

Bomb injures Santa Cruz lawyer

Crime + Criminals - 1990-1999

Divorce attorney, who had feared for his safety, discovered package at his office

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By JOHN WOOLFOLK
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A Santa Cruz divorce lawyer who recently told a friend he was in danger was seriously injured at his office Monday when a booby-trapped gift package exploded in his arms and apparently blew off at least one of his hands.

Jack Jacobson, a well-known local attorney, suffered severe damage to his hands and shrapnel wounds to his face and upper body from the blast, police said.



Jacobson

Jacobson appeared to have lost his right hand and much of his left, Santa Cruz police Lt. Joe Haebe said. The victim was taken to Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz and airlifted to Stanford University Medical Center, Haebe said.

Stanford hospital officials would not confirm that Jacobson was under their care or comment on his condition.

Late Monday, police said they were checking several leads.

They were called to Jacobson. See **BOMB**, Back Page

Paramedics take Santa Cruz attorney Jack Jacobson from his office after Monday's blast. He was airlifted to Stanford University Medical Center.

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■ BOMB

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son’s 1134 Soquel Ave. second-story office at 10:55 a.m. after nearby workers reported hearing either gunfire or an explosion.

“I thought one of my tanks had exploded, but then I came outside and saw the window broken and heard him screaming,” said Joe Cunha, 26, who was delivering compressed air to the Crepe Place restaurant below Jacobson’s office at the time.

“He just screamed ‘call 911, it’s a bomb — I’m going to die,’” Cunha said.

No one else was injured, police said. Jacobson, 50, has a solo practice and was alone at the time of the explosion. An off-duty Santa Cruz firefighter and reserve deputy sheriff gave Jacobson first aid until medics arrived.

Police sealed off Soquel Avenue for the remainder of the day, snarling holiday shopping traffic, while the sheriff’s bomb squad inspected other packages in the office and police documented evidence, Haebe said. Investigators from the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms were called in to assist.

While police and prosecutors were checking leads, they had not identified a suspect, Chief Deputy District Attorney David Genochio said.

Because Jacobson works in the emotionally volatile field of family and divorce law, friends speculated he may have been the victim of a client’s disgruntled spouse.

Expressed concerns

“I think that Jack was afraid,” said Hermia Kaplan, a fellow family law attorney and close friend of Jacobson’s. She said Jacobson had recently confided to her that one of his cas-

es had caused him to fear for his safety.

Kaplan said she had a strong suspicion of who was behind the explosion, though she would not say who until police name a suspect.

Police said they have not determined what type of explosive was involved but that it was powerful and spread shrapnel over a wide area. The package was left outside Jacobson’s office and wrapped like a holiday gift, FBI spokesman George Grotz said.

The blast sent shock waves through Santa Cruz legal circles, where divorce lawyers for years have been clamoring for heightened courtroom security.

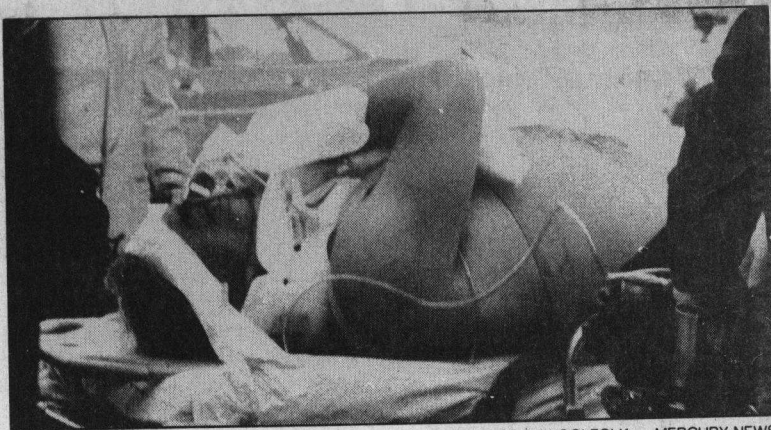
“In Santa Cruz courts, there is absolutely no security, but it definitely is something that is needed in our court system,” said James Hober, president of the Santa Cruz County Bar Association. “Of all the disciplines in the practice of law, I think family law is the most dangerous. It’s the most volatile and certainly the most emotional.”

Local family law attorneys can rattle off countless war stories from the front lines of divorce.

“I’ve had clients on the other side getting emotional in court and yelling at me from across the parking lot,” Hober said. “I’ve had clients whose husbands have jumped on the hood of their cars and pounded on the windshield. There’s always emotional volatility in divorce.”

Even so, divorce lawyers were stunned by Monday’s explosion.

“Everybody who does family law is aware of the potential for a disgruntled other party to a case overreacting in some way,” said Santa Cruz family law attorney Preston Brahm.



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Jack Jacobson apparently lost at least one hand in the explosion.

“It’s taken very seriously by people who practice family law. But I can’t say I’ve ever worried about a letter bomb.”

Jacobson saw the risks as a challenge, said David Thiermann, a friend and career consultant who works out with Jacobson at the nearby gym.

“I kidded with him a few months ago that being involved with divorce cases can sometimes be dangerous,” Thiermann said. “He said, ‘Yeah, that’s one of the challenges you face when you’re in this business.’”

Jacobson earned his law degree from the University of San Diego in 1972 and has long practiced in the Santa Cruz area, according to the local bar association.

Currently single, Jacobson lives on communally owned property on Happy Valley Road in the Santa Cruz Mountains, said Gary Bascou, who shares property with him.

Amicable divorce

Jacobson divorced his wife of 5½ years, Mary Cecilia Krebs, in 1990, court records show. They have two sons, age 10 and 11, and an adopted daughter, 19. Friends and court records suggested the split was amicable.

Bascou said Jacobson enjoys sailing in his spare time and described him as an affable and friendly man.

“He’s a real friendly guy,” Bascou said. “He’s not the kind of guy who would have enemies. . . . Boy, what a tragedy.”

Local lawyers said Jacobson is well-respected in the field.

“Jack certainly is a fine lawyer,” Kaplan said. “He takes each case to heart. I always thought he loved being a lawyer.”