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Ten-year-old faces being tried as adult on murder charges

STROUDSBURG, Pa. (AP) — The defendant wriggled in his chair, hating his elbows onto the armrests. He crossed his arms when he stood before the judge, who called him Mr. Kocher and told him he had been charged with shooting a 7-year-old girl in the back with a hunting rifle.

Cameron Kocher pleaded innocent, moving closer to becoming apparently the youngest person ever in the country to be tried on an adult homicide charge.

He is 10 years old.

The boy let out a heavy sigh as he turned to his parents, Keith and Patricia Kocher, after his arraignment Friday.

Prosecutors have ruled out the death penalty if the fourth-grader is convicted. Mark Pazuhlich, a Monroe County assistant district attorney, said life in prison remains a possibility, although he hasn't decided yet what punishment he would seek. No trial date has been set.

Cameron's lawyer said prosecutors, who fought a request to move the case to juvenile court, should realize they are not dealing with "a miniature adult."

"He doesn't understand the concept of murder and doesn't fully understand the concept of death," Charles Hansford said after the arraignment.

Cameron is charged with killing a playmate, first-grader Jessica Carr. She died March 6, two months before Cameron's 10th birthday, after she was shot as she rode on the back of a snowmobile.

Schools were closed that day because of heavy snow. Cameron, a 13-year-old Shannon Ratti, and other children were spending the day playing video games at Cameron's house in Kresgeville, a small town in the foothills of thecono Mountains.

After Shannon's father, Ratti, found dirty dishes in the house, he put the video games away, and the children went to bed. Cameron had told him not to ride snowmobiles when they were around, and he angrily went home next door, Ratti testified.

The boy said the shooting accident while he was playing with a gun. But investigators gave the count of what happened next, including off a list of deliberate steps the judge cited in his decision to have the boy tried as an adult.

Cameron took a key from a lamp in his parents' bedroom, opened his father's gun cabinet, took out a .35-caliber Marlin lever-action hunting rifle his father had given him to shoot, and loaded it.




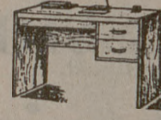

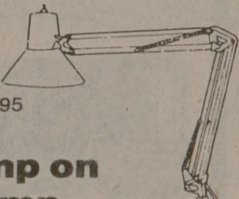



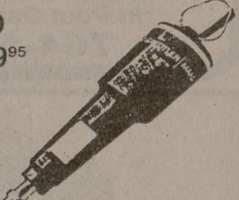


After unlocking a bedroom window and opening it, Cameron pointed the rifle out the window, investigators said.

At 1:05 p.m. a shot rang out from the back of the snowmobile. Shannon was driving.

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Woman resumes study of piano after 70 years

ASSOCIATED PRESS

After her high school graduation in 1918, Edith Levy stopped taking piano lessons.

But when she started a part-time job as a receptionist at Chicago's Sherwood Conservatory of Music two years ago, she got the idea to resume piano study — nearly 70 years later.

"The piano had always been an important part of my life, and there I was in an environment where people were playing the music I'd always loved most — classical music," Levy, now 87, says.

Having completed a group piano class and begun biweekly private lessons, her current project is a complex piece by Bach.

"As my granddaughter puts it, I've never been the kind of grandmother who just sits at home and knits," she says. "I enjoy being active, and playing the piano gives me that opportunity."

One of Levy's fellow students at the conservatory is 67-year-old Weldon Hall, who began piano study while in his 50s.

Now that he's retired, Hall spends more time than ever practicing the piano — about 90 minutes each day.

"I never could have found much time to practice while I was working," he says. "Now I have a real sense of accomplishment because I've mastered some very difficult pieces — and I've overcome shyness about playing in front of other people."

Brenda Dillon, a Dallas-based piano teacher who teaches older adults, believes self-confidence is the most important factor in determining whether or not they succeed at piano study.

"There's a myth that older people have lesser abilities to memorize, perform, and that's just what it is," she insists.

"The only handicap I see in older piano students is that sometimes they start believing the myth themselves."

Dillon reminds her older students that whatever physical difficulties they may have, technical problems can be found in piano students of all ages, "and with older people, their great enthusiasm and self-discipline more than makes up for physical challenges they may have."

At the Sherwood conservatory, piano teacher Harry Davidson counts Hall and Levy among a dozen students over age 65.

Groups take steps to stop banning books in U.S.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

This week more than 40 million public school children and 13 million college students begin returning to their classrooms. But in many of these halls of learning, the shadow of censorship hangs over that source of light and knowledge, the library.

Freedom of speech and the press, to write and to read whatever you like, remains protected in America. But those freedoms are frequently challenged. Public and school librarians often feel under seige.

Books as seemingly harmless as Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn" and L. Frank Baum's "The Wizard of Oz" have been challenged. And some of the most-frequent targets are John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men," Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughterhouse Five" and J.D. Salinger's "Catcher in the Rye."

But, as the school board in Eliot, Maine, said in rejecting a parental request to ban Judy Blume's novel "Forever" as pornographic: "... while you have the right to censor material for your child, we do not believe you have that right for other children in the system."

It's estimated that since Gutenberg invented the printing press some 25 million individual books have been written and published, almost a third in the English language. Worldwide there are another 350,000 titles published every year, at least 50,000 in the United States.

To house and protect this multiplicity of ideas, the U.S. supports more than 115,000 libraries of all kinds.

Judith Krug, who writes and edits the American Library Association Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, chronicles those individuals and groups "who attempt to restrict those materials from public availability and accessibility..."

"This is a constitutional republic, not work unless the electorate is enlightened. We are a nation of governors, but in order to make appropriate decisions we need to have information available and accessible."





In three weeks, authors and librarians will visit bookstores and libraries across the country to read publicly excerpts from banned books they did when Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses" raised a furor.

In Los Angeles, for instance, the Center West, an author's group, held a gathering in Malibu to read readings of banned books by authors and celebrities. Among the participants were Steve Allen, Alice Walker, Martin Sheen, Ray Bradbury, Bill Lange, Alvin Toffler, Larry Sanders and Billy Crystal.

In the 1986-87 academic year, People for the American Way reported there were 153 attempts to remove books from public school libraries in 41 states, 37 percent of them successful.

In the year ended May 1988, the American Library Association reports that more than 100 books were brought up on charges, including Jim Davis' "Garfield: His Lives."

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