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The Record (New Jersey)

SNAKE PLOT ADMITTED BUT DEFENDANT DISCOUNTS DANGER OF RATTLERS

The Record By Betsy August, Record Staff Writer

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A snake trainer who called himself "Cobra King" said in court yesterday that a friend paid him \$30 to put three poisonous snakes in the home of a Wallington woman whom the state says his friend wanted to harm.

But the trainer, ██████████ told Superior Court Judge Charles R. DiGisi that he chose rattlesnakes that were unlikely to bite and participated only because his friend and codefendant in the attempted murder case, former Teaneck firefighter ██████████ pestered him.

"He was very serious about the problems with the girl, and I went along more or less to keep him off my back," ██████████ 58, said as he pleaded guilty of a weapons offense in a plea bargain. "It's not my nature to frighten people" with snakes.

The woman was not injured, but a snake reportedly bit a pet cat.

As a former snake handler, ██████████ said, he knew that the nature of the young, foot-long rattlesnakes made them unlikely attackers.

██████████ a construction worker from Little Ferry, pleaded guilty to an accusation that he illegally possessed weapons, namely the three snakes, for unlawful use against ██████████ and her two cats.

In exchange for ██████████ guilty plea, Assistant Prosecutor ██████████ agreed to recommend that the judge dismiss attempted murder and aggravated assault charges and that ██████████ be sentenced to no more than 364 days in the county jail. The charge normally carries a three- to five-year prison term.

██████████ also gave a sworn statement implicating ██████████, and he has agreed to testify against his friend, whose case is being prepared for a grand jury, ██████████ said.

██████████, 43, faces attempted murder and aggravated assault charges and is free on \$100,000 bail. Authorities said that after his arrest, he moved out of the apartment complex where he and Ms. Goldman lived.

Contacted yesterday, Ms. ██████████, 33, declined to discuss the case.

Authorities said ██████████ and Ms. ██████████ had a longstanding feud in which she complained about noise and he "verbally harassed" her. Their dispute ended with the arrest of ██████████ and ██████████ March 1 on charges of attempted murder.

Ms. ██████████ reportedly found the first snake in the hallway outside her apartment Oct. 7 and called a neighbor to kill it with a cane.

The next one was discovered two days later inside her apartment after her cat's face became bloated from a bite, authorities said. Another neighbor struck that snake with a baseball bat, and her cat's veterinarian later killed it.

The third snake also was found in her apartment, and a police officer she called to the scene killed it with a nightstick.

██████████ attorney, ██████████ of Hackensack, said ██████████ plea will not affect his client's case and that Giovannielli denies any involvement.

In questioning ██████████ yesterday about the alleged scheme, DiGisi asked ██████████ if he knew the snakes were deadly.

"I knew they were poisonous," ██████████ responded. He said he explained to ██████████ "that they were poisonous, and he liked the idea that they were poisonous. " "He wanted something that was venomous. "

But ██████████ said he thought the snakes would hide and that when Ms. ██████████ found them, she would dispose of them.

In an interview with The Record in March, Staten Island Zoo curator ██████████ said a healthy adult bitten by a baby rattlesnake was unlikely to die if he received prompt medical attention.

The state contends that repeated bites could be fatal.

Outside the courtroom, [REDACTED] attorney, **Michael J. Beatrice of Hackensack**, said his client had thwarted a potentially serious injury.

[REDACTED] was well-known in North Jersey during the 1950's and 1960's for training and performing with poisonous snakes, taking the stage name "Cobra King. " In the late 1970's, he served a six-month federal prison term for illegally importing reptiles. He gave up performing several years ago after a nearly fatal bite from an Indian cobra.

[REDACTED] who is free on bail, also faces civil fines from the state Division of Fish, Game, and Wildlife for possessing rattlesnakes without a permit.

Photo [REDACTED] in a photo taken about 1980.

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