

# Picture of Forks Township woman's attack posted to Facebook by friends, family

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By **Kathryn Brenzel** | **The Express-Times**



Posted on the Facebook walls of friends and family members is a picture of Megan Rost in the hospital, her right eye battered and the surrounding bones broken.

The picture, initially posted on Facebook by Rost's mother, is spreading among a small, but gradually growing, circle of friends, accompanied by messages of support, and in some cases outrage.

"To be able to do this to a human being, it just burns me up," said Kathy Shivers, a longtime friend of Rost's mother, Robin Rost Ruschak.

Shivers and others who have shared the photo aim to bring attention to the attack Rost alleges her boyfriend, **Joseph Doran, launched on her Sunday.**

"Nobody should be able to walk away from what's happened to her," Shivers said.

## Bail reduced

Doran, 32, of the first block of Harmony Terrace, is accused of chasing Rost with a rifle and punching her in the face, leaving her with a fractured nose, a cut below her left eye and a fractured orbital -- the bones surrounding her eye -- according to court documents. He was arrested on charges of aggravated assault and terroristic threats Sunday.

Though initially held on \$30,000 bail, **a New Jersey Superior Court judge lowered the bail Friday** to 10 percent of \$40,000. During the bail reduction hearing, Defense Attorney John McGuigan argued that bail is customarily set between 10 percent of \$45,000 and \$100,000 for the harshest of Doran's charges, second-degree aggravated assault.

Doran's military service in Iraq, and his subsequent post-traumatic stress treatment, became a central part of the hearing. Judge Ann R. Bartlett ordered that Doran resume treatment within 10 days of his release and barred him from contact with the victim and the victim's family. Doran, appearing in a grey jumpsuit, remained silent throughout the proceeding.

Calls to the Alpha home listed for him and family members were not returned.

## **Waking up to a nightmare**

Rost, 30, of Forks Township, said she doesn't know if Doran hit her with his fists or the end of the rifle. She said she woke up Saturday in a nightmarish confusion: Doran was yelling at her, and cutting himself over the kitchen sink, she alleges. He then began choking her, causing her to pass out, she said.

Rost woke up Tuesday in the trauma center in St. Luke's Warren Hospital, with a face she didn't immediately recognize as her own.

"I didn't think that Joey would ever hurt me," she said.

But the fact that she needs reconstructive surgery makes for a sobering reality, she said.

"When I look in the mirror and my face is crooked, it just makes it real," she said.

## **Going viral**

Friends, family and acquaintances have digitally rallied their support, but Rost said the incident has drawn attention from strangers as well.

She said she's received hundreds of Facebook messages from women she doesn't know, providing support and sharing stories of domestic violence.

Though divulging information over the Internet has become borderline instinctual for many, when it comes to domestic violence, silence is the de facto social reflex, according to those familiar with similar incidents.

"Families, more often than not, try to keep it as a family issue," said John Toner, director of development at Turning Point of Lehigh Valley, a nonprofit agency that supports and helps domestic violence victims.

Though Turning Point employs social media tools to raise awareness about an issue often muted by misunderstanding and sometimes misplaced blame, Toner said it's very rare for a victim to be on the forefront of spreading personal experience.

"It's very brave and very unusual for someone to go viral with this," he said.

The hope is that Rost's photo -- as it is swapped beyond walls of friends and friends of friends -- will encourage others to free themselves from abusive relationships.

"I am not a negative person, however, you can't find much good in that picture," said Katherine Janecko Matlock, of Greenwich Township. Matlock is a friend of Rost's mother and said she only recently reconnected with Ruschak. She said was shocked to see Rost's battered face staring up from the computer screen.

"The only good that may come is sharing it so some other girl doesn't end up dead," she said. "So I guess that's why I posted it, to save Megan from going back and perhaps saving someone else before that happens to them, or worse."

## **Stricter laws**

The aftermath of domestic violence takes both a physical and mental toll, and it can often lead to victims blaming themselves, Toner said.

"Unfortunately, in a lot of cases, people feel like they've done something to warrant it, when that's not the case," he said.

Ruschak said she hopes her daughter's case casts light on the issue.

"It tears you apart. I think the law should be stricter," she said. "Beating up women, most of the time, it's a slap on the wrist."

Rost gave permission to The Express-Times to publish her picture as an extension of social network efforts and as a cautionary message to others.

On the other side of an attack that could have left her 7-year-old son motherless, Rost said she is seeking counseling and is working to end what she has identified as an abusive cycle.

"This isn't the first time I've been beaten, so this has to end," she said. "I need to end the cycle now. It's not OK for people to hurt me."