



Doctor describes infant's autopsy in Nancy Ortiz's trial

BY DAVID CASTELLON

dcastell@visalia.gannett.com

A newborn girl who died after being abandoned on a cold December day in 2006 in an Orosi neighborhood showed no signs of abuse, but she likely endured severe physical stress as hypothermia killed her.

On the witness stand Thursday for the trial of the baby's mother, Nancy Ortiz of Orosi, Dr. Burr Hartman said the baby's body showed signs of hypothermia, including dark blue toenails and fingernails, and portions of her eyes and lips were prominently discolored, almost orange, "which would suggest some kind of cold exposure."

Hartman, who contracts with Tulare County to perform autopsies, examined the body of the girl, given the name "Angelita DeOrosi" (little angel of Orosi), by the county Coroner's Office.

She was found about 8:45 p.m. on Dec. 3, naked and swaddled in a black sweatshirt in the bed of a pickup in the 12000 block of Sequoia Avenue. Based on statements by Tulare County sheriff's investigators, the baby may have been left in the pickup more than 24 hours before a teenager looking for something in the pickup discovered her.

AccuWeather reported that temperatures throughout the day Angelita was found ranged from 28 to 63 degrees.

Evidence in blood

Another prominent indication of hypothermia, Hartman said, was what he found in the baby's stomach: "There was altered blood. Coffee-ground type material, a result of altered blood coming in contact with stomach acid, causing the coffeelike material to form. "It suggests the body was under severe stress from the cold," he explained on the stand.

Under questioning by Ortiz's defense lawyer, Michelle Winspur, Hartman noted that this can occur for other reasons, including severe brain injuries and adrenal tumors.

When asked by the defense if the stress of childbirth could have caused it, Hartman reluctantly said it's possible.

Based on his examination, Hartman said, the baby appeared to have undergone 32 weeks (8 months) of gestation before birth instead of a full nine months.

Hartman added that Angelita could have been alive hours or a few days before she died, though he couldn't determine a precise time of death.

He noted under questioning by Janet Wise, the deputy district attorney for Tulare County prosecuting the case, that newborns are sensitive to cold, and premature babies tend to be even more sensitive.

He noted that he found some minor bleeding in a ventricle of Angelita's brain, and she had a small bruise on one hand — the reasons for which he couldn't determine — but he found no signs she had been beaten.

Angelita was the last of three newborns abandoned less than a block from each other in the same neighborhood. The first two, a boy and a girl, were found by neighborhood residents in February 2005 and January 2006.

Both survived.

Child-endangerment, murder charges

Prosecutors have charged Ortiz, 24, with murder and three counts of child endangerment for abandoning the babies and an additional child endangerment count stemming from a July 2007 incident in which her then 3-year-old daughter was found wandering naked and dirty about a quarter-mile from home.

Sheriff's officials testified in a previous court hearing that Ortiz told them she hid her pregnancies and gave birth to her last three babies in secret without her parents knowing.

She lived in the same neighborhood where the babies were found with her parents and two children.

Winspur has said her client put the babies in front of neighbors' homes because she didn't believe she could give them a good life, and she thought the people who found the babies could provide better.

Testimony

Testimony in the case began Tuesday, with the prosecution presenting its evidence and witnesses, among them sheriff's Detective Jim Franks, who testified about going to Ortiz's home in May 2007 after getting a tip she might be the mother.

He asked Ortiz to rub a cotton swab inside her mouth to get a DNA sample that could be matched against the abandoned babies to rule her out as the possible mother, as he had with several other women in the area.

The prosecution played a digital recording of that conversation, but the sound quality was so bad that only bits could be made out, and reporters in the courtroom were not given transcripts, as were the 12 jurors and five alternates.

At one point on the recording, Ortiz gave Franks the name of a woman who she claimed might be the mother.

But she apparently refused to have her mouth swabbed, as Franks could be heard saying a DNA test was an easy way to eliminate her as a suspect and noting the urgency of the investigation because the second baby was abandoned 11 months after the first, and the third baby was abandoned 11 months after the second.

"If things continue the same way, there's another baby due in five months," Franks said on the

recording.

Ortiz was heard saying, "I wasn't here for it" when the dead baby was found.

As the recording progressed, Ortiz and her mother — whom Franks said encouraged her daughter to provide a DNA sample — can be heard arguing loudly.

Among the discernible statements by Ortiz are "No, I won't" and "No, Mom!"

Franks testified that the argument got so heated that Ortiz got between him and her mother when she volunteered to have her mouth swabbed — as DNA testing would show whether she is the abandoned babies' grandmother — and actually held her hands under her mother's mouth.

"I've tested 20 different girls, and you're the only one who reacted this way," Franks said on the recording.

He later testified that the altercation ended when Ortiz's mother wiped the swab in her own mouth.

He returned to the house next day to try again to get a DNA sample from Ortiz. She wasn't home, but her mother allowed him to get a sample from Ortiz's daughter.

That DNA testing determined a familial link between Ortiz's mother and the three babies, Franks said. Based on that, investigators obtained a court order requiring Ortiz to provide them a DNA sample.

In the tape, Ortiz's son and daughter could be heard talking briefly with Franks. The defendant began sobbing in the Visalia courtroom.

The defense has not yet presented its case.

Ortiz's trial is scheduled to continue today, and could include a recording of her interview with sheriff's detectives after being told DNA testing showed she is the babies' mother.

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