



What Amy Boyer Didn't Know Killed Her

When the phone rang, Helen Remsburg picked up the receiver and answered with her usual cheery “Hello!”

The voice on the other end sounded desperate. “You have to come! It’s Amy.”

It took a few seconds for Helen to recognize the voice. It was John Bednar, her daughter’s boss.

“Helen, please come. Amy. Amy. Oh my God. Hurry, Helen!”

Helen hung up the phone and quickly called her husband, Tim Remsburg, who worked close by to Bednar’s orthodontics practice. Hearing the panic in his wife’s voice, Tim ran to his car, jumped in, and headed to Bednar’s office. On the way, he heard sirens and saw the flashing lights of several police cars and an ambulance barreling down the street toward him. Instinctively, he made a U-turn and followed the caravan, which stopped at the emergency entrance to the hospital.

Tim parked and ran into the hospital, but security ushered him into a waiting room where he sat alone for what seemed like a lifetime. A nurse finally came in and asked him whether his stepdaughter wore toe rings. Sure she did, he said, and asked when he could see Amy.

The nurse paused for a moment. “I’m sorry, Mr. Remsburg. Amy is dead.”

Tim fell to his knees; he couldn’t breathe. He staggered to the emergency room entrance as Helen drove up. She opened the car

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door and looked at Tim. She knew immediately her daughter was dead.

Helen and Tim found the police in the emergency room and wanted answers. The police shared the details they knew: Amy Boyer had been shot by Liam Youens, a young man about their daughter's age. Apparently, Youens had pulled up to Amy's car in the parking lot near Bednar's office, called out her name, and then shot her several times in the face and arms with a Glock 9mm semiautomatic before turning the gun on himself. Youens was pronounced dead at the scene.

Helen and Tim had never heard their daughter mention Youens, although both of them had attended Nashua High School at the same time in Nashua, New Hampshire, a few years earlier. When the Nashua police went to visit Youens's parents that night, they found a connection of sorts between the two. They confiscated Youens's computer and discovered two online diaries, on Tripod.com and GeoCities.com, dating back at least 2 years. The police began to cobble together a tale of obsession and murder.

Youens first saw Amy during a church youth group meeting when they were both in eighth grade. He wrote in his online journal that he simply "fell in love" with Amy but watched her from afar, never letting her know how he felt. By the 10th grade, he waited until she passed him in the hall and just stood and stared. His was a growing obsession, as the following excerpts from his websites make clear.

Whenever I was around Amy, I knew she was thinking of me. She would act as though she didn't notice me, whether or not I was staring at her (I actually didn't do it all the time, much less later in the year). To pretend that you don't notice someone uses twice as much concentration on that person than if you just ignored them. She even went as far as to brush by me in the lunch room, I even tried to avoid it, but she would have none of that. A normal person would have kept right, but because, "She had no idea I was there (yah-right)" she stayed in the center of the hall.

On one of his websites, Youens later wrote:

Oh great, now I'm really depressed, hmmm ... looks like it's suicide for me. Car accident? Wrists? A few days later I think, "hey, why don't I kill her too?" was the basic plan for the next half decade, I work fast don't I?

On December 12, 1997, Youens wrote the following post on the alt.suicide.holiday discussion group about slitting his wrists:

The best way to do it is this: - get a very large bowl, full of ice water ... lots of ice - put your arm in it for an hour (hurts at first) - get a razor or sharp knife, exactor knife good - cut along the wrist where it meets the hand - then cut 45 degrees down across your wrist - then down center along your arm until it starts to hurt - note: when I tried this, right before I cut. I dropped the knife and vomited.

Youens wrote online about his frustrations, his dreams, his anger, and his obsession for Amy, and then stalked her in real life. He borrowed his mother's car several times, drove it to Amy's house, and parked across the street. He would park for hours near her house, smoking, thinking, and dreaming. He lived to see her just one more time, and his paranoia escalated. One day as he waited near Amy's house, a police car drove past him. He later wrote on his website that he was sure the police were "onto him." Youens was convinced that Amy's stepfather also "knew" about his obsession with Amy. But he had a plan: He was going to kill Amy.

His collection of firearms grew, too, including an AR-15 and a Glock. He took photos of himself posing with the guns and posted them on his websites, noting the purchase price and even musing about murdering Amy in the following excerpt:

Murder: Subplan: NHS (Nashua High School). I'm trying to remember when lunch starts, 10:05 I think, I believe 10:20 would be a good time for the attack. I plan to start shooting people in the courtyard as fast as I can. Reload, I am told that two Nashua Police officers will be in the school (this is why I need a vest). If those cops don't

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blow my brains out, I figure I'll have one minute
before the cavalry comes ... ill go for head shots
head shots head shots! They are a MUST.

Amy wasn't Youens's only target. The young man also flagged fellow Nashua High student Owen Banks. Youens wrote online that he once drove to Banks's house and saw him taking out the trash. He claimed that their eyes locked as they stared at each other, but Banks would later testify that he didn't remember the incident. In fact, he didn't even know Youens.

For the most part, the internet was a safe place in 1999; you could surf, plan a vacation, chat with new friends from around the world, go shopping, play games, and have fun. Helen and Tim never thought to enter their daughter's name into a search engine to check on any personal information about her that appeared. Had they done so, Youens's obsession with Amy might well have been discovered:

Where I am noone will see me
People only can when they are far
Curled u in myself is where I belong
The pain leaves me empty waiting to die
It's hard to go I fear I never will
Scared to live scared to die
Seventy years of misery is my fate
Can anyone have the answer?

—Liam Youens, undated

Youens posted, "If I had a life myself, I really wouldn't care even if I was in love with her. I don't love her anymore, I wish I did but I don't. I wish I could have killed her in High school. I need to kill her so I can transport myself back into high school."

He wanted to set his plan in motion and find a place to kill Amy. He began searching online for her workplace, trying various investigative websites without any luck. Then, in early September 1999, he found Docusearch.com, which claimed it would provide a workplace address for anyone. But first he needed her Social Security number, which he also requested from Docusearch.com. Within days, he had the number and submitted the request for her workplace address. In all, he paid less than \$150 for the information.

"It's actually obscene what you can find out about people on the internet," Youens posted. "I imagined what it would be like to know where she worked, a wonderful feeling a 'non-reality' thing like having a gun in algebra class to shoot her. Docusearch pulled through like a dream."

Tripod.com and GeoCities.com—the websites that hosted Youens's online diaries—claimed that his pages drew little traffic, but there is no way to substantiate this. When Youens's posts were removed less than 24 hours following the murder/suicide, a message in a guestbook on one of his pages read, "Nice page. Very informative. Keep it up." The police also found a series of emails between Youens and someone named Pieter from Greece who was apparently goading the young man into killing Amy. But that wasn't all.

"Pieter recommends I go on a rampage, but I don't know," Youens wrote. "I think [Amy] may be taking the whole 'I love life' thing bit too far. Now she's finally happy, but she could have been happy with a good career." And later, "Maybe she really will be a dentist. ... Oh shit."

Youens staked out Bednar's office during September 1999 and kept track of Amy's schedule: when she arrived, when she left, how long she was gone, where she parked, and her route to and from work.

On one of his pages, he wrote:

In the last 4 years I have had 3 or 4 dreams about Amy, but in the last month I've dreamt about her every single night. The last dream I had Amy was pregnant, so I stabbed the fetus through her, then cut her throat down to the bone, and broke her neck with my hand. She is either at Bednar's and not at home or at home and not at Bednar's. When she gets in [to work] I'll drive up to her car blocking her in, window to window I'll shoot her with my glock. On October 7 [1999] I was making excuses because I was scared. I still feel uncomfortable about sitting in the parking lot. I pray to God that [she] parks on the street like last friday, but I doubt it. My mother is going on vacation so I would be able to use her car. That may make me bold enough to park in the lot at 4:30.

On October 12, 1999, he wrote: “I saw her car on the street the perfect place. I parked my car there and sat at 4:35, but by 5:05 she still wasn’t there, what a waste of a perfect opportunity. I drove around and saw that she left around 5:45, but I didn’t see her and had no place to shoot. I would have done it. I feel good now.”

The Nashua Police Department’s 489-page report on the case noted that 15 minutes before the murder/suicide on October 15, 1999, Youens posted a final message on his webpages: “Pieter see if I did it.” Then he placed a link to the local television station site, WMUR-TV.

On that day, as Youens sat in his mother’s car, he watched Amy leave Bednar’s office with two co-workers. The trio walked through the parking lot, chatting and laughing. As Amy waved goodbye, she opened her car door and slid into the driver’s seat. She put her purse on the passenger seat and started the engine. As another car pulled up to hers, she heard someone call her name. She looked over to see Youens and a gun pointed at her head.

Instinctively, Amy covered her face with her arms, but it did nothing to protect her from the 8–10 rounds that struck her face and arms. The gunshots stopped for a few seconds; then one final shot rang out as Youens put the Glock in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

When the gunshots ended, a series of frantic 911 calls began. Then, it was Bednar’s call to Helen and her call to her husband, and life as they knew it had changed forever.

A few months after Amy’s death, her mother and stepfather launched a public campaign to spread the word about online safety, encouraging internet users to conduct a search regularly on their names and learn safe surfing practices. They appeared on talk shows, were featured on the nightly news, and testified before Congress, always promoting awareness of the potential dangers that lurked online.

On March 11, 2004, Helen reportedly received an \$85,000 settlement from a lawsuit she waged against Docusearch.com. After 4 long years, Amy’s family finally felt that a level of justice had been served. The settlement wouldn’t bring Amy back, but it generated publicity

and fueled greater public awareness about the way private information is bought and sold on the internet.

“We want other people to do what we didn’t know how to do back then,” Helen said. “Put your name, your children’s names in a search engine and see what might be out there.”