

## Teen dies after fall off abutment

Danville park where girl fell was scene of 2 past incidents

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DANVILLE, Ind. -- A beautiful, summerlike afternoon turned tragic Sunday when a 14-year-old girl fell about 30 feet to her death, the latest victim at a site that has proved dangerous before.

Laura Elizabeth Rudie, of Danville, died of massive head and neck injuries after she fell from the concrete skeleton of an old interurban bridge just east of the Ellis Park playground beside White Lick Creek.



Laura  
Elizabeth  
Rudie

But she was not the first to fall from the towering concrete abutment, and at least one previous victim said her efforts to have safeguards put up at the scene went unheeded.

In July 1997, Aja Rossman fell from the same spot. Then 18, she broke her pelvis, femur and ankle. She suffered severe facial fractures, compound breaks that left her with chronic bone infections, probably from the water that got into the open fractures.

"It's not safe," Rossman, now 25, said when she learned of Laura's fatal fall. "We tried to get them to close it or put up a sign, but that never happened. It's a shame that they haven't taken any initiative to keep kids from there. It's a public park, and there are trails leading up there."

At about 3 p.m., Laura was hiking with two boys on those trails in the park when the three climbed up on the old bridge -- a common hangout for young teens.

Danville Police Detective Bill Wright said Laura was lowering herself down to a ledge on the concrete structure when she slipped and fell head first onto the large boulders below.

When police arrived, Wright said, Laura wasn't breathing. Though emergency officials revived her for a short time, she died at the scene.

"I took her shoes and purse to her parents, and as you can understand, they couldn't even talk," Wright said about three hours after the incident.

A freshman on the honor roll at Danville High School, Laura played the clarinet and piano, sang in the choir and was a member of the swim team. Her parents are Nevin and Jan Rudie. She has one sister, Melissa.

She also volunteered at Hendricks Regional Health hospital in Danville, where she shadowed a nurse. Laura had hoped to go into nursing.

Onlookers at the park Sunday said they always would remember Laura's bright red hair and freckled face.

Wright said a boy fell from that same location two years ago and broke his arm.

For Rossman, the memories continue to haunt her.

"I'm healed now, but it's an ongoing deal," she said, noting that treatment for the multiple injuries led to a fortune in medical bills. She had to learn how to walk again after the injuries.

Rossman has been studying at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis and Methodist Hospital to become a traumatic-pain counselor, a subject with which she's been intimately familiar since her fall nearly seven years ago.

Arrangements for Laura are pending at Weaver Funeral Home in Danville.

**Call Star reporter Josh Duke at (317) 444-2810.**