

Valarie Fiorenza



Our daughter, Valarie Fiorenza, 30, was found dead on April 15, 1993, in Saugus, Massachusetts. Her body was found hanging from a floor joist in a basement storage room in the home of her estranged live-in boyfriend, Saugus Police Officer Paul R. Bennett. The Saugus Police Department was the investigating agency and proclaimed the death a suicide even before the autopsy. The newspapers and TV were not contacted, because the police did not want anyone to know that Valarie's body was found in the

home of a police officer.

On April 12, 1993, Valarie had taken out a 209A Restraining Order on Officer Bennett. In her affidavit, she stated that Bennett repeatedly beat her and he "took his gun out one night, threatened to shoot me in the back and kill himself. He has also threatened to cut up my face, cut off his fingers to prove his love. Set me on fire. Kill me while I sleep. Also chop up my dog. **I am in fear for my life.**" ([Page1](#)) ([Page2](#))

The judge granted a five-day restraining order, throwing Bennett out of his own home at 28 Fairchild Avenue, in order to give Valarie time to move out. Bennett moved in with his parents, two streets away.

This was not the first time that Valarie had been forced to take out a restraining order against Paul Bennett. She also did so in December, 1992.

Aside from owning and operating her own retail store, Valarie worked as a lingerie model, and co-workers describe how she often came to work so

ingene model, and so women accuse her. She often came to work so battered that they had to help her cover her bruises with makeup. When Valarie attempted to extract herself from her live-in relationship with Bennett, he reacted with such fury that Valarie was in fear for her life. She stated in her December affidavit, "After I was packing my boxes to leave, he threw a tantrum and was throwing furniture and glasses around the house. He has threatened to use all his police powers to **destroy me if I ever tried to leave him.**" ([Page1](#)) ([Page2](#))

Although the Saugus Police were well aware of this dangerous situation, Bennett was never disciplined. Town Counsel, John Vasapolli, [excused](#) this by telling a reporter for the Boston Globe, "The guy is a pretty good cop." According to a report by Bennett's fellow officers, police were called to a "family disturbance on Fairchild Avenue," wording that suggests a shouting match rather than Bennett's holding a gun to Valarie's back and telling her she was going to die, beating her for hours, and banging her head against the wall so many times that she thought he would split it open. When Bennett complained to his colleagues that Valarie had hidden his gun, two officers placed her in handcuffs, refused to let her get dressed, and humiliated her by dragging her down to the police station in freezing weather, wearing only a thong, T-shirt, and high heeled shoes.

Like all too many victims of abusive relationships, Valarie allowed her lover to sweet-talk her into reconciling. The honeymoon was a brief one. Now, four months later, Valarie was once again attempting to leave Bennett. This time she really seemed to have her act together and was taking strong positive steps to recreate her life. She and her father were planning to go into business together, and Valarie had a new boyfriend, Jimmy McNeal, whom she had begun seeing secretly a month before. Sometime before her death, Jimmy offered to fly her to France for a vacation. On April 13, Valarie phoned her close friend, Claire Fairbanks, and told her she had found a new apartment. "She was packing her bags and getting ready to leave," Claire told police.

The following day, Wednesday, an eyewitness saw [Officer Bennett](#), in full uniform, pull up to the house at 28 Fairchild Avenue in a cruiser. Disregarding the restraining order, he used his key and [entered](#) through the front door.

Valarie didn't show up for work that day. When they couldn't reach her by phone, her manager and coworkers contacted her former husband, Larry Cassity, who had remained a friend, and asked him to check and make sure that she was all right. Larry paged Valarie all day, but she did not respond. When he went by her house, she didn't come to the door. Reassured by the fact that Valarie's car was in the driveway, loud music was playing inside the house, and Valarie's dog was tied up outside, barking, Larry left.

Early the next afternoon, neighbors saw a Canine Control van pull up in front of the house. Two officers got out, peered in through the windows, looked around the side and back of the house and made a call. Soon after that, an ambulance showed up. The EMT's also peered through the windows and looked around the side and back of the house. They all left.

Approximately ten minutes later, a plainclothes policeman arrived. He entered the house through the front door, [using a key](#). Neighbors saw the light in the basement go on and go off again very quickly. The policeman then exited the house and left the scene. Nothing more happened until 7:30 p.m., when Larry Cassity stopped by the house again. The dog was still outside barking, Valarie's car hadn't been moved from the previous day, and he could still hear music playing inside. He began to feel very uncomfortable and called the police. He said he had to call them twice to get them to respond.

Approximately three and a half hours later, members of the Saugus Police Department arrived at the house. They questioned a neighbor and then left, returning with a key, which they had acquired from Paul Bennett's mother. (Bennett and his parents were supposed to have relinquished their keys when the restraining order was issued.) The police later stated that they weren't able to enter with that key because of wooden barriers wedged under the doors, and they had to break a window to get into the house. The implication was that Valarie must have committed suicide because nobody else could have gotten inside to kill her. That makes no sense, in light of the fact that witnesses saw a plainclothes cop enter and leave through the front door earlier that same day. If those barriers really were there, (there are no photos to document their

existence), there were other entrances to the house, including [basement doors](#), conveniently located in the room adjacent to where Valarie's body was discovered.

When police closed Valarie's case as a suicide, we hired our own investigators. The doctor who had performed the autopsy on Valarie was not credible, (he was the same doctor who later performed the autopsy in the infamous "Nanny Case," and resigned because of mistakes he made on the Eappen baby, a school teacher, and numerous other victims), so we hired a forensic pathologist for a second opinion. The doctor who did the autopsy had placed the time of Valarie's death as 10:55 p.m., which was after police had arrived and cut her down from the floor joist. Our medical expert told us that evidence indicated that Valarie had been dead for at least a day and a half. He also told us that Valarie's death fell outside "the usual pattern of suicidal hangings," that the investigation of her death was "superficial," and that evidence indicated that Valarie may have died in a [face-up position](#) and been strung up later. Valarie had had a fear of choking for many years. She would not leash her dog for that reason. The last way she would have chosen to die was by hanging.

There are so many unanswered questions about this case! Why were the Canine Control, an ambulance, and a plainclothes police officer going back and forth to that house throughout the afternoon? Why did Canine Control leave without Valarie's dog, which had been tied outside, barking, for two days? Who summoned the ambulance that stopped by that afternoon, and why did it leave without Valarie? Who was the plainclothes cop, and how did he get a key? Why did he go straight to the basement, turn on the light just long enough to look at Valarie, turn it off again and leave the scene? (If the doctor who performed the autopsy was correct in his statement that Valarie didn't die until 10:55 that evening, that officer could have saved her!) How did the boards get wedged under the doors between the time the plainclothes cop entered and left the house and the time that Larry Cassity called the police?

For seven and a half years, all our energy and finances have been invested in private detectives, forensic specialists, crime scene reconstruction, the

acquisition of case materials, and attorney fees. Each attorney we approached wanted to use his/her own favorite private investigators and expert witnesses, so it was like reinventing the wheel and paying for all the same things over and over. We fired two attorneys because we caught them lying to us, and our final attorney wanted to drop off the case when she learned we were running low on money. She was very upset when she realized it was too late for her to do that.

Just before the Statute of Limitations were up we filed a Civil Claim against the Town of Saugus and Officer Paul R. Bennett. The attorney who had wanted out of the case threw us away at Summary Judgement. To make matters worse, she returned only two of the seven boxes of evidence materials we had provided her. We filed an Appeal, but no attorney was willing to represent us, because we no longer had the complete investigative file.

We went to court twice to try to get Officer Bennett on Assault and Battery. The judge told us that, because Valarie was not there to testify against him, no charges could be brought.

As we have discovered the hard way, there is a new breed of criminal in this country. It's the rogue cop, the one who, instead of protecting his community, preys on it. He wears a blue uniform and a badge and carries a gun. Many times his profession allows him state protection that is paid for with our tax dollars. He hides under the guise of law and order, and when you speak out against him you become suspect and considered un-American.

Linda and George Fiorenza