

Toddler death still a mystery

A month has passed, details remain elusive

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YORK, Maine — It has been exactly one month since a Rochester, N.H., toddler was pronounced dead at York Hospital, and still the circumstances surrounding her death remain unclear.



KASSIDY BORTNER

According to a preliminary report from the Maine Chief Medical Examiner's office, Cassidy Bortner died Nov. 9 from a blunt force trauma to her head. However, the official cause of death and autopsy results for the 21-month-old child continue to be withheld pending further study.

Chad E. Evans, 29, of 191 Milton Road in Rochester, who lived with Cassidy's mother, was charged in New Hampshire with manslaughter in connection with the toddler's death. The charge came after a one-week investigation by Maine and New Hampshire state police, Kittery and Rochester police and the New Hampshire attorney general's office. Although Evans appears to be the prime suspect in Cassidy's death, many questions remain unanswered, and officials in both Maine

☆ *Kassidy*
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Man seriously



Rochester fire and emerge Washington-Street in Roche Visible in the photo is the b

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personnel were dispatched to the Seymour Osman Community Center at 9:36 a.m. for the report of an unresponsive child.

One neighbor said he watched Trudeau's mother bring her baby to the community center, and moments later, rescue personnel were remov-

ing "something in a white sheet" and loading it into the ambulance. Trudeau was pronounced dead at Wentworth-Douglass Hospital at 9:55 a.m., according to Noreen Biehl, vice president of community relations at the hospital.

The infant lived with his 24-year-

old mother and her 1 1/2-year-old sister at the Hampshire Circle address since birth. Prior to that, Trudeau's mother lived at a Pleasant View Circle address, said a friend of the family on Friday. Another neighbor, down the street from the Trudeau residence, said Thursday that the

mother has lived alone since moving to the Hampshire Circle address.

At the doorstep of the Hampshire Circle address on Friday, police tape had been removed from the foot of the steps, and several flyers and mail could be seen stuck in the door jamb and mailbox.

Kassidy

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and New Hampshire are saying very little about the details of this case.

Kassidy died after reportedly being left at the Kittery residence of her aunt, Jennifer Conley, and her boyfriend, Jeffrey Marshall. The child was dropped off by her mother, Amanda Bortner, 18, at about 8:30 a.m., according to Marshall.

No charges have been filed against the child's mother, and police would not comment on whether charges are expected.

An entry in the Nov. 9 Kittery police log listed as an "unattended death," states an unidentified man called from the Rogers Road residence at about 12:41 p.m. requesting an ambulance for a child who had fallen.

Kassidy was transported to York Hospital by ambulance, where she was pronounced dead shortly after 1 p.m.

As of Friday afternoon, a spokeswoman for the state medical examiner said the results of Kassidy's autopsy are still pending. The autopsy was completed Nov. 10, and the toddler was laid to rest Nov. 16 following what family and friends described as a brief ceremony in Buckfield, Maine.

Bortner was one of the individuals to speak about Kassidy's death. According to one family member, the child's mother told relatives and friends it is very difficult to raise a child as a teen-age mother.

Bortner lived with Evans at the time he allegedly abused Kassidy, but relatives say she is now residing somewhere in Texas. When asked whether Bortner had left New England, Christopher Carter, New Hampshire assistant attorney general, said he could not confirm or deny that statement. Carter said that the investigation is ongoing, and based on that fact and the

effort to ensure Evans has a fair trial, few specific details about the case could be released.

"We believe this to be a very, very serious case," Maine State Police Sgt. Matthew Stewart said in the early days of the investigation. "We consider the circumstances of Kassidy's death and the nature of her injuries to be very suspicious."

"The death of a child this young and this helpless is beyond any capability of rational understanding," said Carter following Evans' arraignment in Rochester District Court on Nov. 17. "What we have here is a toddler who was utterly helpless. Simply stated, (Evans) is charged with beating Kassidy to death."

Although no plea was entered as part of the arraignment, Evans' attorney said his client "vehemently denies" killing the baby girl.

Evans spent less than a week behind bars at the Strafford County

House of Corrections before his \$100,000 bail was posted anonymously at Rochester District Court. To remain out of jail, Evans must not have any contact with Bortner, Conley, Marshall and several other state witnesses in the case.

A probable cause hearing on the manslaughter charge has twice been postponed at Rochester District Court and has not been rescheduled.

However, Evans is scheduled to return to court in January on a related issue. In addition to the manslaughter charges, authorities say Evans violated probation by possessing live rounds of ammunition at his Milton Road home and being charged with a felony.

Evans has been serving a 365-day probation since March for assaulting his ex-wife, who has been included in the preliminary list of state's witnesses in the manslaughter case.

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