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“I’m Always Looking Behind Me”

By Jennifer Sullivan, Times Snohomish County Bureau

When 17-year-old Nicole heard about last week’s slaying of a Stanwood teen at the hands of an ex-boyfriend, she shuddered. She said it could have been her.

Like Dayna Fure, who on May 24 was fatally shot by her ex-boyfriend, who then killed himself, Nicole said she also lives in fear of a former boyfriend. The Snohomish County girl said she has received death threats, had her car repeatedly vandalized and even had pornographic photos of her posted across her high school.

And like Fure, Nicole, whose last name is not being used to protect her identity, she has a domestic-violence protection order against her ex-boyfriend. But she doesn’t feel a court order guarantees she will be safe.

“I hate it because I’m always looking behind me,” Nicole said. “It’s scary. I worry about my friends and my mom.”

According to domestic-violence experts, more teens are becoming victims of threats and violence from former boyfriends and husbands. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, girls and women ages 16 to 24 are victims of intimate-partner violence at a rate of nearly 16 per 1,000. Comparatively, the rate of domestic violence among 25- to 34-year-old women is 9.4 per 1,000, and it’s 6 per 1,000 for women ages 34 to 49.

According to the National Center for Victims of Crime, one in five high-school girls reports being abused by a boyfriend, and girls and women between 16 and 24 experience the highest rates of dating violence.

According to court papers, Fure lived in fear of her former boyfriend Mainor “Mario” Valentin. Armed with a gun, Valentin threatened to commit suicide in front of Fure on May 13.

The next day, Fure sought and was granted a protection order that forbade him from coming within 1,000 feet of her home, her work and Stanwood High School. She even changed her hairstyle and had started riding in different cars to avoid being followed by the West Seattle man, according to her family.

“I have given many reasons and hints to leave me alone and after two months of separation he is determined to do whatever it takes to get me back,” Fure wrote in the order request she filed May 14, her 18th birthday. “Mario has continued to call and show up around my town including my parents’ houses, my grandparent’s house, my sister’s house and other locations he is familiar with.”

Nicole says her experience was painfully similar. She said that when she broke up with her ex-boyfriend, he also threatened to kill himself. Yvette, Nicole’s mother, said she had no idea anything was wrong until the boy started calling her at work. She said the boy threatened to hurt Nicole if she didn’t encourage the girl to patch things up with him.

“I thought he was a nice, thoughtful and respectful kid,” Yvette said.

Yvette said that when she told Nicole about the phone calls, Nicole told her the boy had been verbally abusive. Nicole said the boy had even forced her into sex when she was 15.

“He made me feel like I needed him to live,” Nicole said.

Tammy McElyea, a domestic-violence coordinator for the Mountlake Terrace Police Department, said many of the teenage girls she has talked to don’t see domestic violence as a serious problem.

“They want a boyfriend,” McElyea said. “They don’t see it (domestic violence) as a crime, they see it as an annoyance.”

McElyea said she often visits high schools to talk about relationship violence. She warns teenage girls to be “hyper-vigilant” about protecting themselves from violent relationships.

She said they need to take hang-up telephone calls, minor assaults and somebody driving by their house unannounced seriously.

“Most teenagers think they’re invincible,” McElyea said, adding that she finds that most teenagers don’t tell their parents after they’ve been victimized.

It’s been about a year since the relationship ended, and Nicole said she is still struggling for control of her life. A student who got A’s and B’s her freshman year, Nicole said that because she has been terrified to see the boy at school, she flunked several classes. She has changed her telephone number repeatedly.

By working closely with a domestic-violence advocate, Nicole has created her own safety plan. She always carries a cellphone, she doesn’t walk to her car alone, and she is always armed with a device that will notify the police if she presses a “panic button” connected to a security system in her apartment.

“It’s all very extreme,” Yvette said. “We could move, but he’s already found out our phone number. Because for \$29.95 on the Internet he can figure out anything he wants.”

Debbie Jakala, a spokeswoman for the Edmonds School District, said the boy was expelled from the district in January and withdrew from Mountlake Terrace High School on Feb. 4.

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Whom to Call for Help

Snohomish County Center for Battered Women: 425-252-2873 or www.snococbw.org/

Snohomish County Domestic Violence Task Force: www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/COUNTY_Services/DVTF/

Washington State Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-562-6025

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