

Student sent home for allegedly practicing witchcraft

By John Rivera
The Baltimore Sun

BALTIMORE - Baltimore's Southwestern High School was thrown into turmoil Tuesday when a ninth-grader accused her classmate, an admitted practicing witch who is the daughter of a witch, of putting a hex on her.

In an incident seemingly more appropriate for a Halloween tale than for a public school, Jamie Schoonover, a 15-year-old freshman, was sent home Tuesday with an official city schools discipline form, which cited the reason for the referral as "casting a spell on a student."

Earl L. Lee, principal of the Alpha Academy that comprises the school's ninth grade, has summoned the parents of both girls to his office Wednesday to sort everything out.

"This is the first case I've ever had like this in 29 years," Lee said. "This is totally new to me."

Schoonover said it's all a misunderstanding. She would never cast a spell because the principles of Wicca, a form of neo-paganism that she and her mother practice, dictate that what-

ever you do, good or evil, returns to you threefold.

"If she was to go ahead and cast some evil spell, she would look at it coming back to her three times over," said her mother, Colleen Harper. "I don't think that she'd want to do that."

Harper believes her daughter has become a target because of her religious beliefs. "I'm highly upset because this is a faith we practice as devoutly as a Christian would practice Christianity," she said.

But school officials say the disciplinary action taken against Schoonover is not about religion.

"The student was suspended for allegedly threatening other students, which is a violation of the student discipline code, which was established by the Baltimore City school board," said Vanessa Pyatt, a city schools

spokeswoman. "The nature of the threat - casting a spell or whatever - that doesn't enter into it right now." Harper openly practices witchcraft with the girl. Harper, a transsexual who was Schoonover's father but now calls herself her mother, has been a practitioner of Wicca for a year, after dabbling in it for five or so years.

We're not Satanists, simply because Satan is a Christian concept and we don't have anything to do with Christianity.

Colleen Harper, student's mother

"We're not Satanists, simply because Satan is a Christian concept and we don't have anything to do with Christianity," Harper said. "Unfortunately, there are too many superstitions that have been encouraged by Hollywood's depiction of witchcraft."

Wicca is a benign religious practice closely associated with nature and nature's cycles, Harper said.

That confusion is at the root of the problem, Schoonover said. According to her version of events, she and

friends were sitting around a tree when they noticed other girls had written their own names on rocks. One of her friends wanted to cross out the names, so Schoonover lent the friend a white-out pen.

After crossing out the names, the friend wrote, "Life is a virtue of death."

"The girls came over and they thought I had put a spell on them," Schoonover said. "I said, 'No, I didn't put a spell on anybody.'"

One of the girls began to cry. "That girl was scared stiff," Schoonover said. "She was crying and crying. She would just get scared of me looking over at her."

Lee said he was troubled by Schoonover's admission that she practices witchcraft and by the effect that knowledge is having on some students.

"Because of the information the child was giving us, we felt it was necessary to send a letter home and to talk with her parents about how it is affecting other children in the school," he said.

Baby enters world at toll booth

By Tom Jackman
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON - Jose Ortiz hurriedly tossed 50 cents in the toll basket on Northern Virginia's Dulles Toll Road Tuesday morning so he could speed his pregnant girlfriend, Ana Medrano, to the hospital. But before Ortiz could pull away from the toll-booth, Medrano blurted out from the back seat, "Oh, my God, the baby's coming."

Ortiz told James Jones, who was stationed at the booth in the main toll plaza, to call the police and an ambulance.

Jones asked, "She's having a baby right now?" Pat Gande, the tollkeeper on the other side of Ortiz's car, heard Jones' astonished tone, looked down at Medrano, and "I saw the (baby's) head. I thought, 'They're not going to make it to the hospital.' This lady was having a baby right in the middle of the lane."

And before paramedics could arrive, Stephany Emperatriz Ortiz entered the world in the back seat of a Nissan Sentra at 3:08 a.m., one month prematurely, after two hours of labor. Stephany held her first news conference less than 12 hours later at Inova Fairfax Hospital, declining comment but looking pink and healthy at 6

pounds 13 ounces and already sporting a full head of black hair.

Doctors said Stephany and her mother were in excellent health. Medrano, 23, of Reston, Va., said through an interpreter that she was "very grateful that everything went quickly and that she received the medical attention she needed at the tollbooth." She said it wasn't a difficult delivery, "because it went so fast."

Doctors at the hospital said the tollkeepers did all the right things in handling the delivery, though Gande said they did little other than watch it all unfold. "We told them to roll up the windows and keep the engine running, to keep the baby warm," Gande said.

The time from when Ortiz, 23, of Herndon, Va., and Medrano rolled into the toll plaza to Stephany's birth was about three minutes, Gande said. "She didn't even scream," Gande said. "She didn't yell. She didn't say anything."

After Stephany emerged, the tollkeepers comforted the mother and child while waiting for an ambulance, but they didn't cut the umbilical cord. "We didn't have a clipper," Gande said. "They'll probably issue us those now."

Espionage trial of ex-Navy captain gets under way

By Richard C. Paddock
Los Angeles Times

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia - Environmentalist Alexander Nikitin had been in jail more than six months on espionage charges when one of the key secrecy acts he is accused of violating was finally adopted.

The act, a Defense Ministry decree, is itself so secret that Nikitin and his lawyers had never even seen it until this week. Neither had the three judges who will soon decide whether Nikitin is guilty of treason.

But that did not keep the trial of the former navy captain from starting Tuesday in what has become Russia's foremost human rights case since the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Nikitin, 46, a former nuclear submarine inspector for the Defense Ministry, faces up to 20 years in prison for helping a Norwegian environmental group document extensive radioactive pollution by the Russian navy north of the Arctic Circle around Murmansk.

The espionage trial, more than three years in the making, has become a test of the military's power to hide its degradation of the environment behind a curtain of national security. While Russia's fiscal crisis has sparked fears of a return to Communist control of the economy, Nikitin's case has made

activists worry about the revival of Soviet-style political repression.

"The outcome of this trial will be the single-most important indication of whether Russia will become a society of law, or whether it reverts into a society where security forces can bring to bear secret evidence on a retroactive basis against scientists who speak the truth," said Stephen Kass, a New York environmental attorney and board member of Human Rights Watch who is here to observe the trial.

On Tuesday, Judge Sergei Golets, the head of the three-judge panel hearing the case, rejected Nikitin's motion for an open trial and closed the proceedings to the public.

The prosecution already has presented its case against Nikitin in 21 volumes of material prepared by the Federal Security Service, the main successor agency to the Soviet-era KGB.

Nikitin is scheduled to testify for two days behind closed doors and then offer two witnesses on his behalf. The trial could come to a close as early as Friday.

Golets said in an interview before the trial began that the essence of the case is whether two Defense Ministry decrees governing secrecy can be applied retroactively, as a commission of experts already has ruled. Nikitin's attorneys argue it is unconstitutional

to do so.

Amnesty International has declared Nikitin to be Russia's first "prisoner of conscience" since Andrei Sakharov, the Soviet Union's best-known dissident.

The United States has urged Russia to drop the case against Nikitin. Canada has invited Nikitin and his family to emigrate there. Officials of half a dozen countries, including the United States and Canada, were among more than 150 international observers and reporters who attended the open portion of Tuesday's hearing.

Nikitin, who spent 11 years as a nuclear submarine engineer, began working with Bellona, the Norwegian environmental group, after he retired from the Defense Ministry in 1992. He had written a section of a report for Bellona on pollution by the Northern Fleet when he was arrested in February 1996, for allegedly passing secret information to the Norwegian group.

Nikitin was denied a lawyer for more than two months after his arrest and he spent more than 10 months in jail. Since his release on bail in December 1996, he has been prohibited from leaving St. Petersburg.

He says the information he provided Bellona was based entirely on public sources and that he did not di-

vulge any confidential information.

"The indictment says I have violated a law on state secrets," Nikitin said in an interview. "But when we ask them to cite the exact article of the law, the paragraph, the point, the prosecution has a problem answering us."

A 45-page indictment charges Nikitin with violating the government's official secrets law and two Defense Ministry decrees that spell out what the law covers.

While the law is a matter of public record, both decrees are closely guarded secrets.

The law was adopted in December 1995, three months after Nikitin turned in his part of the report to Bellona. The first Defense Ministry decree was issued in 1993, the year after he retired from the military. The second was issued in August 1996, after he had already been arrested.

Alexander Kolb, a Federal Security Service investigator who helped build the case against Nikitin, said the secret information that Nikitin revealed in the Bellona report included a record of Russian naval nuclear accidents.

"Nikitin has single-handedly exposed a history of accidents which led to the deaths of many, many people," Kolb said. "The loss caused by his actions is immense."

Saddam's son making millions off smuggling, ex-aide says

By John Daniszewski
Los Angeles Times

CAIRO - Saddam Hussein's son and heir apparent, Uday, is pocketing hundreds of millions of dollars from a smuggling empire that illegally exports Iraqi oil and brings cigarettes and other goods into Iraq, according to a remarkable interview by his former personal secretary.

The statements by Abbas Janabi, who defected last spring and is said to be in hiding someplace in Europe, give new details about Uday's involvement in sanctions-busting oil trade and insights into the personality of the 34-year-old. Janabi said he has seen Uday murder and torture his enemies.

Uday Hussein, who publishes Babel newspaper in Baghdad and controls a voluntary militia of fighters for his father, is perhaps best known in the West for surviving an assassination attempt in December 1996 that has left him unable to walk without crutches.

But rather than the heroic victim celebrated by Iraq's state-controlled media, the portrait of Saddam Hussein's oldest son that emerges in

the interview is of a determined man bent on accumulating power and motivated by greed, violence and extremism. The interview with Janabi is being published this week in installments by the pan-Arab daily Al Hayat, based in London. The newspaper said that Janabi fears for his life and has asked for asylum in an unspecified European country.

Abdel Wahab Badrakhan, an editor at the newspaper, described Janabi as a "man who was very close to Uday and knows everything about him." He said the interview would "help people to understand some background of many, many events."

The revelations will likely provide ammunition for the many in the Middle East who argue that maintaining U.N. sanctions, far from hurting the Iraqi leadership, has been a source of profits for Saddam Hussein and his immediate family.

Iraq in recent weeks has ceased cooperating with inspectors from the U.N. Special Commission, whose job it is to certify that Iraq has destroyed all weapons of mass destruction. In response, the U.N. Security Council has suspended its periodic reviews on lifting sanctions - in effect keeping

them in place indefinitely.

Although it has long been alleged that Iraq is selling oil illegally despite U.N. sanctions - in May U.S. Undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering said such sales reached 200,000 barrels a day - Janabi's statements provide fresh corroboration from someone with direct access to the inner circle of the regime. According to Janabi, Uday has built a "trade empire" that extends to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iran, and includes a flotilla of 50 ships for smuggling Iraqi oil through the Persian Gulf, an operation carried out in cooperation with parties in Iran.

Janabi accuses Uday of seizing much of the food and medical aid sent to Iraq from sympathetic European and Gulf Arab countries. A small amount is distributed for the sake of the media, he said, but most is stolen and sold.

All in all, "Uday is the biggest winner from the sanctions," Janabi said, because he has been able to assume a monopoly on cigarettes, whiskey, chemical fertilizer and fuel.

Janabi, 50, is a former journalist who worked for the Iraqi national news agency and later became edi-

tor of Babel, the daily newspaper owned by Uday, before becoming his personal secretary.

Hayat did not provide details of his defection, but said that Janabi had escaped a kidnap attempt in an Arab capital before succeeding in reaching a European country. Janabi said he decided to leave after he was accused by Uday of mishandling a business deal involving imported Western cigarettes, an accusation that Janabi considered tantamount to a "death threat."

According to the interview, Uday personally profited from Iraq's seven-month occupation of Kuwait in 1990-91, stealing 160 cars, several boats, gold, jewelry and carpets. Janabi said that Uday disagreed with his father's handling of the Kuwait occupation, believing that Saddam should not have stopped in Kuwait.

According to him, Uday wanted Iraq to mount a lightning strike on Saudi Arabia's oil fields. That way it could have blackmailed Western powers by threatening to set the world's largest oil deposits on fire if they intervened.

N.Y. court keeps stadium issue off ballot

By Blaine Harden
The Washington Post

NEW YORK - Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani threw a legal curve ball. Its aim was to help New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner build an expensive new baseball stadium in Manhattan, while making sure that New Yorkers could not vote against it in a referendum.

The top court in New York state Tuesday called that curve ball a strike, ruling that the Republican mayor has authority to keep the stadium referendum off the ballot Nov. 3. In denying an appeal by the New York City Council, which tried to force the anti-stadium referendum onto the ballot, the New York Court of Appeals said Giuliani's effort to keep it off raises "no substantial constitutional question."

If the referendum had been allowed on the ballot, Steinbrenner's plan for an \$800-million, taxpayer-supported stadium on the West Side of Manhattan almost certainly would have been vetoed, according to a number of polls. They show that eight out of 10 New Yorkers oppose spending tax dollars to move Yankee Stadium out of its 75-year-old home in the Bronx.

The ruling, in the midst of a World Series that the Yankees are well-positioned to win, marked the final out in a complex game over the stadium that has mixed baseball with politics and the profit motive. The champion of the referendum was New York City Council Speaker Peter F. Vallone, the Democratic candidate for governor who hoped the measure would increase voter turnout in the city and boost his

struggling campaign to unseat Republican incumbent George E. Pataki.

The political impact of Tuesday's ruling, however, could extend well beyond Vallone's long-shot bid. It also could affect the nation's tightest Senate race by depressing New York City turnout in the Senate contest between Sen. Alfonse M. D'Amato, R-N.Y., and Rep. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y. Analysts here say low turnout is likely to help incumbent D'Amato.

"Certainly, higher turnout is always better for Democrats," said Howard Wolfson, a spokesman for Schumer. "Every New Yorker deserves the opportunity to vote on the future of Yankee Stadium, but we will win with or without the referendum on the ballot."

The court ruling is a triumph for Steinbrenner, who has threatened to move his team to New Jersey if he doesn't get a new stadium, and for Giuliani, who has feared that he would forever be branded as the mayor who "lost" the Yankees.

Steinbrenner, whose Yankees are the most lucrative franchise in baseball, has pressed the city for years to build a new stadium in Manhattan, one that would have lots of high-profit skyboxes for wealthy corporate patrons. The current stadium's location in the South Bronx, Steinbrenner argues, is unsafe for baseball fans.

His argument, though, was substantially weakened this year by attendance figures, as nearly 3 million fans came to the Bronx to watch the Yankees win an American League-record 114 games in the regular season.

Letters to the Editor

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