

MARCH 30, 2012

# WEST WINDSOR & PLAINSBORO NEWS



Headliners: *Julia Aimers & Megan Donnelly, page 11; Plainsboro's David Ho, 15; fired coach Jim Giovacchini, 20.*

## Ravi: Many Questions, Few Answers

### To the Editor: Please Sign the Petition

What everyone had read until recently was that Dharun Ravi, an 18-year-old graduate of WW-P North, Class of 2010, a Rutgers freshman, secretly recorded his roommate Tyler Clementi while he was with another man and posted it on the Internet for everyone to see. Now 19 months later, we know that nothing was ever recorded, and nothing was broadcast over the Internet. Please read the Star-Ledger article by Mark Di Ionno dated Thursday, March 22. Also please see the 20/20 program on ABC, Friday, March 23, telecast of Dharun Ravi's exclusive interview with Chris Cuomo.

In these interviews, for the first time you will get to read and hear what Dharun has to say. The prosecutor's office has taken advantage of a faulty law to convict Dharun on bias charges, a law that even the judge, Glen Berman, admitted was muddled. Dharun now faces up to 10 years in jail.

As we understand from the Star-Ledger article and the 20/20 program, every single witness testified unequivocally that Dharun Ravi had absolutely NO hatred towards gays/homosexuals.

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### Dharun Ravi and Ravi Pazhani: Two Different Worlds

by Shridhar Sadasivan

On March 16, former Rutgers University student Dharun Ravi was found guilty of bias intimidation, evidence and witness tampering and invasion of privacy, for secretly spying on his roommate Tyler Clementi's liaison with another man in their dorm room. Tyler Clementi subsequently jumped off the George Washington Bridge to his death. According to the jury, the charges of witness and evidence tampering, and invasion of privacy were "cut and dry," but the jurors spent time debating on the bias intimidation charges.

A conviction for bias intimidation, a second-degree felony, indicates Dharun Ravi targeted Clementi for his sexual orientation and knew his actions would hurt Clementi. Because of the bias intimidation charge Dharun Ravi now faces up to 10 years in prison and possible deportation. Sentencing is scheduled on May 21.

At the trial the defense team presented seven character witnesses — Anil Kappa, Sandeep Sharma, Rajesh Rathinasabapathi, Ramkumar Pandurangan, Girish Warriar, Karthikeyan Arunachalam and Murugan Gnanavel — all South Asian men, friends and business associates of Dharun Ravi's father, Ravi Pazhani. When

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## Tax 'Police' Out in Force At WW Council Budget Talks

by Rikki N. Massand

As budget talks continued at the Monday, March 26 town council business meeting, two resolutions aimed at a \$463,000 reduction were introduced. Council voted 3-2 for the proposed budget to eliminate \$200,000 from liquor license revenue, \$100,000 from the fund balance, \$100,000 coming from increased revenue projection, and \$63,000 from a reduction in operating expenses.

"What was approved was the framework for getting the budget to reflect a zero cent increase, possibly for the first time in West Windsor's history," Councilwoman Linda Gevers said.

Councilman Bryan Maher led the charge to chop the proposed budget and attack the township's

costs. He met resistance, but delivered a strong message nonetheless.

"There's a new sheriff in town!" exclaimed Maher, after refuting Council President Kamal Khanna's thoughts against reducing the mayor's proposed \$37,340,000 budget.

**'We are going to be hawks because the administration has approved expenses that should never have been approved.'**

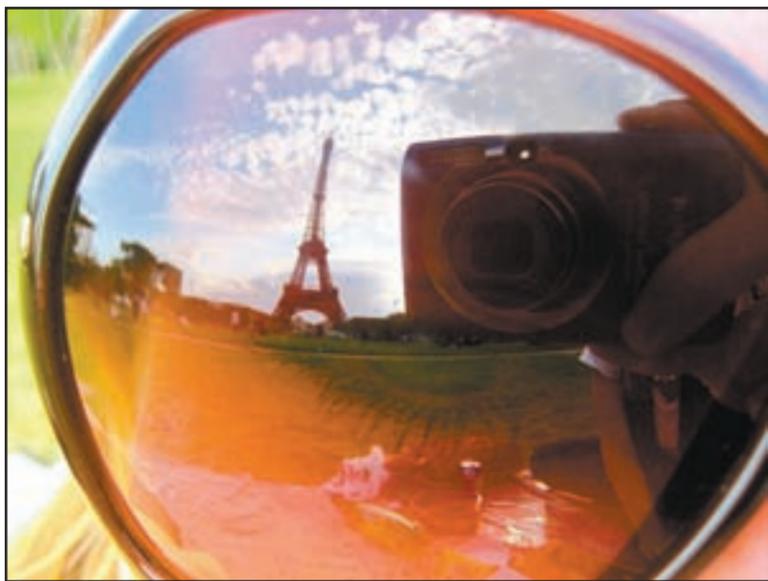
More than a sheriff, Maher resembled a marksman, shooting down comments from Business Administrator Robert Hary, Township CFO Joanne Louth,

and Khanna. At several times during the meeting Maher was asked to let others speak, and at one point Township Attorney Michael W. Herbert told Maher he was in violation of Robert's Rules of Order.

In a follow-up interview Maher

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## Sharing Visions of the World, and Memories of Her Father



*Eye on the Eiffel Tower – and Elsewhere: Colleen Maniere, at right, traveled through Europe taking pictures, including the one above, in Paris, France.*

by Euna Kwon Brossman

When Colleen Maniere was 10 years old, she and her family moved from Connecticut to a house in West Windsor with a huge bay window that looked out onto her backyard and a greenbelt with bunnies, groundhogs, and all sorts of living creatures. Sensing her burgeoning interest in nature, her mother gave her a pair of binoculars.

"I would sit at that window for hours looking at everything out there, just absorbing the world and noticing the colors and the movement," says Maniere, who pinpoints that childhood experience as the time when her vision as a photographer was born.

At West Windsor-Plainsboro High School, she put down her binoculars and picked up a camera as a student in Mr. Leventhal's photography class, opening up a whole new chapter in her love affair with the lens and a different way of viewing the world.

On Tuesday, April 3, Maniere shares that vision with a photographic exhibition "Deep

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THE LEWIS SCHOOL  
OF PRINCETON

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MARCH 31  
10 A.M.

SEE AD PAGE 24

PRINCETON  
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SACRED HEART

OPEN HOUSES  
WEDNESDAYS,  
APRIL 11 & 18  
9 A.M.

SEE AD PAGE 12

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**Petition for Dharun Ravi**

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However the prosecution decided that he did and they themselves decided what was in his mind, despite all the evidence to the contrary. The dean of Rutgers School of Law says in ABC's 20/20 program that he sees no hate on part of Dharun in this case. Dan Savage, a gay rights activist, says that there was a rushed opinion at the time of Tyler's death and shift of blame on the shoulders of foolish teenagers Dharun and Molly Wei. As a CNN article from March 23 by Charles Kaiser suggests, the punishment for Dharun should be to speak at different high schools every week for a year. This could make a big difference in the lives of many students.

Dharun is from our school district and from our community. Anyone who has raised children in the 15 to 20-year age group will understand that kids are capable of making very foolish mistakes. These mistakes are due to their immaturity and momentary lapses in judgments. However they are not filled with hatred and these are not malicious acts. Let us understand Dharun's actions for what they were, immature and foolish. Dharun's actions were NOT born out of hate and bias. Let us show support to one of our own community members, Dharun, and his family.

We feel sorry for Tyler Clementi's family as we try to understand their profound grief.

There are many things we as parents, along with counselors, teachers, friends, and family members need to consider when we send our 17/18 year olds to a new atmosphere as freshmen in a college dorm room. Are there any major issues in their life that need to be addressed? Should we not be worried when strangers from the streets, who are much older than our kids, walk into their dorm rooms? Are these youngsters able to understand the implications of texting and tweeting incessantly? How will our kids handle new opportunities and responsibilities that come along with the independence?

Instead of drawing lines in the sand and taking sides, let's come together as a community and prove that we can make tough decisions and show some compassion, understanding, and sympathy.

Please sign the petition at <http://wh.gov/NM1> if you believe that equality and tolerance should be achieved through honest, open communication. Share this website with as many as possible: <http://wh.gov/NM1>

**Anjani Gharpure**

The writer is a former WW-P Board of Education member

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the defense lawyer asked the witnesses if they had ever heard Dharun Ravi speak ill of gay people, they all had the same answer: No. The defense hoped these witnesses would help prove that Dharun Ravi was not biased against gay people and therefore not guilty of the bias intimidation charges. Prosecution attorney Julia McClure cross examined these witnesses with a very simple question. "Did the topic of homosexuality ever come up in your discussions with Dharun?" All the seven men, again, had the same answer: No.

I am a South Asian Indian, 33, living in New Jersey. In more ways than one, my background is similar to Ravi Pazhani, Dharun's father. I grew up in the same state (Tamil Nadu) and speak the same language as Ravi Pazhani. Like Ravi Pazhani, I also work in information technology and moved to the U.S. for work. Until 2011 I also lived in Plainsboro.

Interestingly, I also share a similarity with Tyler Clementi. I am gay.

I am guessing here, but if Ravi Pazhani, the father, were to testify, his answer would be the same as that of his seven friends. "No. We never discussed homosexuality within our families." Watching the trial, I couldn't help but wish Dharun Ravi had actually had a chance to talk about homosexuality with his father. I can't help but wonder if sex and sexuality weren't a taboo in Indian culture, if Dharun Ravi would have been accused of violating his roommate's privacy?

Ravi Pazhani comes from a country that has a population of more than 1 billion. A country that gifted the KamaSutra to the rest of the world, but where it is very common for people to act like the word "sex" doesn't exist. Forget about homosexuality: even heterosexuality is never discussed in living rooms or at dinner tables. It is then up to the individuals to figure out human sexuality and its complexities.

Sex is a dirty word that also never gets discussed in schools. In our 10th grade biology book, the last lesson was on human reproductive organs. But that lesson was never taught in the class and it was an unspoken agreement between students, teachers, and the education department that no questions will be asked from that

lesson in board exams. My friend, who came to the U.S. recently to work as a teacher, was completely horrified that she, as a science teacher, was expected to teach her students about sex and sexual organs.

So where do children and adolescents in India turn for information on sex and sexu-

**How much of Dharun's perceptions of homosexuality arose from needing to conform to his family and cultural expectations, compared to what he actually felt?**

ality? Their peers and friends in schools and colleges, who are often equally as clueless as them. Growing up as teenager with same-sex attraction, in the 1990s, in a non-metro town in Tamil Nadu, I believed I was the only boy in the entire universe who was attracted to other boys. I did not know the words "homosexuality" or "gay" or its non-derogatory Tamil equivalents until I got access to the Internet in my early 20s. When my friends talked about girls, I thought there was something terribly wrong with me. I was 28 when I came out to my parents. In India, as a teenager you can never talk about your romance with your parents, even if it was for the opposite sex. Then how could I tell my parents that I was attracted to boys? I didn't.

Following India's economic liberalization policies of the early 1990s, there has been increased media-driven circulation of information and discourse on the subject of homosexuality. Many Indians mistake the increasing visibility of homosexuality for an increase in the prevalence of homosexuality itself, and blame the latter on "Western influence." Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that criminalizes same-sex behavior, failing to distinguish between consensual and non-consensual acts, was introduced by Lord Macaulay during the British era. In July, 2009, the Delhi High Court, in its historic ruling, read down Section 377, thereby decriminalizing adult consensual homosexual behavior in India. The Supreme Court of India is currently hearing appeals of the Delhi High Court's judgment. At the hearings, India's Additional Solicitor General (ASG), P.P. Malhotra, representing the Indian government, told the Supreme Court that he did not know any homosexuals. As if the ASG's

statement were not outrageous enough, the health minister of the world's largest democracy called homosexuality a disease and a Western influence.

I don't know if Ravi Pazhani is homophobic, but he grew up in a country that considers sex a taboo subject and often associates homosexuality with shame. Dharun Ravi, on the other hand, grew up in the U.S., a relatively sexually liberated country.

According to Ian Parker's report in the February 6 New Yorker, Dharun Ravi wrote the following to his friend Jason Tam, about his roommate's sexuality: "I still don't really care, except what my parents are going to say. My dad is going to throw him out the window." Was Dharun Ravi's father indeed homophobic? How much of Dharun Ravi's perceptions of homosexuality arose from needing to conform to his family and cultural expectations, compared to what he actually felt about gay people?

If the father was not homophobic, then why did Dharun assume he was? Was it because, like many other South Asian families, his family ignored topics of sex and sexuality, giving an impression that any sexual act or expression, outside marriage, was an aberration, a condemnable act?

Ravi Pazhani and Dharun Ravi grew up in two different worlds. Sex, sexuality, and the politics around them are completely different in these worlds. This is true for many first-generation Americans: their worlds inside and outside their homes are drastically different. If Ravi Pazhani had acknowledged this difference, and as a parent taken the time to help his son navigate the two worlds, would things have turned out differently? If homosexuality is yet another cultural conflict between Indian-American youth and their parents, what can we do to confront it?

And, back in India, what can we do to make Additional Solicitor General P.P. Malhotra and others of his ilk realize that homosexuality is an intrinsic part of our diverse Indian cultures, and that invisibility and silences do not mean absence?

I have more questions than answers.

*Note: The author hopes to initiate open discussions within the South Asian community on the topics of gender and sexuality. This is not an attempt to pitch Indian conservatism against American openness. An expanded version of this essay was published on Orinam.net, a bilingual website with information on gender and sexuality issues.*



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