

Police: Woman was strangled

Murder
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While police do not have forensic evidence to prove the body found in the Santa Cruz Mountains above Boulder Creek is that of 64-year-old Elvira Burnson, they say clothing and jewelry found there match what the Gilroy woman was last seen wearing.

Police also believe they know how Burnson died — strangulation. **SANTA CRUZ** Sheriff's Office spokesman Kim Allyn said a rope was wrapped around the neck when the body was discovered Monday in a shallow hillside grave in the redwood forests of Logan Creek.

Burnson, a Gilroy substitute teacher, disappeared Jan. 7 after she reportedly came to Santa Cruz to take her daughter to a drug-rehabilitation program, Santa Cruz Police Lt. Joe Haebe said.

Police believe Elvira Burnson was killed Jan.

7 at an apartment on Kaye Street where Paula Helene Burnson and her boyfriend, 43-year-old Robert Charles Beckwith, live. Police think that a day or two later Burnson and Beckwith took Elvira Burnson's body to the remote location off Logan Creek Road, buried her in an area of dense redwoods and started the body on fire.

Believing Elvira Burnson had been murdered, police arrested Beckwith Jan. 12 and booked him on a murder charge. On Jan. 17, they arrested Paula Burnson when she was released from a local hospital where police had taken her after her mother's disappearance.

Investigators have at least five different theories of the motive for the killing, Haebe said, but do not have enough evidence to point to any particular motive.

Paula Burnson grew up in Gilroy but has lived in Santa Cruz County for several years and held various jobs. She was unemployed at the time of her arrest.

She attended UC Santa Cruz from January

to December of 1999, studying dramatic arts. She left UCSC as a junior never having earned a degree.

Her family said Paula Burnson has battled drug addiction since she was a teen-ager. She kicked her heroin habit when she was in college.

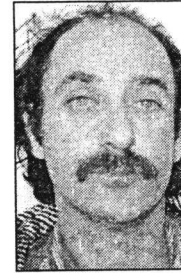
Neighbors said Paula Burnson had lived in the Kaye Street apartment for about a year. She apparently told neighbors she moved there in an attempt to escape her drug addiction and Beckwith, who eventually moved in with her.

Family members say Elvira Burnson often gave her daughter food and money and tried to help her get clean.

Beckwith, a Santa Cruz native, worked as a carpenter, a waiter and once owned a convenience store. Both he and Burnson have been arrested on drug-related charges before. Beckwith's criminal history shows several drunken-driving arrests and a felony assault conviction in 1992.



PAULA BURNSON



BECKWITH



ELVIRA BURNSON

Burnson will appear in court Jan. 31, where she is expected to enter a plea to the murder charge. Beckwith will be arraigned the same day on a murder charge. Both are being held at the Santa Cruz County Jail on \$1 million bail each.

Burnson's late-father's family has hired an attorney to defend her. Beckwith has a court-appointed attorney. Neither have cooperated with the murder investigation, Haebe said.

Funeral arrangements for Elvira Burnson have not been set. The Coroner's Office hopes to have a positive I.D. by the end of the week.

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