



ASTRONAUT UPDATE

"Her children seem to be doing fine and she's coping the best she can," a friend says of Nowak (in court with her lawyers Aug. 24).

A PUBLIC APOLOGY

Face-to-face for the first time since their parking lot confrontation, ex-astronaut Lisa Nowak says "how very sorry I am" for frightening her romantic rival Colleen Shipman

They arrived separately, surrounded by lawyers. They waited for the hearing to start in separate, side-by-side rooms. In court they sat 10 feet apart but never acknowledged each other. And when former astronaut Lisa Nowak finally addressed Colleen Shipman for the first time since confronting her in an airport parking lot on Feb. 5, Shipman was already gone. "The past six months have been very difficult for me," Nowak, 44, said after an Aug. 24 hearing in



Colleen Shipman (testifying Aug. 24).

Orange County, Fla.—her first public statement since her arrest in the notorious NASA love triangle case. "I know that it must have been very hard for Colleen Shipman, and I would like her to know how very sorry I am about having frightened her in any way."

As Nowak prepares for her Sept. 24 trial, she knows that some people are supportive and forgiving, and some—like Shipman—are not. Facing a possible life sentence if found guilty of burglary with assault and attempted kidnapping, Nowak appeared calm

and composed at the Aug. 24 hearing, and not at all like the disheveled woman in her mug shot—who, the defense now claims, was temporarily insane. Nowak's lawyers revealed they will rely on an insanity defense, arguing that an obsessive-compulsive disorder, severe insomnia and deep depression—on top of the stress of her crumbling marriage—caused Nowak's airport meltdown.

Shipman, for one, isn't convinced that Nowak is now harmless. The Air Force captain who Nowak perceived as a rival for the affections of former astronaut Bill Oefelein, 42, Shipman, 30, made it clear at the hearing that she still fears Nowak. "Absolutely not," Shipman testified when asked if she would consent to the removal of Nowak's electronic ankle monitor, which she must wear as a condition



Bill Oefelein (in '06).

of her bail (Nowak's lawyer argued that it's embarrassing and makes it hard for her to exercise). "When I'm home alone and there is no one there with me," said Shipman, "it is a comfort."

What matters, though, is what the jury believes. Will

jurors see Nowak as a former NASA standout who snapped? Or will they take a harsher view of what happened in that parking lot, where Nowak allegedly confronted Shipman after driving more than 900 miles with a knife, BB gun and diapers in her car? Certainly Nowak has seemed to get a grip on her life in the last few months. Separated from her husband, Richard, 44, a flight controller for the International Space Station, since January, she lives in the home they once shared in Clear Lake, an upscale Houston suburb. NASA relieved her



"I look forward to resolution and closure for everyone," Nowak said after her Aug. 24 hearing.

of her duties in March, and she has been assigned by the U.S. Navy to develop training programs for young aviators at the Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi, Texas, a four-hour drive from Clear Lake. She spends weekdays in Corpus Christi before heading home for the weekend to be with her three children—twins Katrina and Alyssa, 5, and son Alexander, 15. (Their father cares for them during the week in a house he rents nearby.)

The arrangement “is working out okay,” says Nowak’s family priest, Fr. Dominic Pistone Jr. “Lisa regularly comes to Mass with her children, which is good because it means she is getting out. When she first came back, she was warmly welcomed. A lot of people are praying for her.” Even her new coworkers “welcomed me with open arms and genuine enthusiasm,” Nowak said on Aug. 24. “They told me, ‘You’re on our team now.’”

Shipman, too, has tried to get back to normal. She

“It would have been very easy for me to . . . retreat into a world of personal sorrow” —LISA NOWAK



is still an engineer at an Air Force base near the Kennedy Space Center, and she is still involved with Oefelein, regularly visiting him in suburban Houston. And while Oefelein lives close to Nowak, Shipman testified that with “my boyfriend . . . I do feel protected.”

The two women will not likely cross paths again before the trial. Until then, the court will weigh the request by Nowak’s lawyers to remove her ankle monitor—as well as to dismiss certain evidence because Nowak was too confused at the time of the arrest to exercise her right to a lawyer. And Nowak herself will prepare to finally tell her side of the story. “She is just going to be honest,” says Fr. Pistone. “I just hope people realize Lisa is a good woman with a tremendous heart.”

By Alex Tresnoiwski.

Reported by Jeff

Truesdell in Orlando and

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