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‘My Sweet Girl Was Truly Special’: Woman’s Court Statement on Puppy Killed in Darien Man’s Care

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A New Canaan woman in a forceful statement on her experience last summer of learning that her [13-month-old puppy had died](#) in the care of a Darien man [found by police](#) to be operating an non-registered kennel is pushing for justice officials to deny him a special [form of parole](#).

Burns, owner of the now-shuttered Terry’s House of Pets, requests that he be denied “accelerated rehabilitation” or ‘AR’ in order to send a message “there are severe consequences” for mistreating animals.

“My heart is broken after losing my Betsy but Mr. Burns’ crimes are much bigger than just her death and the consequences he must face should reflect that,” Gammill wrote in her statement, published in full below.

— This article [previously was published](#) by *NewCanaanite.com*.

Burns appeared in state Superior Court in Stamford on Friday in connection with an animal cruelty charge brought by Darien Police in October. His case, statutorily sealed since he applied for AR, was continued to March 9.

It isn't clear what charge or charges prosecutors ultimately will bring against Burns in connection with the golden retriever's death, whether AR will be approved, whether it will include a provision that his criminal record be cleared after meeting obligations such as community service and attending classes, or whether he will do time.

According to an arrest warrant application from Darien Police, dogs boarded at Terry's House of Pets were often kept locked in a motor vehicle while Burns ran errands, were forced to compete for food tossed onto an unsanitary garage floor—in a room that was not climate controlled—and the animals never were let outside for fresh air or exercise.

When Betsy died, Burns appears to have lied to the dog's New Canaan owner as well as to emergency veterinary workers and police, the arrest warrant application said.

Though Burns told the staff at Norwalk's [VCA Veterinary Referral and Emergency Center](#) that the dog, Betsy, had "collapsed suddenly after playing outdoors," that "did not make sense," according to the testimony of vets cited by police in the application, signed by Stamford Superior Court Judge John Blawie.

"Evidence indicates this golden retriever died of heat stroke, some time before arriving deceased at the emergency hospital," it said.

Here is the full text of Gammill's statement, submitted to the State's Attorney's Office in Stamford:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of my dear Betsy. I am grateful to be able to do so though I have struggled with how I can possibly put into words how much my dear girl has meant to me and how devastated I am at losing her.

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After too many years working too many long hours in New York City, I was finally ready to parent a dog of my own. By moving to Connecticut, I had the house, the yard and then I put a plan in motion to find her. My sweet girl was truly special and to me, she was perfect. She was the sweetest, easiest, most loving puppy of only 13 months before her life was cruelly cut short by Mr. Burns. She did not bark, she did not chew and she loved everyone.

I took every precaution I knew to do in selecting Betsy's caregivers—the veterinarian, trainer and ultimately a dog-sitter. With my full-time work schedule and traveling often, it was important that I had someone I could trust to care for Betsy during the day and in my absence.

In interviewing Mr. Burns, he assured me that he was very experienced and that he genuinely had a love for animals. This was the first of his lies to me and reflective of his business intentionally built on deception.

Before hiring Mr. Burns to daily care for Betsy, I asked to visit his home for him to show me where Betsy would be kept when with him during the day.

I wanted to know the conditions of where Betsy would stay when I was away from her. Mr. Burns showed me the interior of his home and insisted that Betsy would be with his family and playing with his young kids in the house. He purposely hid from me the secret garage where he was actually keeping the dogs.

The Darien Police investigation revealed the deplorable conditions: the filthy, non-temperature controlled, little ventilation garage where he kept the animals in crates all day and where they were forced to compete for food.

I would wonder and comment to Mr. Burns why Betsy had entirely too much energy when she was home with me if she had been walked and exercised during the day while with him. He would lie to me and I now understand why — she was kept in a crate all day and by Mr. Burns offering to pick-up and deliver Betsy to/from home each day, he set it up so that I would never find out.

On the day she died, Mr. Burns called me at the office saying Betsy was convulsing and asked me what he should do? (This claimed professional did not know what to do — another of his intentional deceptions).

My immediate reaction was to tell him to take her to the vet to which he asked me “Is it still open?” It was after 5 p.m. so I quickly checked on the computer where to take animals for after hours care. I gave him the address for him to take her.

After I arrived at the emergency center, I learned that when Mr. Burns brought in Betsy her body temperature was too hot to the touch and that she was already in full rigor mortis. The doctors explained to me that she had to have passed away at least a full 1 1/2 hours from when she arrived — which was a very inconsistent story from what Mr. Burns said happened. More and more lies and zero accountability.

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Betsy's death was a deplorable, horrendous, cruel crime that led to an anonymous caller contacting the police and gaining their attention.

But, that one day in July is in no way reflective of the full extent of his animal cruelty crimes.

It is important for the court to know that while Mr. Burns is responsible and intentionally harmed Betsy on July 19, resulting in her death, he has been regularly mistreating animals in his care, displaying blatant neglect and built a dog-sitting business built on lies and deception. Betsy paid the ultimate price with her death.

I trusted Terry and believed his claims of experience, professionalism and having a genuine affection for dogs. By design, he built a deceptive business and the animals in his care regularly paid the price.

I urge you to please deny his application for Accelerated Rehabilitation and send the message to Terry and any others that are mistreating animals that there are severe consequences.

My heart is broken after losing my Betsy but Mr. Burns' crimes are much bigger than just her death and the consequences he must face should reflect that.

— Mimi Gammill

See also:

- [Police: Complaints of 'Abuse, Unsanitary Conditions, Neglect' at Darien Kennel Result in Arrest](#) (Oct. 12)
- [Police: After Dog Died in His Care, Darien Man Lied to Animal's Owner, Veterinarians and Cops](#) (Oct. 13)
- [Darien Man Charged with Animal Cruelty Seeks Special Form of Probation](#) (Dec. 1)