
THE TRIPWIRE

A Situational Report of events and research on security matters impacting the United States and its citizens today

The Sandy Berfield Story

Pursuer, Predators, and Stalkers all have a level of dangerousness. However, dangerousness is situational. Those who commit violent acts can appear to be not dangerous, and in fact, are not, until the opportunity, conditions, and circumstances are in their favor. The intent always exists, but pursuers and predators are patient. Time is on their side.

Take the situation of Sandy Berfield, who lived in Everett, Massachusetts. Berfield worked at a Bickford's restaurant in Medford, MA. Steve Caruso, an Everett resident, and local handyman patronized the restaurant with pronounced regularity, eating there once or twice virtually every day. He had been hired by the restaurant to do maintenance work and repairs routinely. Beginning in 1996, the Caruso insisted on sitting in Berfield's section; he stayed there for lengthy periods while staring at her. This activity on the part of Caruso made Berfield Nervous. As previously stated, pursuers have patience. Caruso was in no hurry to make a move. He had access to Berfield every day, all day if he desired. Until August of 1998, the interactions between the defendant and Berfield were otherwise unremarkable. The two engaged in what Berfield described as "light conversations," and she characterized their relationship as "sort of friendly." In late August of 1998, Caruso, the pursuer, decided to make his move. Caruso asked Berfield if she wanted to go to a movie with him, and Berfield declined. This declination became the key to Caruso's future actions. Declining his offer was not acceptable. After all, he sat in her section, kept her company, made small talk. He was more than in friend, in his mind. How could she say no? After that, the Caruso continued to insist on sitting in Berfield's section and stare at her continually while smirking. Now we are into what we call "concerning behavior." Caruso's behavior became different. Staring at Berfield and smirking to intimidate. His desire for Berfield's affection had now turned to anger and potentially rage, and he wanted her to know it. Berfield became increasingly uncomfortable in his presence, and she avoided engaging him in conversation. Again, the target recognized the change in behavior, and it caused her to change behavior. Her move angered the pursuer even more. Eventually, at her repeated insistence, the restaurant manager asked the defendant to sit in a different section of the restaurant. The target had now pushed the pursuer away, removing the problem but not the threat.

Eventually, Caruso was denied access to the restaurant and thus preventing him from access to Berfield. At this point, Caruso felt justified and further that he had no alternatives. His only way to have contact and vent his anger was away from the target's work site.

On four separate occasions during the fall of 1998, someone caused severe damage to Berfield's car while it was parked on the street next to her home. In the first two incidents, all four of Berfield's tires were slashed; in the second two, battery acid was poured into her gas tank.

In the September and October incidents, Berfield either video recorded or personally viewed the perpetrator at her vehicle. Due to her knowledge of and history with Caruso, she was confident that it was him she saw by her car. Working with the police, Caruso was ultimately arrested, charged, and convicted of malicious destruction of property.

Caruso was sentenced to 18 months in prison, serving only six, and told to stay away from the restaurant and Berfield. Again, the problem is removed, but the threat still exists.

As we stated earlier, pursuers and predators have patience. They will wait until the conditions and opportunity are right. In this case, Caruso patiently waited until January of 2000, had no contact with Berfield, designed and built a package bomb, and delivered it to Berfield's front door. She never knew what hit her. The package exploded when she attempted to open it, killing her instantly.

In summary, when Caruso was released from prison, the conditions and opportunity became available. The threshold for justification was met and the lack of alternatives allowed it. He had been to prison and it was Berfield's fault. Therefore, the threat to the target re-emerged. Generally, when pursuers and predators feel their actions are justified, they do not fear the consequences. Sadly, only eliminating the opportunity could have saved Sandra Berfield's life. Restraining orders, punishment, and orders from the judge did nothing to deter the pursuer.

Stat of the Day:

- Over half of female and male victims of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner experienced some form of intimate partner violence for the first time before 25 years of age. (CDC, 2010)