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Orders Don't Always Protect

By Kate Gurnett, Staff Writer

[GLENS FALLS, NY] – Ten minutes after Laurie DiLorenzo left the Glens Falls police station, her estranged husband, Raymond, fired three shots into her head with a hunting rifle at a Cumberland Farms, police say. DiLorenzo, seated in the front of her car with their 13-year-old daughter, had just sought an order of protection. She didn't get it.

Even having a legal document in her purse probably wouldn't have saved Laurie DiLorenzo, experts say.

Orders of protection assume that people will follow the law, said Sherri McNulty, an Albany County Family Court attorney and former public defender.

“In these situations, people are so out of control, and their emotions are running so high, that all they think about is this overwhelming need to deal with their feelings of hatred, grief, loss, whatever.”

So, if orders of protection don't always work, why are they still the front line of defense against violent spouses?

“That seems to be the question on everybody's mind all over the country,” said Susan Pollett, executive director of Pace Law School's Women's Justice Program. The orders work for many people, she says. “And at the very extreme of that continuum are people who, no matter what piece of paper they have, cannot be protected because the person is intent on killing them.”

When domestic violence turns deadly, the media tend to ask “How did the system fail this victim?” Pollett said. But such finger-pointing is too simplistic, she argues. Keeping people safe is a complex and daunting task that requires an arsenal of safeguards from orders of protection to safety plans to education and counseling.

Many don't believe they're at risk. Minutes before she died, Laurie DiLorenzo “wasn't concerned for her safety,” Glens Falls Police Chief Richard Carey said of the 42-year-old mother of two. “She just wanted him to stay away from her. We believe that she truly didn't think he was a danger to her.”

New York State sees about 150 domestic killings a year, according to the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Last year, half of Albany's 10 homicides were domestic. Estimates of general abuses range from 960,000 to 3 million a year, according to the Family Violence Prevention Fund.

The most dangerous time for women, who make up 85 percent of domestic violence victims, is when they leave, said Lillian McCarthy, outreach director for the domestic violence program at Equinox Inc. "In that situation, the abuser loses some of the power and (may) become violent. It can happen to anyone. It doesn't matter who you are or where you live."

Many times, a protection order deters violence; sometimes, it may incite it, McCarthy said. Unhinged husbands have killed and threatened children, siblings and strangers in their rage.

However, in most situations, in the average family court case, people who get a court order abide by it, said James McSparron, a longtime law guardian in Albany County Family Court.

Sometimes, judges ask alleged violators to leave the house for a cooling-off period for a day or two. Such actions are designed to hold offenders to be accountable for their actions.

Raymond DiLorenzo, 48, was a former security guard at Glens Falls Hospital, where his wife worked as a lab technician. Carey said he followed his wife to the gas station last Sunday, possibly from the police station. Sometime before that, DiLorenzo trashed their former Queensbury home, scrawling "Laurie the slut" and threats on the walls in red spray paint signed "666," they said.

Though Laurie suspected her husband had scratched her car with a key and driven past her boyfriend's house, neither offense merited a criminal warrant, Carey said. Police don't issue orders of protection; they come from a judge. A person who seeks an order must file a petition in family court or report a crime to police. Then, a family or criminal court judge decides whether to issue the order.

DiLorenzo fled the scene and went to Turning Stone casino before he was caught, police said. After his capture, he threatened his estranged wife's boyfriend in front of television cameras, then expressed "love" for his wife and children.

Abusers routinely confuse love with control, McCarthy said, and minimize their own responsibility.

Family violence is marked by gray areas, said Pollett, of the Women's Justice Program. "It's not a science. You're dealing with human beings and human emotions. We have (women) come in and say, 'He pulled my hair and dragged me down the hall and stuck a knife under my chin,' and the next time the person comes (to court), they ask the judge to take away the order of protection. They have children with these people, often. There are issues of the heart that make it a much more complicated decision than meets the eye."

The best approach is a full, coordinated response, Pollett says. In Westchester County, the Pace center trains police, prosecutors, judges, lawyers, probation officers and educates the public about what to do when confronted with family violence. The county also has the state's first Integrated Domestic Violence Court.

"Every death cannot be prevented," Pollett said. "But many are."

Counties in New York offer free domestic violence counseling, advocacy and shelter, McCarthy says. Courts make referrals to anger management programs for batterers. Many issue high-tech phone devices that can summon local police within 45 seconds.

"For the most part, people don't leave Family Court contemplating murder," McNulty said. "They go out and they see something, they hear something, one of their kids says something" that triggers a rage. "But you can't put someone away for something they haven't done yet."

Education is key, Pollett says. "Society is more violent than ever. Our children are bombarded with images of violent, disembodied, dehumanized images of women. We have to work on prevention."

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