



David Lenio Reloaded?

Each of us writing this piece knows what it is to be threatened by Lenio

BY FRANCINE GREEN ROSTON AND JONATHAN HUTSON // NOV 19, 2015 //
GUEST COLUMN, OPINION

After David Joseph Lenio tweeted threats to shoot up a grade school in Kalispell, and put two bullets in the head of a rabbi, law enforcement agencies from three states plus the FBI mobilized to identify and stop him – and they did. He faces one felony count of intimidation.

When Lenio was arrested on February 16, Police Chief Roger Nasset told the Flathead Beacon that he posed “a very real threat” to Kalispell’s grade schools and Jewish community. He said, “I did not want children’s blood on my hands because I didn’t do everything I could.”

Each of us writing this piece knows what it is to be threatened by Lenio. One of us (Francine) is one of only two Flathead Valley rabbis and has kids in the local schools. Lenio tweeted to the other of us (Jonathan) to ask where his kids go to school.

Lenio crossed the line between hate speech and hate crime. When he moved to Montana in December 2014, he repeatedly tweeted his intent to shoot up a Kalispell grade school. From then until his arrest, his threats escalated – repeating his intentions with more details and further revealing his hate-filled motivations.

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This white supremacist has a right to his ideas, including his denials that both the Sandy Hook mass shooting and the Holocaust ever happened. But he doesn't have a right to threaten violence against Jewish

leaders and grade school kids.

On the day Lenio threatened to kill more people than the 26 who were massacred in 2012 at the Sandy Hook elementary school, he retrieved two rifles and ammunition from his storage locker. He also painted a suicide-by-cop scenario, tweeting that he would kill grade school kids "until cops take me out, too."

Hate and the crimes that often go with it, affect us all. When our children fear going to school or a religious group fears meeting and publicizing its events, our society has a problem. When individuals can use multiple modes of social media to publicize their hate-filled messages and intimidate communities, we can either live in fear or we can speak out against hatred.

We need to learn from this tragedy averted that when intimidating hate speech is called to the attention of legal authorities, our communities can be protected from threats, fear, and violence. If you see something, say something. You might help prevent a tragedy and save lives.

An angry young man filled with paranoia and hate is a target for recruitment by hate groups. When Lenio served five months in the Flathead County jail, he received support from Karl Gharst, who served time in the same jail in 2004 for threatening a Native American social worker. Gharst has recently taken to the Internet to try to rally white supremacists to support Lenio.

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Therefore, we would like to plead the case for respecting each other's human rights – and the right to live in peace, not in fear.

When haters try to draw a circle so small that it excludes anyone who doesn't look like them, or doesn't believe or behave as they do, then we must resolve to draw a much bigger circle that includes all of us, even haters, in the same human community. As people of faith, we resolve to spread the message that every individual deserves to live in peace, practice their religion in peace, and gather to share their views in peace.

In this season of Thanksgiving, we are grateful that law enforcement has denied this white supremacist an opportunity to make a name for himself written in the blood of the Flathead Valley's school kids and Jewish residents. But we know that County Attorney Ed Corrigan is trying to resolve the case quietly, out of public view. We urge him not to offer anything less than a felony conviction that would deny Lenio legal access to guns and ensure that he is no longer a danger to himself, to us, or to our neighbors. We cannot be silent and stand idly by as this dangerous man leaves with the possibility of receiving a deferred prosecution that would eventually lead to all charges being dismissed and the State of Montana putting weapons back in his hands.

Our traditions teach that when you save a life, you save an entire world. We all have a responsibility to save lives when we can—the lives of innocents and the lives of those like David Lenio. May he find his way toward a life of love rather than hate and may our community enjoy the blessings of peace, love, and safety.

Rabbi Francine Green Roston is the spiritual leader of the Glacier Jewish Community-B'nai Shalom, and a supporter of Love Lives Here in the Flathead Valley.

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Jonathan Hutson is a life-long Christian and a concerned Dad who warned law enforcement about David Lenio's threats and recommended a strategy to identify and locate him. He is a former Chief Communications Officer for the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence in Washington, D.C.

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