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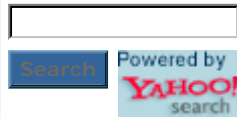
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Letourneau released from prison

Teacher's ex-lover 'can't wait to see her'

Wednesday, August 4, 2004 Posted: 9:17 AM EDT (1317 GMT)

GIG HARBOR, Washington (AP) - Mary Kay Letourneau, the grade school teacher convicted in 1997 for having sex with a sixth-grade pupil, was released from prison early Wednesday, and her now 21-year-old former lover plans to challenge a court order that bars her from contacting him, a friend said.



Mary Kay Letourneau

"He's relieved that she's out of prison and currently he can't wait to see her," Noel Soriano told NBC's "Today" show.

Letourneau, who served 7 1/2 years in prison, slipped unnoticed past the hordes of reporters and gawkers outside the Washington Corrections Center for Women before dawn.

As a condition of her release, Letourneau, 42, cannot contact former pupil Vili Fualaau, the father of two of her children.

Soriano told NBC that Fualaau plans to ask a judge to dissolve that no-contact order later Wednesday.

Letourneau, who sang in the choir and recorded books-on-tape for the blind while in prison, wants to try to build a normal life, said Seattle attorney Anne Bremner, who struck up a friendship with Letourneau in 2002 and spoke to her recently by phone.

"She wants to be a mother," he said. "She wants to be a responsible member of society."

As a sex offender, Letourneau will have to register with the state and receive court-ordered treatment. Authorities will notify her new neighbors -- although the TV trucks will probably tip them off first. More than seven years in prison has

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done little to dim Letourneau's notoriety.

A small crowd gathered outside the prison gates on Tuesday night -- a few families and some rowdy teenage boys flaunting signs that said "I'm 18, Baby" and "Take Me Home" for the TV cameras.

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Letourneau was a 34-year-old elementary school teacher in suburban Seattle and a married mother of four in 1996 when her friendship with the then-12-year-old Fualaau mutated into flirtation and then sex.

"We had sex in the gym, we had sex in the girl's bathroom and we had sex in her classroom," Fualaau testified in a 2002 civil trial.

The illicit relationship was revealed when Letourneau's husband, Steve, found love letters from the boy. Steve Letourneau later moved to Alaska with the couple's children and was granted a divorce.

When Letourneau was arrested in 1997, she was already pregnant with Fualaau's daughter. A judge sentenced her to six months in jail for second-degree child rape, and ordered her to stay away from Fualaau.

But the temptation proved too much for her to resist. A month after Letourneau was released, she was caught having sex with Fualaau in her car, a violation of her parole. She was sent to prison for seven and a half years, and gave birth to Fualaau's second daughter behind bars.

"This case is not about a flawed system. This is about an opportunity that you foolishly squandered," King County Superior Court Judge Linda Lau told Letourneau at her sentencing, referring to the lenient terms she had earlier imposed.

Letourneau's two daughters with Fualaau are now 5 and 7. They visited her in prison about twice a month. Her four older children visited a few times a year.

Letourneau may now want to tell her own story. A state appeals court ruled in 2000 that she may sell and profit from her story. She has also expressed interest in working for a group that advocates for the rights of mothers in prison.

As for trying to reconnect with Fualaau, Letourneau was mum.

"I'm not allowing myself to think about being with him," Letourneau told Seattle's KOMO-TV earlier this week. "We had a beautiful relationship, and I value it for what it was."

Attempts by The Associated Press to reach Letourneau or her lawyers were unsuccessful.

Fualaau told People magazine recently that he'd like to reunite with Letourneau, but wants to take things slowly. He is unemployed and told the magazine he is working on his GED. His mother is raising their children. Fualaau's phone number is unlisted.

"I don't know what my feelings are right now," Fualaau told KING-TV on Tuesday, acknowledging he was "kind of nervous."

"But I know that I do love her," he said.

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