

Teacher Is Arrested in Internet Child Pornography Case

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A 31-year-old kindergarten teacher in Brooklyn was arrested on child pornography and sexual assault charges after going to a New Jersey motel on Friday morning for what he thought would be a sexual rendezvous with an 11-year-old boy, Federal officials said yesterday.

Instead, the teacher, Lawrence J. Cohen, of Manalapan, N.J., encountered an undercover detective from the New Jersey State Police and was arrested after a five-week investigation into use of the Internet to peddle child pornography and arrange sexual liaisons with youths.

A Federal magistrate in Newark, Dennis M. Cavanaugh, ordered Mr. Cohen held without bail yesterday, and New York City's Board of Education dismissed him from his teaching position at Public School 307 in Fort Greene, Brooklyn.

A board spokeswoman, Karen Crowe, said Mr. Cohen was a nontenured teacher and so the board's Division of Human Resources had the authority to dismiss him outright without formally bringing disciplinary charges against him or providing him a hearing to challenge them.

She said Mr. Cohen had taught kindergarten at P.S. 307 since September 1995. Before that, she said, he had taught from September 1992 to June 1994 at Junior High School 303, which serves Coney Island, Brighton Beach and Bensonhurst in Brooklyn. It was not immediately known how Mr. Cohen spent the 1994-95 academic year, Ms. Crowe said.

Law enforcement officials said Mr. Cohen is single, lives with his parents and had no prior criminal record.

The city's school system was closed yesterday, and Ms. Crowe said records about Mr. Cohen's teaching performance at the two schools were not available. She said the authorities at central board offices had no record of any complaints against him by parents in Brooklyn.

She said the dismissal was based on the Federal and state charges against Mr. Cohen. The United States Attorney in New Jersey, Faith S. Hochberg, has charged him with illegal interstate transmission, via computer, of photographic images of naked young boys engaged in sexual acts, some while in bondage. And the Monmouth County Prosecutor, John Kaye, has filed state charges of conspiracy to commit aggravated sexual assault and attempted aggravated sexual assault.

During yesterday's court hearing, Mr. Cohen's lawyer, Lawrence S. Grossman, entered a plea of not guilty and told Magistrate Cavanaugh that his client was under private psychiatric care. In addition, he said, a psychologist examined Mr. Cohen in the Monmouth County Jail over the weekend and determined that he suffered from "multiple personality disorder."

Mr. Grossman said Mr. Cohen believes he has four separate identities -- his own and those of three teen-age boys.

During yesterday's hearing, an assistant United States attorney, Donna A. Krappa, argued against the release of Mr. Cohen. "We believe he's a danger to the community, based on

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his job," Ms. Krappa said.

Federal officials said that Mr. Cohen's arrest stemmed from a Federal campaign against using computers to transmit child pornography across state lines. A complaint filed by a Federal Customs agent, Philip Padlo, said the case against Mr. Cohen began on Feb. 17 when Mr. Cohen, using the computer name "Coryc," first exchanged E-mail with a person with the pseudonym, "Arizona Boy Lover," on an Internet chat room called "#%%boysex&Pics."

In reality, Federal officials said, Arizona Boy Lover has worked as an informer for the Customs Service since November 1995. The informer's previous tips have helped the Customs Service bring computer-related pornography charges against people in Phoenix, Boston and Baltimore and in Alabama, Federal officials said. They refused to provide any information about the informer.

The complaint said that on Feb. 17 and 18 and again on March 20, Mr. Cohen sent the informer at least 20 photographic images of boys in sexual poses and engaged in sexual acts. In addition, Mr. Cohen provided the informer his home phone number, the complaint said.

During the exchange of E-mail messages on Feb. 17 and 18, the informer told Mr. Cohen that he had an 11-year-old stepson named Branden and that Mr. Cohen suggested some sex acts he could engage in with Branden, the complaint said.

On Feb. 28, the informer relayed the information to the Customs Service and a New Jersey State Police detective was called into the investigation, officials said. On March 17, the detective, identifying himself as Arizona Boy Lover, called Mr. Cohen's number and spoke to a Larry, who asked if Branden could be taken to a New Jersey motel for a sexual liaison on the weekend of March 29 or the week of April 21, the complaint said.

The authorities selected a motel in Wall Township, in central New Jersey, for the liaison, officials said. When Mr. Cohen arrived there about 9 A.M. Friday, he was carrying two gym bags. Items in the bag included a stuffed dog, dog leashes and leather restraints, Ms. Krappa, the assistant United States attorney said.

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