

Trans-Bashing or Misunderstanding? You Decide!

The Sad Story of JoLea and the Two Bears

Commentary By Joann [REDACTED]

Scenario: Two New York City police officers, Peter Ungarino and David Gilman, responding to a Bronx 911 call involving an "emotionally disturbed person" and a drug interaction, found themselves caught up in the grip of a nightmare scene, as the people who called them to the apartment attempted to prevent them from bringing the subject to the hospital for psychiatric evaluation.

Another point of view: A Bronx mother, Nancy Lamot, concerned about the possibility that her transsexual daughter JoLea (nee James) Lamot could have had a bad reaction to Benadryl



JoLea Lamot

photo: Michael Sofronski

and cross-sex hormone therapy, called 911, looking for EMS assistance. What she got are two burly cops with attitude. One is alleged to have shouted, "Why didn't you just tell me it was a fuckin' trans-testicle! Where is he? She? Whatever it is?" The cops then proceeded to beat and subdue JoLea Lamot, drew a gun, and maced the apartment occupants.

Two nearly diametrically opposing points of view, yet both emanate from the same circumstances! Who is lying? Is anyone lying? And which nightmare is the real one?

Facts: The story begins in the afternoon of November 24, 1998, with JoLea Lamot, a 27 year-old transsexual who has been on hormones and undergoing the "real life test" for 18 months, took some Benadryl to avoid the effects of an allergy. She then took a nap.

Nancy, JoLea's mother, became concerned when JoLea's friend, Evanna Black, who is also TS, came by to visit at about 5:00 p.m.

JoLea was fast asleep, and the pair had difficulty rousing her. They became worried that perhaps JoLea had taken too much Benadryl, or was having some sort of reaction to HRT, aggravated by the Benadryl.

At that point, Nancy Lamot called 911, looking for a response from the EMS, but referring to JoLea as her son, Jimmy.

While the others were awaiting the emergency response, JoLea, feeling somewhat better, got out of bed and went to visit a friend upstairs.

EMS workers arrived on the scene, and when it was discovered that JoLea was neither in the bedroom nor in the bathroom, they indicated that it was a good sign that JoLea was up and about, but that the family should look for her to make sure she wasn't still disoriented. No longer being confronted with an emergency, the EMS workers made their exit.

At this point, Evanna Black then went off to find JoLea.

Having heard the 911 dispatcher, Officers Ungarino and Gilman proceeded to the scene, looking for the "disturbed individual."

They were apparently unaware that EMS had responded, but Nancy Lamot explained the situation, and the officers offered to assist in the search for JoLea.

As the cops leave to commence their search for Jimmy, they passed by Evanna and JoLea in the hall and greeted them, saying "Hello, ladies."

As JoLea entered the apartment, her friend Evanna turned to tell the officers that JoLea was the person they were looking for.

The stories diverge: At this point, the stories told by both sides are different.

Looking at both accounts as reported in the Village Voice ("Knock Down Drag Out" by Karen Houppert, January 20-26, 1999), one possible alternate version is this:

The officers became confused by this disclosure - they were looking for an emotionally disturbed male drug user, based on the 911 call. Now they find that their quarry is apparently a transsexual.

Perhaps Officer Ungarino did make the derogatory comments attributed to him by Evanna Black in the Houppert article, or perhaps they were misunderstood words of surprise.

The standard police procedure when dealing with a call relating to an emotionally disturbed individual is to bring the person to a psychiatric facility for observation. Doing this requires that the individual be restrained, and usually that restraint involves handcuffs. Failing to respond in this way could open the police to potential liability.

What the Lamot family saw was the formerly friendly cops trying to arrest JoLea. Ordinary people who don't have a lot of contact with the police do tend to assume that handcuffing someone means the person is being arrested. The police officers, trying to do their job to bring the subject in for evaluation, found themselves set upon by the family.

It is pretty obvious that what occurred was due to a horrible misunderstanding. Mary Lamot, JoLea's 13 year-old sister, was quoted in the Houppert article as saying, "After police realized JoLea was a transsexual they went all out of proportion and started handcuffing her. They pushed her up against the wall and told my brother and my mother to get away. The cops were yelling and she was telling them to get off her. I seen them spray Mace at my mother."

The family was frightened by the actions of the officers in what appeared to them to be an arrest for no reason other than the officer's aparent bigotry against transsexuals. After all, what had JoLea done to warrant being arrested?

The officers were frightened by the attempts by the family to prevent the "arrest" that wasn't an arrest. By the time it was over, police officers, Lamot family members and friends were physically hurt, and there were arrests made. JoLea was not arrested, but was taken to Bronx-Lebanon Hospital for psychiatric evaluation. She spoke to a psychiatrist there and was released the next day.

Nancy Lamot was arrested, as was her son John, age 24, and a neighbor, Ricardo Perez, age 47, for assaulting the police officers, among other things. In mid-January, Nancy Lamot made a court appearance, charged with criminally assaulting a police officer—a violent felony charge that could land her 15 years in prison.

Apparently prosecutors intend to go forward with a prosecution for a crime where it is obvious from a review of the facts that Nancy Lamot did not have the requisite criminal intent. There is no case more qualified for an adjournment contemplating dismissal, if not an outright dismissal.

The police department ought to make sure the officers receive better training in dealing with civilians. Perhaps if they explained that they were not arresting JoLea, that the handcuffs were only for protection, and that they were only bringing her in for psychiatric evaluation, the whole nightmare might not have erupted.

Civil lawsuits contemplated by the Lamot family in connection with the matter may be brought, but in this analysis of the facts, seem to be as absurd as the prosecutors continuing the prosecution.

The police officers were doing their job in accordance with the facts as they understood them. The Lamots were trying to protect JoLea in accordance with the facts as they saw them. It's a lot like a traffic accident where both sides claim to have had the green light - perhaps no one is lying! But everyone got hurt.

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