

# Man suspected in slaying of Gilroy woman

Police: Victim's body may have been dumped near Santa Cruz

By JASON SCHULTZ

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SANTA CRUZ — A Santa Cruz man has been booked on suspicion of killing his girlfriend's mother, but police will say little more about the man or the Gilroy woman's disappearance.

Robert Charles Beckwith, 43, was arrested Saturday on suspicion of killing Elvira Burnson, a teacher, and booked into Santa Cruz County jail.

Burnson, 64, was seen by her nephew last Monday leaving her Gilroy home and heading for Santa Cruz to see her daughter, identified by police as Paula Burnson.

Police believe Beckwith killed Elvira Burnson Monday or Tuesday at the Beach Flats apartment he shared with Paula Burnson at 212 Kaye St.

Santa Cruz police Lt. Joe Haebe and Chief Steve Belcher refused to answer questions Monday about Paula Burnson, about a possible motive for the slaying or murder weapons. Nor would they comment on evidence against Beckwith, whether Elvira Burnson's body had been found or what Beckwith may have said during questioning at the Santa Cruz Police Department on Saturday.

Neighbors who asked to remain anonymous reported seeing the daughter, Paula Burnson, being taken out of the Beach Flats apartment on a stretcher Thursday, but police would not comment on her whereabouts or say if she had been charged in the slaying.

Police believe Beckwith dumped Elvira Burnson's body somewhere in the "wooded mountain areas of Santa Cruz County," using the victim's white 2001 Toyota Corolla to transport the body. Haebe would not say if the body had been found.

Witnesses told police that a brown, city-issued trash can had been tied to the car. Police have confiscated the trash can, which they believe Beckwith tied to the vehicle. Haebe would not say whether they think the victim's body was towed in the trash can or stowed in the car.

A neighbor who declined to be named said the trash can belonged to her. She said it had vanished for a few days, then re-appeared with the wheels broken and a shovel and rope inside.

The neighbor said she called police, and investigators came and took the can.

Witnesses told police they had seen Paula Burnson wash the vehicle several times, Haebe said.

Haebe urges anyone who may have seen Beckwith driving the Corolla with the trash can tied to the back between 11 a.m. on Tuesday and 5 p.m. on Wednesday to call police at 420-5820.

Beckwith is being held on \$1 million bail and is set to be arraigned on Wednesday. His arrest warrant said he

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## Murder

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was an unemployed laborer, and neighbors said he and Paula Burnson had lived in the apartment for a few years.

"She didn't deserve this," Haebe said of Burnson's mother.

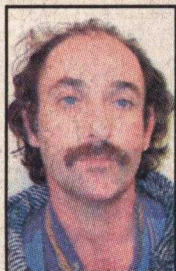
Neighbors living in the building could be seen looking out their windows Monday, but they declined to come outside and answer questions. A police officer stationed in front of the home kept reporters from going inside.

Contact Jason Schultz at  
jschultz@santa-cruz.com.



**BURNSON**

64-year-old teacher last seen on her way to visit daughter



**BECKWITH**

Boyfriend of victim's daughter



Photo courtesy Santa Cruz Police Department

The victim's white 2001 Toyota Corolla may have been used to transport the body, police say.