Syndicated News

When You Lie Down With Pythons

Posted 2009-07-21 14:57 GMT

Last year, the sad story of a little dog that was stalked for days and then swallowed whole by an enormous python made news around the world. The Peric family of Queensland State, Australia, had already lost a cat and a guinea pig to the sixteen foot-long snake a few weeks earlier. After such satisfying meals at Chez Peric, the python went after Scotty, the family's Chihuahua. Stuart Douglas of the Australian Venom Zoo told the press that the Perics had actually seen the snake in the dog's bed several times in the days leading up to the devouring. This was a sure signal that the python had designs on Scotty.

This month, a python was responsible for a far more tragic event. During the night of July 1, 2009, Charles Jason Darnell's "pet" Burmese python escaped from its aquarium in Oxford, Florida, got into the nursery, and strangled the two-year-old daughter of Darnell's girlfriend. According to Fox News, Darnell told investigators that he put the 8 feet 5 inch snake in a bag in its aquarium Tuesday night. When he woke up Wednesday morning, he found the python wrapped around Shaunnah Hare in her crib. Other news sources said that the girl's mother revealed that the snake had escaped already once from the aquarium earlier that night.

In both incidents there were signs of a problem in the making. The Perics had lost two other pets to the scrub python in Australia. They had seen the python nesting in the dog's bed! What did they think? That this was a kumbayah moment between snake and dog? And Charles Darnell's pet python had already escaped from the aquarium once that night. Why on earth would the Oxford, Florida man not assume that the snake would escape again and take the necessary precautions? When it comes to something as dangerous as a python, warning signs should not be ignored because when you lie down with pythons, you seldom rise at all.

Apply the python stories now to the current situation in Northern Virginia's Fairfax County, of a school with disturbing ties to radical Islam petitioning for the right to expand and increase its student population. Nestled on lovely two-lane bypass, Popes Head Road, some 21 miles from Washington, DC, the Islamic Saudi Academy (ISA) is a private K-12 school founded and financed by the Government of Saudi Arabia. The fully accredited ISA declares that it "promotes respect and mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims, Arabs and Americans while keeping within the Muslim faith." It also says "it strives for its staff and students to uphold tolerance, honesty, integrity and compassion, qualities that represent the best of both American and Arabic cultures." But warning signs indicate that the ISA's adherence to Saudi Arabia's radical Wahhabi sect of Islam present a pythonesque situation -- and not in a British comedy way.

Three years ago, the Center for Religious Freedom, then at Freedom House, partnered with the Institute for Gulf Affairs to translate textbooks provided to the ISA and other schools and mosques in America by the Saudi Ministry of Education. In a June 2008 press release, independent government agency the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reported the findings of that effort. The texts sanctioned the murder of converts from Islam, Jews, adulterers, polytheists (i.e. Wahhabis call Shiites polytheists) and homosexuals. Such statements obviously encourage the breaking of U.S. law. This is tantamount to sedition against U.S. sovereignty, since in Islam no law can be higher than the Sharia (Islamic law). Articles in Front Page Magazine on October 29, 2007 and June 29, 2008 provide more details on the textbooks' contents.

When the textbooks were first brought to light, the Saudis, including the leadership of the ISA, promised reform. In October 2007, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom called for the ISA to be closed under the Foreign Missions Act until the Saudi textbooks used at the school were made available for comprehensive public examination. Not long after the Commission raised the issue, the Saudi government turned over textbooks used at the ISA to the U.S. State Department. But in September 2008, USCIRF commissioner and director of the Center for Religious Freedom, Nina Shea, reported that despite requests, the State Department did not make the textbooks available either to the public or to the Commission, nor did it release any statement about the content of the books that it received. Shea said that the State Department "misleadingly wrote" that ISA "offered to make the books available to USCIRF." Actually, she said, ISA invited USCIRF to "visit" the school, but this would not aid in translating and analyzing the texts. That job would take months.

Troubling textbooks appear to have brought forth equally troubling fruit in certain students. ISA valedictorian for the class of 1999, Ahmed Omar Abu Ali, was convicted in 2005 of providing material support to Al Qaeda and plotting to assassinate President Bush. In his senior year at ISA, Abu Ali's classmates elected him "most likely to become a martyr." Two other former students, Mohammed Osman Idris and Mohammed el-Yacoubi, were linked to a planned suicide bombing in Israel in December 2001. And last month on June 4, 2009, Raed Abdul-Rahman Alsaff, a 2003 ISA graduate, was arrested in Tampa when he tried to board a plane for Phoenix with a seven inch long butcher knife concealed in his bag.

ISA staff members have also been implicated in illegal activities. In 2004, former ISA employee Ismail Elbarasse was arrested for taking suspicious photographs of the support cables and other structural features of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. Elbarasse was identified as a "high-ranking Hamas operative." And former ISA director, Abdallah I. Al-Shabnan, was arrested for covering up the reported sexual abuse of a five-year-old student. Following the tenets of Sharia rather than the law of the State of Virginia, Al-Shabnan returned the girl to the father who was abusing her.

For as long as the ISA has been the center of controversy regarding its Islamic ties and adherence to Sharia, the school has been staunchly defended by officials of Fairfax County, Virginia. According to Saudiwatch, at a May 2008 Fairfax County Board of Supervisors hearing dealing with the renewal of the ISA's lease for their other school facility in Alexandria, Virginia, concerns over the school's radical connections were dismissed by supervisors as "slanderous, bigoted, and unfounded." Saudiwatch adds that then Fairfax County Chairman (now U.S. Representative) Gerald Connolly "apologized to Mr. Al-Shabnan for what he deemed slanderous
accusations that impugned the integrity of the Islamic Saudi Academy.” The County extended the ISA’s $2.2 million a year lease for another year.

During recent hearings over the expansion of ISA’s facilities on Popes Head Road, county officials seem to have again dismissed concerns about the ISA connections to radical Islam. At a March 2009 hearing by the County’s Planning Commission on the ISA’s proposed expansion, the Planning Commissioners made it clear that their decision to recommend to the Board of Supervisors either approval or rejection of the ISA’s expansion would be based solely on “land-use issues.” Then the commission dismissed a multitude of concerns regarding traffic problems and environmental impact from the homeowners living near the ISA. When homeowners testified about dangerous hair-pin turns on Popes Head Road, frequent and serious accidents, and the added danger that would be caused by additional drivers, commissioners scolded them and demanded to know why they had not previously reported such incidents. When the Planning Commission was reminded that the land on which the ISA was built was zoned for low-occupancy and was considered an environmentally-protected area, some commissioners seemed to use the testimony of a pre-teen ISA student to counter the testimony of long-time area residents. On June 11, 2009, the Planning Commission reported their unanimous recommendation for approval of the ISA expansion to the Board of Supervisors.

In the latest development, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors held a public hearing on July 13, 2009. Once again the mantra, “this hearing will be based on land-use issues only” was repeated -- which was odd, because the Board of Supervisors have a much more broad portfolio, which they are usually eager to implement. So once again, the board heard the testimonies about traffic hazards, environmental concerns, and other actual land-use issues from neighborhood homeowners. They also heard the testimony of those who pointed to the warning signs that land-use in the case of the ISA appears to be land used for promoting Shari’a in Northern Virginia. The board will vote on the expansion plan at their meeting on August 3, 2009.

Imagine that the Australian zookeeper, Stuart Douglas, had visited the Perics prior to Scotty the Chihuahua’s demise and had seen the python lying in the dog’s bed. What if when Douglas then warned the Perics that the dog was in danger, they had rolled their eyes and smirked at him? Or imagine that a friend of Charles Darnell had witnessed the Burmese python bursting out of its cage and slithering along the carpet. What if when the friend had urged Darnell to secure the snake, Darnell had lashed out at the friend for his slanderous accusations?

Insane. But is it any less insane to ignore the warning signals about the Islamic Saudi Academy? Fairfax County has been given clear warning signals by those who testified to both the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. On August 3 Fairfax County will decide whether or not it intends to lie down with pythons.

By Faith J. H. McDonnell

FrontPageMagazine.com