

## Prank gone awry stuns Worthington

Resident of 'haunted' house critically wounds teen

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*THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH*

Teens throughout Worthington had heard the stories about the home by the cemetery, hidden in a tangle of trees, bushes and weeds, with trails snaking out from the door and around the house. "It's haunted," some said. "Crazy people live there." And one of the favorites: "They're witches."

Police learned only yesterday of those stories and the youthful dares of teens driving to the house at 141 Sharon Springs Dr.

But none of those tales involved a man with a gun.

Late Tuesday night, the homegrown scary tale turned to real horror. Five thrill-seeking girls set to begin their senior year at Thomas Worthington High School on Friday ran afoul of an armed resident of the home, leaving 17-year-old Rachel Barezinsky critically injured by gunfire, police said.

Allen S. Davis, a 40-year-old man who lives at the house with his mother, said during a jailhouse interview that he was defending his home.

He admitted opening fire from his first-floor bedroom window after hearing the girls outside around 10 p.m. He said he repeatedly fired shots from a .22-caliber rifle.

"Did they threaten me?" he said. "No.

"I didn't know what their weaponry was, what their intentions were," he said. "In a situation like that, you assume the worst-case scenario if you're going to protect your family from a possible home invasion and murder."



Crime scene investigator Gary Wilgus, left, and Worthington Police Sgt. Jim Mosaic take measurements of the car Rachel Barezinsky and her friends were in Tuesday night.



The house Allen S. Davis shares with his mother at 141 Sharon Springs Dr. in Worthington.



Rachel Barezinsky is in critical condition after being shot by Allen S. Davis, right.

Police said the girls were mischievous, but they weren't even close to the house and hadn't harassed Davis or his mother, Sondra, when he opened fire.

"It's just a kid thing," said Worthington Police Lt. J. Douglas Francis. "Unfortunately, this time it had some bad ramifications."

Barezinsky was struck twice, in the upper body and head, police said. She remained in critical condition at Ohio State University Medical Center, where she had surgery yesterday to reduce brain swelling.



JAMES D. DECAMP | DISPATCH  
**Three of the four friends who were in the car with her when she was shot comfort each other at a vigil last night at Thomas Worthington High School.**

The other girls with her, Margaret Hester, Tessa Acker, Rachel Breen and Una Hrnjak, weren't hurt.

Davis, who police said had no criminal record, is charged with five counts of felonious assault. He was being held in the Franklin County jail pending an appearance in Municipal Court this morning.

Last night, several hundred of Barezinsky's friends and family filled the football field of the high school, where they signed posters wishing her well and lighted candles.

Barezinsky's mother, Amy Barezinsky, came directly from the hospital to talk to the crowd.

"She's doing really well for someone who had that kind of trauma," said her mom, who is a nurse. "I'm going to have to get on my knees and pray. Maybe you guys could do that, too."

Doctors have told the family that they are "cautiously optimistic" about Rachel's recovery. She has squeezed her aunt's hand and responded to doctors' requests to wiggle her toes.

"It's just so senseless," said her aunt, Tina Wedebrook, who attended the vigil. "We need to focus our energy on healing Rachel. She is such a fighter, so full of energy."

Some of the girls who were in the car with Barezinsky also attended. Una Hrnjak broke down in tears after talking to the assembled crowd. "This is so hard to do," Hrnjak said. "She's fighting so hard for all of us and for herself."

Lt. Francis gave this account of what happened Tuesday night:

The girls had gone to the Walnut Grove Cemetery for "ghosting," which amounts to teens trying to scare one another. The girls told police that the Davis house, right across the street, is known among local kids as the "spooky house."

"They dare each other to walk into the property," Francis said, saying this week was the first police had heard of the practice because the Davises had never filed a complaint.

Two of the girls stayed in the car while the other three started up the concrete walk to the Davis home. They didn't get far before turning around.

"One of the girls honked the horn to scare them," Francis said.

After they all were back in the car, the girls heard what they thought were firecrackers, but was gunfire instead. They made the mistake of circling the block, Francis said.

Davis said he fired again as they returned.

"To the best of my knowledge, that did the trick," he said. His mother, he said, was asleep upstairs, and he didn't learn he'd hit someone until police arrived later.

Police said no one got out of the car the second time the girls drove past. They discovered that Barezinsky, in the front passenger seat, was shot as they drove off. The panicked girls headed for N. High Street, where they found police.

When Rachel Breen called saying, "Mom, I'm all right but ..." Kathy Breen assumed she had wrecked the car.

"Instead, she said Rachel got shot," said Mrs. Breen, of Worthington. "I thought, 'This can't be. This is Worthington. Those things don't happen here.'"

"All the kids talked about an old lady — a witch — living there," she said. "They're good kids. They didn't ring the doorbell or knock on the window. They had just taken a few steps on the property when they ran back to the car."

Sam Steiner, a friend, called Barezinsky the "typical, upbeat, lots of fun, always-smiling cheerleader-type." Indeed, she's a member of the Cardinals cheerleading squad.

Davis, who said he is a selfemployed writer, said he and his mother had put up with mischief for months. Teens would bang on their windows and doors, shout and cause a ruckus, he said.

"The main goal was to drive these people off and to teach them to stop coming and harassing and trespassing," he said of shooting out of his window.

"I regret that (Barezinsky was shot)," he said. "However, I would ask, why was that teenage girl engaging in delinquent behavior?"

He said he and his mother didn't notify police of the ongoing harassment because of their poor relationship with the city.

Worthington officials have responded repeatedly to complaints about the property over the years, most recently when a picket fence collapsed and neighbors complained of overgrown shrubs. "They did the absolute minimum," said Don Phillips, the city's chief building inspector.

Diana Gilmore and her husband lived next door to the Davises for 18 years, until moving in April.

She said the few times Allen Davis came out to tend to the mass of vegetation growing around the house, "He'd swing that sickle like he was killing it."

Her 33-year-old daughter, Melissa, said that even when she was a teen, she joked with her siblings that the grayhaired Sondra Davis was a witch. The large black caldron Davis used as a planter in the front yard, made the story perfect, she said.

The caldron is still on the property, obscured by brush but visible to anyone who heads up the winding dirt trail that leads to Davis' front door.

One sign on the trail warns, "Enter at your own risk. Falling walnuts." Posted on the front door is another that reads, "Armed response." But the door, along with most of the house, can't be seen from the street.

Sondra Davis remained in her home yesterday but would not comment.

From jail, her son laughed at the legend that had brought five girls to his home.

"Wow, a haunted house, huh?"

"Wow."

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