

# Woman faces neglect charges

■ Her 11-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son were found alone without food in a cluttered Scotts Valley apartment.

BY TERRI MORGAN  
Special to the Mercury News

Scotts Valley police arrested a single mother of three earlier this week after discovering two of her children had been left hungry and unattended in a dirty apartment for several days.

Police charged Cherie Jean Atkinson with two counts of felony

child neglect on Monday — the day after they found her 11-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son alone and without food in a home cluttered with clothing and dirty dishes.

The older children and their 3½ year-old half-brother, who was staying with friends at the time, were taken into protective custo-

dy and placed in foster care, police said. Officers declined to release the names of the children. The youngest child was placed in foster care because he was often seen at the home, police said.

Police went to the Blake Lane apartment Sunday after an anonymous caller gave them detailed information about the family.

The two older children, described as cooperative and polite by police, told officers they were often left unsupervised. Police said the home was messy and did not have a telephone or televi-

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— Police Sgt. Bruce Lindsay

sion. The children apparently slept on piles of bedding on the living room floor.

“The place was pretty dirty and they were obviously neglected,” said Sgt. Bruce Lindsay of the Scotts Valley police department.

“This isn’t the Ruby Pointer story,” he added, referring to

three small girls found grunting in a squalid apartment in Santa Cruz several years ago.

Lindsay said the youngsters did not appear to be malnourished, although the refrigerator held only rotting vegetables. Nearby residents told police the pair had been known to go door

See **ALONE**, Page 10B

## Woman charged with neglect after 2 kids found home alone

### ■ ALONE

from Page 1B **ALONE** JUL 3 0 1993  
to door asking for change for food.

Neighbors told officers they often fed the children and invited them in because they were obviously lonely and had no one to provide for them.

“It was not an isolated incident,” Lindsay said. “We’ve learned the kids were left alone quite a bit.”

Atkinson apparently stopped by her apartment briefly on Sunday, Lindsay added, then left again without caring for the children.

Scotts Valley police left a note on Atkinson’s front door, asking her to contact them. She was arrested Monday when she went to the Scotts Valley police department.

She was booked at the county

jail and released on her own recognizance on Wednesday. Atkinson, also known as Cherie Berry, turns 29 today.

If convicted of felony child neglect charges, she could be sentenced to a maximum of six years in state prison. If the district attorney files misdemeanor charges, Atkinson could face up to one year in the county jail if convicted.

Atkinson could not be reached for comment. A neighbor, who declined to be identified, said the children were left alone “all the time.”

Lindsay said the children are doing fine in foster care.

A spokeswoman for the county’s child protective services agency confirmed the children were in foster care, but declined to release any additional information.