

Dead baby ‘never had a chance’

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Saturday, January 31, 2004 - 07:00

Local News

She was a happy little girl who loved to walk barefoot in the grass, climb stairs and play with her favourite dog.

Her grandmother smiles, recalling their time together. Those are moments forever cherished and never to be repeated.

The little girl was just 23 months old when she died last week in her Barrie home.

Just how she died hasn't yet been determined.

The autopsy wasn't conclusive, the next step is tests at the Centre for Forensic Science.

What is known is the toddler and her baby sister lived in a troubled home where workers from the Simcoe County Children's Aid Society had visited, on and off, since she was a month old.

The grandmother talks about taking the little girl home and teaching her how to climb the stairs, a feat, once accomplished, the little girl repeated ad nauseum.

“She'd clap her little hands and laugh and think this was great,” said her grandmother, squeezing out a smile.

“She demanded attention from her nan and pop constantly, and she got it.”

Her grandmother's dog was the little girl's constant companion during those visits.

He would even hop into the bathtub with her.

A picture shows the little girl smiling, dressed in pink, posing in front of her great-grandmother's garden.

The picture can't be published, and the little girl's name can't be printed because the surviving baby sister has been taken into the custody of the Simcoe County Children's Aid Society.

According to the Child and Family Services Act, publishing the girl's name could identify her baby sister which, by law, must remain protected.

The young grandmother is hanging on to the happy thoughts, because there are others. The little girl, she said, didn't have to die.

The grandmother and great-grandmother wrote officials and told them they weren't doing enough, that the little girl and her five-month-old sister were in “imminent danger.”

The letter was addressed to the Simcoe County Children's Aid Society and dated Oct. 29.

The little girl died Jan. 21 in the home her great grandmother had said in the letter was unsafe.

“As the children’s grandparents, we tried everything in our power to elicit the help of the appropriate agencies to protect our grandchildren,” they said in a statement Friday. “We repeatedly reported the plight of the children and their parents.

Local children’s aid officials said they couldn’t discuss the case of the little girl. In a press release, CAS officials said when a child dies, the CAS conducts an internal review of the case and the service procedures.

“When people do express concerns, we work with them and take them very seriously,” said Mary Ballantyne, executive director of the Simcoe County Children’s Aid Society.

The CAS policy, she added, is to keep children safe using the least disruptive methods.

Documents show children’s aid workers did have their own concerns.

A worker noted that the little girl came to her for comfort, receiving very little from her own parents, adding “there are attachment concerns.”

The document also describes a dirty, cluttered and unkept household, where the grandmother insists no child should have lived.

The little girl, said the grandmother, would hang onto her, not wanting her to go when being returned home.

The court document makes no mention of any attempts to take the little girl out of the home.

“The little girl never had a chance from the beginning,” said the grandmother.

“I had seen the way the kids were living before (she) came. I knew my daughter had a disability and wasn’t capable of raising kids on her own. I felt she needed guidance and help.”

The grandmother said she was the first to call the CAS on her own daughter.

The CAS document indicates there were calls from at least two others