

Ex-teacher cleared in Putnam Valley sex case

After a 12-year-old student accused teacher Dennis Tave of drugging her and then violating her while she was passed out on a classroom floor, it cost him his career and reputation.

But in little more than an hour, a federal civil jury removed that cloud from over the former Putnam Valley Middle School educator's head.

By a unanimous 8-0 verdict in the lawsuit filed by Laura Bliss, they cleared the 65-year-old Mahopac man of sexually assaulting Bliss in 2001, when she was a seventh-grader.

"It's been such a traumatic experience for eight years," Tave said Monday during a brief interview. "I'm just glad it's over."

Laura Bliss' father, Peter Bliss, set up a website to detail the case and track the progress of various investigations into the allegations.

He said in a statement the family appreciated the backing they had received since 2003, when his daughter first made the allegations about the alleged 2001 incident.

"The Bliss family would like to thank all who

have supported our efforts over the years to seek justice for our daughter," Peter Bliss said in the statement. "We are certainly disappointed in the verdict in federal court but are grateful that we were finally able to have our case heard and presented after so many years."

The same jury that decided the case in favor of Tave also exonerated the school district and middle school Principal Edward Hallisey, who were also defendants in the \$17 million federal civil rights lawsuit.

The jury reached its verdict Friday afternoon following a weeklong trial before U.S. District Judge Warren Eginton in White Plains.

Tave's lawyer, Stephen Santoro, said the speed of verdict indicated the jury completely rejected Laura Bliss' allegations.

"I don't think anybody bought the story whatsoever," Santoro said. "Dennis Tave is relieved. But it can never repair the damage that was done to his reputation."

Advertisement



**Protect Your Home
with ADT!**

**Click Here
to Learn More!**

ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER

The advertisement features a dark background with a silhouette of a person looking out a window. The text is in white and yellow. The ADT logo is in the bottom left corner, and the 'Click Here to Learn More!' text is in the bottom right corner.

Laura Bliss accused Tave of the assault in May 2003, when she told her parents and her therapist about the alleged attack that she said took place in January or February 2001. She said that Tave continued to make sexual advances toward her until 2003. Her parents took her to the Putnam County Sheriff's Department in Carmel, where she filed a complaint.

The sheriff's office contacted the district as did Tave when police questioned him about the allegations.

Tave, a social studies teacher who had been teaching for 35 years, was told to stay away from the school. He retired in 2003.

The sheriff's office conducted an investigation, but no criminal charges were filed. The case was closed in July 2003 "pending leads," police documents show.

In 2008, the state Commission of Investigation issued a report critical of the sheriff's office and the Putnam County District Attorney's office for their handling of the investigation, saying the lead investigator wasn't qualified and the District Attorney's Office wasn't aggressive enough.

That same year, the state Department of Education suspended Tave's teaching license, finding he had shown a "serious lack of judgment" and "poor impulse control" on several occasions. But the department said there was not enough evidence to determine he had assaulted Bliss.

Bliss filed the federal lawsuit in December 2006.

Laura Bliss said she remembered feeling dizzy after Tave gave her something to drink in the classroom and that she saw him unbuckling his belt as she passed out. She awoke 30 minutes later on the floor, her pants and underwear pulled down, and evidence of sexual activity on her underwear, she said.

The head of the Putnam Valley Federation of Teachers said Tave's colleagues stood behind him as soon as the allegations were lodged.

"Our federation of teachers were shocked and knew they could not be true," said Gerry Carlin, the president of the teachers union.

Tave's lawyer, Santoro, said Bliss' story was fabricated. Another former student, Jackie McMahon, testified at the trial that a month before accusing Tave, Bliss told her a similar story about being drugged at a

Advertisement



**Protect Your Home
with ADT!**

**Click Here
to Learn More!**

ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER

The advertisement features a dark background with a silhouette of a person in the foreground. In the background, there is a door with a mail slot and a light switch. The ADT logo and the text 'ADT AUTHORIZED DEALER' are in the bottom left corner. The main headline is in a large, bold, serif font, and the call to action is in a bold, sans-serif font.


party. But she said it was by a male student.

"I don't doubt that something happened to this girl," Santoro said Monday. "I just know Dennis Tave had nothing to do with it."

With the case over, the Bliss family said it was looking forward to "putting this chapter of our lives behind us as we look to a future of great promise for our daughter and our family."

As for Tave, his supporters said they know the last decade can't be undone.

"He will never get the last 10 years of his life back," Carlin said. "But he can now move forward with everyone knowing he was completely innocent of these fraudulent charges."

AdChoices


Ads by Pulse 360

New York: Dermatologists Hate Her

Local Mom Exposes an Anti-Aging Miracle. Her \$5 Trick ERASES Wrinkles!
ConsumerProductsDigest.com

carter's black friday event!

50% off entire site and store. Save now!
www.carters.com

Problem Sleeping?

Find out how to take control of your insomnia
www.consumercompass.com

Advertisement



**Protect Your Home
with ADT!**

 **Click Here
to Learn More!**