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6 Month Old Puppy Dies At Dog Training Center

By: Denise Yost, Multimedia Content Manager - email

A tragic tangle at a dog training facility ended in the death of a puppy, and the owner called NBC4 for answers.

On April 3, 2014, Robbi Scott said she dropped off her 6-month-old Boxer/Great Dane mix puppy, Gracie, at a training facility in Lewis Center.

Later that day, she received a phone call regarding an emergency. Gracie had died at the training center.

"She was loving. She was my everything," Scott said. "She was amazing."

Laura Pakis, owner of ACME Canine dog training facility in Lewis Center, and Scott disagree about why Gracie died.

"[It was an] accident. I mean, just a freakish accident," Pakis said.

"It's a tragic incident more than an accident, I think," Scott said. "I'm not a fan of choker collars, but I assumed they were the professionals. They were the trainers."

As the name implies, a choker collar chokes a dog when pressure is applied.

"If it's used correctly, nothing happens," Pakis said.

Pakis said a choker collar is a crucial tool in training. But when Gracie was dropped off at the facility, the collar tangled with another dog, and violently clamped down around her neck.

"Her airway had been restricted. She was unconscious," Scott said.

"We rushed to get the wire clippers and cut it off, but in the meantime, Gracie was limp, so we started CPR on her and nothing happened," Pakis said.

By the time facility employees rushed Gracie to the veterinarian's office, it was too late.

"I knew...I'm like, 'You did not just kill my dog,'" Scott said.

Scott blames ACME for her dog's death.

"If you're going to put a choker and a lead on a dog, you should be there to supervise them," Scott said.

Pakis disagrees about the circumstances.

"The dog was not unsupervised," she said.

Still, Gracie's death prompted a change at ACME. Dogs at the facility are no longer forced to wear choker collars. The collars have been replaced by Martingale collars, which tighten, but don't choke.

"Just because we feel terrible and we don't want it to ever happen again," she said. "It could have happened with a Martingale."

While that's good news to Scott, it doesn't bring back Gracie, or replace her pain, she said.

"It doesn't go away. I close my eyes at night and I think about what that little girl must have gone through that day," she said.

"If I could bring her dog back, believe me, I would," Pakis said.

There is a heated debate about the choker collars, and many trainers insist they are effective and safe.

Others disagree, saying they are dangerous and sometimes deadly.

The Humane Society of America recommends avoiding using a choke chain, and urge owners never to leave dogs on a choke collar like a regular one, because the chain could catch on something and choke the dog.