

# LOCAL NEWS

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## Motive for murder-suicide remains a mystery

*Murder*

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Investigators said Friday they are no closer to determining what led a 26-year-old Littleton, Colo., man to shoot to death his girlfriend and her best friend on a Santa Cruz County beach Tuesday.

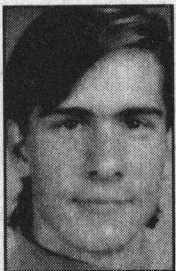
**BONNY DOON**

Santa Cruz sheriff's Sgt. Dave Deverell said detectives have no idea why David Bachman took his 12-gauge pump action shotgun and shot his girlfriend, 19-year-old Melinda Leippe in the back of the head on a bluff overlooking Bonny Doon Beach. Bachman also shot 19-year-old Brenda White, Leippe's best friend, before he turned the gun on himself, detectives say.

Deverell said detectives found no suicide note or any friends and family who reported problems between the three friends. There were no signs of depression or drug problems either, he said.

"We've found zero criminal record and zero family or friends to suggest any dark side to the three of them that would explain this," Deverell said. "We are all grasping at straws right now."

The trio, who were referred to as the "Three Musketeers" by White's father, David White of South Lake Tahoe, met when they lived in South Lake Tahoe. Bachman graduated from



BACHMAN

South Tahoe High School in 1994. Leippe graduated in 2000. White left South Tahoe High in her junior year of 2000. Deverell said it appears Leippe and Bachman had known each other since he was 21 and she was 14. Leippe's relative, Christina Sanford of Mountain View, said she did not know when the couple began dating.

Leippe and Bachman moved to Littleton two years ago. White followed them a year ago, according to David White.

Rachel White, Brenda's sister, told the *Tahoe Daily Tribune* that Brenda had just gotten a puppy and was looking forward to a trip to Bellingham, Wash., with her sister Rachel.

"She told her mom she was leaving to go to Santa Cruz," David White told the *Tribune*. "She wanted to spend the night camping on the coast, then she was going to come home. "She had concrete plans for after her trip. You don't go making concrete plans if you intend on having yourself killed."

Brenda's mother, Keely White, said, "People are saying it's suicide. It wasn't. Brenda was very full of life, and she was looking forward to going to Bellingham with her sister. She had a new puppy. She enjoyed life."



LEIPPE

Rachel White, 21, said, "My sister and I were talking about our future together. Brenda wanted to get a family business going. She wanted to do lotions or something like that. She was not going to kill herself. I don't know how to get that across."

Rachel White said her sister was not close to her suspected killer, although she lived with Melinda and David when she first moved to Colorado.

"Brenda told me before that Melinda and David had a rocky relationship, and she only hung out with David because of Melinda," Rachel White said in the *Tribune*.

White's mother, Keely White, had a surprise visit from her daughter in Lake Tahoe two days before the bodies were found in Santa Cruz County.

"When I saw her Sunday she said she'd be back up Tuesday," Keely White said. "She was friends with Melinda. She knew David through Melinda. He seemed like a personable kind of guy, but even when Melinda and he were here, there were relationship problems between the two of them."

The three were planning to continue on to Kansas to visit Leippe's mother and stepfather,



WHITE

who had moved there recently.

David White said his family lived in the Watsonville area for about five years, leaving in 1997. He said his daughter attended Moss Landing Middle School and still had many friends in the area.

Answers to the murder-suicide appear to be at the crime scene and across the country, so detectives are going both places, Deverell said. Detectives were in Lake Tahoe interviewing family members Friday and may be heading to Colorado next week.

The shotgun used in the deaths belonged to Bachman, Deverell said. Investigators believe Bachman had owned the rifle for some time. Deverell said he could not comment on why Bachman brought the shotgun or how many rounds of ammunition police found.

Leippe's autopsy was conducted Thursday, White's on Friday. Deverell did not know when Bachman's autopsy would be conducted. No results were available from either.

The *Tahoe Daily Tribune* contributed to this report.

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