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Goldfish Owned by Illinois Wesleyan Student Makes a Splash

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan University sophomore Stephanie Nudelman’s family was surprised when they received a letter a few months ago. The letter, urging the recipient to register to vote, was addressed to her deceased goldfish: Princess Nudelman the Second. The family had no idea of the national attention that letter would draw.

The letter came from Women’s Voices Women Vote, hoping to convince Princess Nudelman to register so she could vote in the upcoming presidential election. The Nudelmans assumed their dearly departed goldfish’s name landed on their list because they had put a second phone line under their pet’s name to avoid spam e-mails and junk mail.

“When we got the forms this summer, my mom and I thought it was really funny,” said Stephanie Nudelman. “So we sent a Post-It to the county clerk’s office saying, ‘We regret to inform you that Princess Nudelman will not be voting this year because, one, she is dead, and, two, she is a goldfish. Please remove her from your mailing list.’ We thought that would be the end of it.”

Local news organizations broke the goldfish tale, and the yarn was spun by The Associated Press which declared, “Princess Nudelman won’t be voting on Nov. 4 because she is dead. And she is a goldfish.” National news media were drawn to the quirky tale, from *The Chicago Sun-Times*, *The New York Times* and National Public Radio, to *TIME* online, The Drudge Report, The Huffington Report, FOXNews. Even *Saturday Night Live* weighed in during their election special. “Weekend Update” co-host Amy Poehler speculated that Princess Nudelman received the registration materials because “she has the world’s most awesome goldfish name.”

The story, however, does not end there. What started months ago as a humorous mistake has turned into a political flashpoint. Lake County Clerk William Helander informed The Associated Press he intends to investigate the incident in conjunction with other instances of

voter registration problems. U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) has gone as far as to link the case to “massive voter fraud efforts” in the area, according to reports of a recent town hall meeting.

Women’s Voices Women Vote (WVWV), the nonpartisan organization that sent the registration information to Princess Nudelman, has had to defend itself against accusations of ties to Acorn, the Chicago-based not-for-profit group under fire for alleged fraudulent voter registration practices. On their Web site, WVWV admits that “creating a list of unregistered individuals is an imperfect process” and explains how the error was made.

For Stephanie Nudelman and her family, the entire affair has gotten out of hand. “The situation is ridiculous,” said Stephanie Nudelman. “This isn’t a case of fraud. But it’s a week away from the election. The fact that so many people got so carried away just shows how politically motivated the whole thing has become.”

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