

## **Baby Sitter, 25, is Found Dead in Santa Ana**

By Nancy Wride

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A 25-year-old live-in baby sitter was bound, stabbed and bludgeoned to death while caring for her daughter and four other children in their Santa Ana home, police said Friday.

The parents of the children told officers they discovered the woman dead in her bedroom when they returned Thursday from an evening at the movies, Santa Ana police Capt. James Dittman said.

Margaret and Kai Hendrickson had called their home at 8:45 p.m. to check in with their baby sitter, Linda Faye Rodgers., investigators said.

Rodgers, police said, assured the couple that "everything was fine."

Three hours later, the couple returned to their West Wilshire Avenue home and found the blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman dead, police said.

### **Children not Harmed**

The four Hendrickson children—ages 21/2 to 6—were not harmed, nor was Rodgers' 6-year-old daughter, police said. They declined comment on where the children were or what they might have witnessed when their baby sitter was slain.

"They were inside the house. They were unharmed, (but) I don't want to comment on whether or not the kids saw anything," Sgt. John McClain said Friday. "It was a very brutal, vicious crime."

Police said Rodgers, a single mother who had worked for the Hendricksons the past two years, appeared to have been stabbed with a knife and beaten with a blunt instrument.

An autopsy Friday indicated that Rodgers died of blunt-force trauma to the head.

McClain said it was not known whether anything was missing from the one-story, tan stucco home. He said investigators knew of no motive for the slaying, adding that there was no sign of forced entry.

One neighbor, Sam Cruz, said that he heard a gunshot between 11 p.m. and midnight, but thought nothing of it. "You hear them all the time around here," he added/ Police said the baby sitter had not been shot.

### **Thought She was Wife**

Residents along the tree-lined, older neighborhood near Bristol Street and McFadden Avenue said Friday that the family had only recently moved into the home and that few of the neighbors knew either the baby sitter or her employers well.

Rodgers had lived with the Hendricksons in Buena Park before moving to the Santa Ana home three or four weeks ago, McClain said.

Because he had never seen another woman at the home, Cruz said, he assumed that Rodgers was the mother of all five children and the wife of Kai Hendrickson., a 42-year-old Santa Ana tow truck driver. Police said Margaret Hendrickson, 31, is not employed.

"I thought she (Rodgers) was part of the family. I had no idea she was just a baby sitter," said Cruz, a 24-year-old Santa Ana College business major who lives across the street.

"During the day, you'd see her and the kids, and at night, (Mr. Hendrickson would) come home and park his tow truck in front," Cruz said. I never saw another woman (besides Rodgers) there."

He said he thought a man had been staying at the Hendrickson home for the past few days but he did not know who the man was.

Cruz described Rodgers as a "jeans and T-shirt type" dark blonde who seemed to go about her daily duties like clockwork. He said she seemed to run the household.

"She had a routine," said Cruz. "The garage door opened about 8 a.m. or 7:30 a.m. and you'd see her washing the clothes in the garage."

Sometimes. Cruz said, the young mother would be gardening in the front yard.

All these chores were usually done after Rodgers had walked the children down the street to elementary school in the mornings, neighbors said.

"I saw her yesterday about 2 p.m. She took the kids to school and back every day," said Javier Perez, 37, a neighbor who works at the Hunt-Wesson Foods Inc. plant in Fullerton.

### **Pushed Them in Cart**

"Sometimes she would be taking them to the store . . . there was so many of them that she pushed them in the shopping cart," Perez said, pointing to a metal market basket on the sidewalk across the street. "The little dog would follow them down the street . . . It was always very loud over there."

By mid-morning Friday, the home that neighbors said usually bustled with the noise and activity of children was strangely quiet, with the exception of a small dog roaming the driveway. It appeared that no one was inside, but a light bulb glowed over the black garage door and a bathroom window was lighted as well.

A sign in a front window—picturing the barrel of a gun pointed straight ahead and a line made popular in a Clint Eastwood movie—cast an eerie mood. It read: "Make my day!"