# Darlene VanderGiesen

## July 23, 1963 – February 1, 2006



It was with great sadness that family, deaf community members, and friends learned of Darlene VanderGiesen's tragic death.

VanderGiesen was murdered in Sioux Falls on February 1, 2006. She was 42 years old, was a beloved daughter and granddaughter, wonderful sister and sister-in-law and a kind friend.

Those of us who knew VanderGiesen all shared the grief of her death. She was the daughter of Gene and Dee VanderGiesen of Rock Valley, Iowa. She was born on July 23, 1963 at Osborne, Kansas. She lived with her family on a farm near Dispatch, KS before moving with them to Rock Valley. She was born on July 23, 1963 at Osborne, Kansas. She lived with her family on a farm near Dispatch, KS before moving with them to Rock Valley. VanderGiesen attended school at Hope Haven (Iowa) and Rock Valley Public School. She attended high school at the Iowa School for the Deaf in Council Bluffs and received her diploma in 1983.

VanderGiesen received vocational training at a community college in Council Bluffs. She then worked in Council Bluffs before moving to Sioux Falls. At the time of untimely death she worked at J.D. House of Trophies where she worked for 13 years. She was a dedicated employee and loved her work.

VanderGiesen was a member of Community Reformed Church. She was also a member of the South Dakota Association of the Deaf (SDAD), the Sioux Falls Association of the Deaf (SFAD) ever since she moved to Sioux Falls. She was a member of the SFAD women's softball team for a number of years. She loved to collect Beanie Babies, go camping and play cards. She cherished her dear cats.

VanderGiesen's deaf sister, Sandra Sidford and her husband, Jeff (also deaf) live in Sioux Falls.

Funeral services for VanderGiesen were held on Saturday, February 25, 2006 at the First Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Falls. She was laid to rest at the Valley View Cemetery in Rock Valley, Iowa.

VanderGiesen family requested that memorials be directed to the SDAD and Hope Haven.



NOTE:

The trial in South Dakota of a deaf, black lesbian accused of murdering a rival and dismembering her with a chainsaw has shocked the rural Midwestern US state.

Daphne Wright, 43, was accused of kidnapping and murdering a heterosexual deaf woman, Darlene VanderGiesen, 42, whom she thought was spending too much time with her girlfriend.

Daphne had been sentenced to live in prison without parole, after a jury decided to spare her life. She smiled after the verdict was read Wednesday, April 18 or 19, 2007.

Prosecutors said that Wright was jealous of the friendship VanderGiesen had with Wright's former lover and that it turned to rage that drove Wright to kidnap VanderGiesen, kill her, burn the body and cut it apart with a chain saw. VanderGiesen's remains were found in a Sioux Falls landfill and a Minnesota ditch.

In closing arguments earlier in the day, prosecutor Dave Nelson said Wright, who like VanderGiesen is deaf, deserved to die by lethal injection because the mutilation was the act of a depraved mind. But he said he respected the jury's verdict. "I think they reached this decision independently of any of the diversion of race, of deafness or anything else. I think they decided this case on the evidence," he said.

Wright's public defender, Jeff Larson, argued that she burned and cut the body as an afterthought and that the slaying was an isolated act motivated by jealousy.

Nelson told jurors their verdict would be just if they treated both women equally. VanderGiesen was white and heterosexual; Wright is a black lesbian.

After about eight hours of deliberation, jurors found that Wright had the depravity of mind, but they decided that she should not be executed for it.

The jury forewoman read the verdict, not the judge. It means Wright will spend the rest of her life at the women's prison in Pierre.

It was South Dakota's first capital punishment case with a female defendant.

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