



OAKLEY ASSESSMENT

Owner – Janet Gill

Assessment #1 Date: July 2, 2021

Assessment #1 Location: Thin Blue Line K-9, 126 Yantz Hill Rd., Williston, VT.

On the above date and time, I had Janet Gill and her dog Oakley come to my training facility from 1200 to 1300 hours for an assessment due to a bite that had recently occurred.

I have been associated with the VT Police K-9 Program for over 22 years as a handler, instructor and member of the VT Criminal Justice Training Council K-9 Committee (I was Chairman of this committee for over 9 years also) which oversees the entire police dog program in VT. I am the head dog trainer and co-owner of Thin Blue Line K-9, a dog training company that trains, assesses and gameplans for any dog issue, for any breed and size, and for any problem from minor all the way up to major aggression issues. We specialize in handling aggressive dogs and have the experience, knowledge and equipment to deal with even the most aggressive dogs.

One of my responsibilities on the VCJTC K-9 Committee is to review all police dog bites. Over my 17 years on this committee, I have reviewed approximately 70 plus bite incidents and assisted in developing a game plan for success.

I observed Oakley on this date at my training facility come close to 3 other client dogs and their owners as they were coming and going, and also employees Clay, Nancy and my wife and co-owner Dori along with myself. The training center can be a very busy place and, on this date, we were in the middle of transitioning dogs in and out so the stress level was elevated. I observed Oakley the entire time and did not see any signs of aggression during this busy transition or during the entire hour that he was here.

My employees and I do not put any pressure or stress on a dog when we first meet them, so we ignored Oakley with the hopes that he would come up to us when he was ready, sniff us and accept us. This is exactly what he did to us and at no time did he have his hackles up, growl, lunge or do anything else that could be perceived as nervous or aggressive behavior.

I ascertained from Janet what had happened as far as the bite incident on Monday, June 28, 2021. Her account was that Oakley and she were down by the neighbor's brook, and the neighbor had come down abruptly. Janet believed that this startled Oakley as it did her. She advised me that the neighbor is uncomfortable around dogs and that she had made complaints to Janet about Oakley being loose, so Janet did not think that the neighbor liked Oakley.

She said Oakley started barking at the neighbor after being startled, and that she was talking to the neighbor and not watching Oakley for a few minutes and that Oakley then unexpectedly attacked the neighbor. Janet was sitting in a chair at the brook at the time, watching her grandson in the water, and during the attack fell out of her chair onto Oakley to hold him down while the neighbor, who was bitten in numerous locations including her arms and thighs, got away and then washed her injuries in the brook and went up to her house.

My goal in getting Janet's version of what happened was to see if there was a trigger to Oakley's attack. I deal with dog behavior every

day and was looking for an explanation of why this would happen. I look at the incident through the dog's eyes and do not assess blame or responsibility but only look at the facts to determine if there was something that the dog perceived as a reason for the response\attack in this incident.

In this specific case, it is my professional opinion that Oakley was startled at first, which put him on edge and stressed him out. Dogs will have one of four responses to stress: Fight, flight, submissiveness or they will freeze. Many dogs, when startled, will go directly to fight. I often compare dogs to people in my trainings, and humans have similar responses to stress. A very common bite scenario is a child waking up a sleeping dog, startling them, and then the dog coming out of that sleep will be startled and bite the child. Oakley in this incident was startled, according to Janet, so he automatically went into a response to that stress and started barking.

Janet advised that she did not see, because Oakley was in a position behind her while he was barking, what happened seconds before the bite, but the fact that the neighbor did not like Oakley and does not like dogs in general may be another factor. Dogs pick up and react to the energy that the human puts off, and it is my opinion (I see it every day in my business) that when a dog meets a human who does not like them or is nervous around them, they sense it immediately and often will bark at that person. It is a communication, often, from the dog to the human, asking "Hey, why don't you like me?".

In this incident, Janet had told me that when the neighbor first came to the brook, she had her hand down and Oakley tried to sniff her hand, and the neighbor "recoiled" her hand back because she did not want Oakley sniffing it. This was a furtive movement and most dogs do not like unpredictable, quick movements. This is why many dogs paired with small children is a problem because the child often is high energy and very unpredictable with their actions. In this case Oakley would have been already on edge due to being startled with her presence,

senses that the neighbor does not like him and then a quick furtive movement in response to an attempt to sniff may have put him on high alert that something was not right. None of this gives Oakley the right to do what he ended up doing but helps to explain what was going on in his mind. There are many dogs that are put in similar situations and run away, freeze or become submissive, but there are also many that will go to their fight response also.

What is unknown from this assessment is whether there was a final trigger between the barking and the actual attack. It is common for there to be something else that forces the dog to go from an alert (bark) to a full attack and this at the current moment is unknown.

When Oakley came to me at the training center, he was given space and we did not put him in a high stress situation so he was friendly, wagging his tail, letting us play ball with him and at one point gave my wife Dori “kisses” on her hand. I was assessing if there was a possible medical/neurological issue and he was a “loose cannon” and would attack under any circumstance, or if this bite incident may be an “isolated incident” in which if certain guidelines are enacted in the future, and he is not put in a similar situation ever again, can he behave as he did in the training center.

I train a lot of rescue dogs (and have 5 of them personally) and believe that these dogs deserve to be set up for success in their lives and that long and happy existences can occur. It is my opinion that Oakley is not an out of control, aggressive dog, but that he reacted to a specific isolated situation.

My final assessment on this day was that this was a very unfortunate incident, and that the neighbor unknowingly and unfortunately put stress on Oakley to the point that he went into fight mode and reacted in a manner that in the human world is considered inappropriate (in the animal world it may have been an appropriate response). The injuries to the neighbor were severe and it is an incident that can't be repeated. I

have empathy for the neighbor and this was a situation that should not have occurred, but I am optimistic that there a solution that can prevent Oakley from being euthanized.

Assessment #2 Date: July 3, 2021

Assessment #2 Location: Residence of Janet Gill, 838 Snipe Ireland Rd., Richmond, VT.

On this date at approximately 1500 hours, I visited Janet at her residence. Oakley was inside upon my arrival and I met her outside. I made entry into her house behind her. I did not put any pressure on this initial entry into his home, and ignored him until he came up, sniffed me and accepted me. This was an excellent and ideal response. Once he accepted me, he went to get a toy and then for an extended amount of time, while I spoke to Janet and checked out the living situation, Oakley would bring me his toy and I would throw it inside and he would retrieve it and bring it back. There are many dogs that I assess that won't be accepting of new people coming into their home so I was very happy with how Oakley had reacted to my presence.

There was not much room inside to exercise Oakley, except a path into the kitchen and another one in the living room where a toy could be thrown but it was not ideal to really burn off excess energy. There was a lot of items stacked throughout the house so space was limited.

I then went outside and took a closer look at the setting. I observed the house to be on a hill, with a very steep decline on the back side. I told her that I did not like this decline. She said that he has gone down this steep embankment before but not gotten hurt. At the bottom of this

decline was the roadway coming up to the house and she advised neighbors will walk on that roadway with their dogs.

The house was surrounded by woods, and was a very rural setting. There was a long staircase going up to the front deck and door. The largest area of lawn was on the front side and consisted of a small stretch of grass. We discussed how it would be possible to put a dog run up (a cable that goes about 7 feet in the air and another cable attaches from the dog to the cable above so the dog can be controlled but still have an outside area to move). I observed several cables that were tied to the stairs, deck and on the back side area that she said is his place to go out to the bathroom. This back of the house bathroom area was small.

I asked Janet if she ever exercised Oakley and she said that sometimes she'll throw a ball outside for him to retrieve. She said sometimes she will throw down the driveway or the roadway and this area goes down towards the house owned by the neighbor involved in this incident.

The one area on the front lawn that has some space would be ideal for the previously mentioned dog run. The run, if put up, would best work if attached to the basement door area and go straight to a cherry tree that is about 50 feet away. This option would give Oakley some space to move and also would be a good way to keep Oakley under control at all times. I told Janet that it is imperative that she always have control for the rest of the dog's life.

My final assessment of the home visit was that Oakley, when not put under stress, is a very playful, loving dog. It was obvious to me that Janet really loves Oakley and is doing her best to give him a good environment. I told Janet, however, that I believed the best-case situation for a dog like Oakley is that he be in an environment where he can get a lot of exercise. This may include being in a controlled setting and that a large fenced in yard (Janet's property is not ideal to put up a

fence) and an owner who can take him for daily walks\runs would be ideal for the lifelong success of Oakley.

Based on Oakley not exhibiting any signs of aggression after being around numerous people or dogs and having a new person come into his home and not having any issues, I believe that he should not be euthanized. For optimal success I would recommend he be placed in a setting and home that is able to guarantee he not be put in another situation like this incident and that he has a home environment where exercise is a priority and control is the only option.