the hospital instead with her sister's boyfriend, the dog's owner.

Azaleigha's life was never in danger, Venishia said, but she did spend a week at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Now relocated to Utah, Venishia is concerned the dog remains with her sister's family and could hurt someone else. Venishia said she continues to press the issue with police and the dog warden, without success.

"Why hasn't anything been done yet?" she asked.

Calls and emails to state police over several days were unreturned as of Friday. The state dog warden for Monroe County, George Nixon, referred requests for comment to the Department of Agriculture, which oversees the dog warden program. The department's press office did not return a call Friday.

Owner defends dog

not pursuing charges.

Venishia said she once owned a pit bull before Azaleigha was born and likes dogs, but now won't let her daughter near most of them and believes pit bulls have aggression "in their blood."

Azaleigha faces more plastic surgery and though Venishia said she has retained an attorney, her first priority is not payment, but safety.

Venishia's sister declined to comment but her boyfriend, Fred Boyd, who owns the dog, defended his pit bull, Buster.

Buster, who is 18 to 24 months old, does not like children, Boyd said, so he warned his girlfriend's

sister not to let the dog out of the pen and not to leave children alone with him. Boyd said he was also allowing Venishia, her husband and seven children to stay with him at the time. Boyd said he feels sorry about what happened and offered initially to put the dog down, but was told not to so the dog could be monitored for rabies. He said officials who have met Buster are

"I made a conscious decision based on my discussions with everyone involved in this to make the best resolution for the dog at this point," he said.

Boyd said Azaleigha was alone with Buster at the time of the incident, so no one knows if she provoked him.

"That'd be like convicting someone of a crime that you don't even know they committed because you weren't even around," he said.

Buster has been protective of Boyd's newborn baby and is very gentle, he said. Boyd said the dog is "broken now" after the family adopted him as a rescue and he has owned many pit bulls.

"My son will never get bit by a dog as long as I'm there and my girl is there," he said.

Boyd said though he is a pit bull advocate, he believes people should have more respect for animals.

"Any animal can turn in a heartbeat," he said. "They have attitudes and mood swings just like people."

More viscious bites

But attorney Thomas Newell, who has worked with dog bite cases for decades, rejected Boyd's argument. Children under the age of 7 cannot be accountable for their actions, such as provoking a dog.

"What in the world could, physically, a 14-month-old child do to appropriately provoke a pit bull mauling?" Newell asked, adding that a dog that does not like children should not be in a home with children.

An adult in the room could not realistically stop an attack.

"He's somehow going to be able to, like a bolt of lightning, jump in between the baby and stop it?" he asked.

Newell said the description of the attack appears to fit the law for a conviction of harboring a dangerous dog. A conviction would mean a fine and registration requirements, as well as insurance and muzzling.

In the case of another attack and conviction, the dog would be put down.

the breed has been bred for for hundreds and hundreds of years?" he asked.

And while many other breeds bite and release when provoked, pit bulls have been bred to attack without warning, hold on and maul to allow for more time for betting in dog fights.

"The type of dog bite wound that I am seeing now is much different," he said, speaking of the potential clients he sees.

People are too willing to dismiss breeding, while acknowledging the part it plays in the personalities and tendencies of every other breed, he said. More than half of the calls he receives on severe bites are for pit bulls.

"Why is it that there's one breed and one breed only that its advocates say it doesn't matter what

Humans are responsible

Erin Byrne, of Cognitive Canine Dog Training in Pocono Pines, said she owns an American Pit Bull Terrier that is active in canine scent work and obedience competitions and serves as a therapy dog.

Byrne said she is sorry to hear about the attack. But many people have a misconception of the term pit bull, which includes several breeds and mixed breeds. "I am not currently aware of any dog breed that is bred to be inherently human aggressive because that would make owning said breed extremely difficult," Byrne said by email.

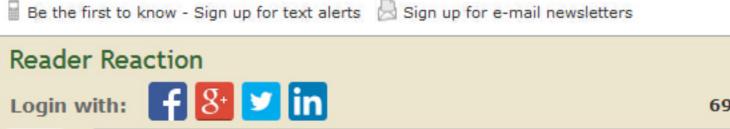
Aggression stems from a lack of positive socialization, poor management of a dog's environment, training, health and genetics.

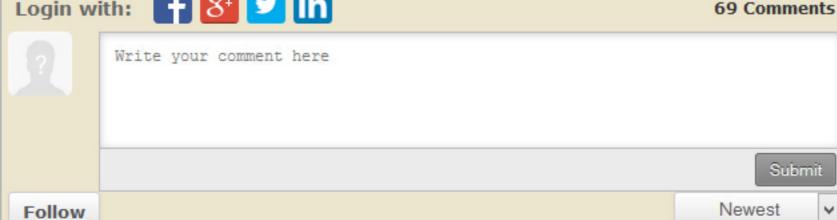
"An important thing to remember is that no dog attacks unprovoked," she said. "Our dogs can't sit down with us over coffee and have a conversation explaining why certain things make them uncomfortable."

But Byrne said humans are ultimately responsible for the actions of their pets. Each situation should be judged on a case-by-case basis.

"If it is discovered that the owner was negligent in the care and management of the animal, then they should be held responsible for the outcome," she said.

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