

Eye on World & Local

Jihad Jane: Local Terrorist Makes National News

By David Hoffer

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Colleen LaRose, also known as Jihad Jane, expressed a desire to participate in a holy war, believing her European looks would allow her to blend in with Swiss society as she and others plotted to kill a political cartoonist. (photo courtesy of the Associated Press)

On March 9th, the bizarre story of Colleen LaRose, better known as "Jihad Jane," became known to the public. Due to ongoing federal investigations, her arrest for terrorist activity, which took place back in October, was never disclosed to the public. Now with her crimes and case unsealed, the details of her story are now quickly spreading around the world and making national headlines.

LaRose (46) who dubbed herself "Jihad Jane" over the internet is charged with conspiracy to provide material to support terrorists, conspiracy to kill in a foreign country, lying to government officials, and attempted identity theft (all charges are one

count). She was arrested back on October 16, 2009 at Philadelphia International Airport upon returning from Europe, where she allegedly was preparing to commit murder.

LaRose, who was residing in Pennsburg, Montgomery County, moved to the Philadelphia area in 2004. A Muslim sympathizer, she used the internet to express her concerns and beliefs on the suffering of Muslims. Meeting others who shared her beliefs online, LaRose expressed her desires to become a "martyr in the name of Allah." In 2009, a co-conspirator sent electronic communications to her instructing her to "go to Sweden, find [Lars Vilks], and kill him." LaRose responded by saying "I will make this my goal [until] I achieve it or die trying." The intended target, Vilks, is the Swedish artist who in 2007 created controversy when he wrote an editorial in a Swedish newspaper in which he included cartoon depiction of the prophet Muhammad as a dog. This coming less than two years removed from the Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoon controversy that originated in Denmark.

Neighbors were shocked to hear that something like this was occurring in their own back yard. "I'm certainly shocked that we had a terrorist living amongst us," said a neighbor that chose to remain identified. "It really scares me." When asked what was LaRose like, her neighbors all seemed to describe her as cordial but one went so far as to she was "very weird" and got a "strange vibe from her."

The FBI was alerted to LaRose last summer after being tipped off by the Jawa Report, an online forum for civilians concerned with terrorism. In her time on the web, LaRose contributed to blogs and even posted videos on YouTube and Dailymotion. During this past summer, LaRose stole her boyfriend's passport and headed off to Europe in late August "with the intent to live and train with Jihadists, and to find and kill Vilks," according to official court documents.

On March 18, she entered a federal courtroom in Philadelphia for an arraignment. With her blond hair, which she herself described as a way to "blend in with many people," in braids and hands cuffed behind her back she entered a plea of not guilty. Her trial begins on May 3rd and she will remain in federal custody until then. Jihad Jane is now looking at facing a one million dollar fine and the maximum sentence of life in prison. (Portions of this story are courtesy of CNN.)



Makeshift memorial for Interboro High School students, Vanessa Dorwart and Gina Gentile. (Photo courtesy of the Associated Press)

Suicide Pact: Interboro High School Tragedies

By: Jenn Knowlton

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On February 25th, 2010, three young girls had made a pact to commit suicide on the train tracks. As one girl backed out, the other two stood in front of an Amtrak train that was heading to Norwood. Vanessa Dorwart, 15, and Gina Gentile, 16, were pronounced dead at the scene. Kelly Cashwell had decided to live on this earth and begged the other two girls off the tracks. However, the two girls wanted only to be with their beloved friend, William Bradley. On January 19th at age 17, William Bradley was struck by a car while riding his bike. His death caused a ripple affect as another boy, Dominic Marchesani age 18, hung himself in an old mill on March 17th. All four students attended Interboro High School.

The school is currently being investigated. Vanessa Dorwart's mother, Kimberly Dorwart, had called the school counselor seeking guidance for her daughter's sudden change in mood. The school never returned her call. Ms. Dorwart had called not once, but twice. A few days later, the tragedy occurred.

Psychologists and school counselors were at the high school after Vanessa and Gina's suicide to help students cope with the loss. Superintendent Nancy Hacker told the media, "The most important thing is to just try to bring in the support that the students need to get them through the week and cope with the magnitude of this." The school's first priority is making sure students are coping affectively in hopes of the suicide streak to end. The school had planned a fund-raiser to help both the Dorwart's and Gentile's pay for their unexpected funeral. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-8255, can help anyone who is suicidal or those who know someone who is suicidal. If this includes you, please call the above number for guidance.

The word "paralympic" comes from the Greek preposition "para", meaning "beside" or "alongside", and the word "Olympics." This infers that the Paralympics are the parallel games to the regular Olympics. The word "paralympic" was originally a play on words combining "paraplegic" and "Olympic". However, with the inclusion of other disability groups and the close associations with the Olympic Movement, it now represents 'parallel' and 'Olympic' to illustrate how the two movements exist side by side.

Russia dominated the Paralympics podium stand with 12 gold medals. They totaled out their medal count winning a whopping 38 medals. Germany came in second, winning 13 gold and 24 total medals. Canada took third with 10 gold and 19 total, followed by Ukraine with 5 gold and 19 total. The United States won 4 gold and went home with 13 medals altogether. The U.S. Men's Sledge Hockey Team captured gold by shutting out Japan, 2-0. The Paralympics were viewed by over 13 million Canadian households and received over 65 hours of television coverage, a record for the games. Xavier Gonzalez, CEO of the International Paralympic Committee states that this helps us to "focus on ability and not disability."

You can find out more information and results of the 2010 Paralympic Games in Vancouver at www.vancouver2010.com/paralympic-games/.

2010 Winter Paralympics Draws to a Close

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The 2010 Winter Paralympics ended March 21st in Vancouver, Canada. Officially known as "The X Paralympic Games", the competition began on March 12th with opening ceremonies held at BC Center. This is the second time Canada has hosted the games, the first being in Toronto during the summer of 1976. Sports on the program include Alpine skiing, Nordic Skiing, Wheelchair curling, Sledge hockey and the Biathlon.

The Paralympics are not just for amputees anymore. The governing body of the Paralympics, known as the IPC, state on their website that there are four disability specific criteria for athletes. These include: cerebral palsy, blindness, persons with intellectual disabilities, and wheelchair and amputees.



Paralympic hockey player readies for action at the 2010 Paralympics in Vancouver, BC. (photo courtesy of The Vancouver Sun)