



**The Facebook Conundrum:
The New Haven *Independent* and the Annie Le Murder
Epilogue**

Managing Editor Melissa Bailey and Editor Paul Bass had a decision to make. Bailey had just put up a story on the New Haven *Independent's* website about the police report ex-girlfriend Jessica Del Rocco had filed when she was in high school with alleged murderer Raymond Clark. Now, on the afternoon of Wednesday, September 16, 2009, Bailey was itching to update the story with news of Del Rocco's Facebook posts, but she and Bass wanted to make sure it would be ethical to do so.

Bailey was reluctant to ask Del Rocco for her permission, because the answer would likely be no. "We make those decisions a lot of time," says Bailey. "For example, when you're dealing with city officials, if you ask to sit in on a meeting, they'll be like, 'No, you can't,' but if you just come in, then you can sit in."¹

After a brief discussion, Bailey and Bass decided they could ethically use Del Rocco's Facebook posts. The headline of Bailey's updated article, which went up just after 2 p.m., was, "Ex-Girlfriend 'Shocked' About Annie Le Target." It began: "When she found out her ex-boyfriend was a suspect in the murder of Annie Le, a young Branford woman flashed back to a high school dispute that led to a visit from the cops."²

"We felt like we were justified in publishing it because was newsworthy about this huge case," says Bailey, "and because we were not going to use her name, and because we felt confident she would not be identified by others." They believed Del Rocco was sufficiently protected. "We

¹ Author's interview with Melissa Bailey in New Haven, CT, on December 8, 2009. All further quotes from Bailey, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

² Marcia Chambers and Melissa Bailey, "Ex-Girlfriend 'Shocked' About Annie Le Target," *New Haven Independent*, September 16, 2009, http://www.newhavenindependent.org/archives/2009/09/alleged_annie_1.php.

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were not going to put in identifying information about her,” Bass says. “We left out a lot of things about her. We didn’t want people to find her.”³

But Bass says he cannot be sure they made the right decision. “There’s not necessarily a right answer,” he says. “I’m not sure we were right. I’m comfortable that we did our best to make a good decision.”

The news about Del Rocco’s Facebook comment strengthened the story about the police report, which turned out to be another attention-grabbing scoop for the *Independent*. In a piece for *Slate*, Bailey described the story’s impact.

Our story hit the front page of the *New York Post*, which used huge block letters and a picture of Clark as the devil to trumpet the “sex shocker.” Because no one else had the police report, other news outlets turned to us. We never gave out the report, or the ex-girlfriend’s name. We got calls from Larry King Live and Geraldo. And the high school incident became a key link in a national probe into Clark’s character. Pundits psychoanalyzed him as a “control freak” who needed to be in control with women to overcome deep insecurities.⁴

Another result of the story: Del Rocco “de-friended” Bailey.

³ Author’s interview with Paul Bass in New Haven, CT, on December 8, 2009. All further quotes from Bass, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

⁴ Melissa Bailey, “The Girlfriends of Raymond Clark,” *Slate*, September 23, 2009, <http://www.doublex.com/section/news-politics/girlfriends-raymond-clark?page=0,1>.