

Suddenly, pets maul little girl to death

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A few minutes of horror over a missing 2-year-old girl turned into the unthinkable Friday.

Her mother initially panicked because the girl was missing from a bedroom. Then she found her child, Samantha Black, dying in the backyard. Police said two large dogs, family pets, mauled little Samantha about 9:30 a.m. in the yard at her Waterford Township home.

By 10:08 a.m., Samantha was pronounced dead at North Oakland Medical Center in Pontiac.

"I can't begin to emphasize enough the horrific events that transpired this morning," Waterford Police Chief John Dean said Friday during a news conference

Samantha may have wandered through a dog door leading to the backyard.

"There was a dog door large enough for a child her size to get through," Dean said, adding, "No one knows exactly what happened."

Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, attending the emotional news conference about the attack, said the dogs -- Nanook, a husky, and Angel, an Alaskan Malamute -- would be euthanized. The female dogs were untethered. Nanook weighed 60 pounds and Angel weighed about 80.

Samantha weighed 40 pounds.

"These dogs are done," Patterson said.

Details of what happened were sketchy, Dean said. As she got ready for school, Samantha's 17-year-old aunt last saw the toddler at 6:45 a.m., asleep in her bedroom. Samantha's 24-year-old mother and grandparents also live in the single-story brick home on the 2000 block of Oakdale.

Police would not disclose family members' names. The Oakland County Medical Examiner's Office identified the victim as Samantha Black. The mother noticed the girl wasn't in her bedroom when she woke around 9:30 a.m. She found



AMY LEANG/DFP

The dogs who killed — Nanook, left, and Angel — are locked up Friday at an Oakland County center in Auburn Hills.

WHAT TO AVOID WITH DOGS

- Don't disturb a dog while it is eating; it may become anxious or irritated.
- Watch for stalking behavior without barking.
- Don't allow children to disturb a dog if it is playing with a toy or a bone.
- If a dog covers an

Samantha outside and immediately called 911.

"I had some veteran officers who were pretty shaken up by this," Dean said.

Police interviewed family members and released them. No criminal charges had been filed Friday. The family was not at home and could not be reached for comment.

Police said they had no previous reports of trouble with the dogs.

A neighbor, Pat Pursley, 78, who lives behind the Black residence, said one of dogs leaped the fence into her yard and ran at her about two years ago.

"I thought, 'Oh my God,' " she said. "I ran into my house just in time. People in the neighborhood all say they don't watch those dogs. I would say they are neglected because they are in the backyard all the time."

The backyard where Samantha died contains a rusted blue and white swing set and overgrown brush and branches.

"You wonder what the inside of the house looks like," Pursley said.

It was the second metro Detroit child death in a dog attack in just over a month. On April 4, two pit bull terriers killed 6-year-old Cassidy Jeter in Hamtramck.

State troopers said those dogs were undernourished and had ingested rat poison. A criminal investigation into the dogs' owners is pending.

Karen Delise, a licensed veterinary technician and author of the 2002 book "Fatal Dog Attacks," said Samantha's death was the 11th fatality related to dog attacks this year in the United States.

"People just aren't getting it with dogs and kids," she said Friday. "When you bring home a 100-pound predator, you have to think it out a little bit. Are you bringing home a guard dog or a companion dog? Do you have kids? Does your neighbor have kids?"

Delise said too many people get the wrong dogs for the wrong reasons.

"You have to factor in the original function of the dog and how it will play in your life," she said. "Is the dog going to be tied up? Is it going to be a yard dog? Will the dog be spayed or neutered?"

C.J. Bentley, a behavior consultant with the Pet Education Center at the Michigan Humane Society in Rochester Hills, said Samantha's death shows that any dog is capable of acting aggressively. She stressed that she does not know the facts of the case.

"I feel horrible that it happened," she said. "I don't want to say the family did something wrong because I don't know. Every situation is different but it is very important that we socialize dogs properly."

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object, don't reach for it.

For more information, call the Michigan Humane Society pet-education behavior help line at 248-650-0127.

IF A DOG ATTACKS

- Try to redirect the dog's attention with an object like a rake handle.

- Don't reach in with your hands. You will risk being attacked.

- Spray the dog with a hose if one is nearby. That may snap it out of a frenzy.

- Try covering the dog's head with a blanket or jacket.

Source: Michigan Humane Society

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