

## They lived 'like honeymooners'

### Evans' childhood sweetheart recalls his relationship with Bortner after Kassidy's death

By **JENNIFER L. SAUNDERS**  
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DOVER — The man accused of killing Kassidy Bortner listened in court Monday as his childhood sweetheart testified he and the toddler's mother lived together "like honeymooners" after her death.

Vanessa Mansson of Keene testified that she has known Chad E. Evans, 30, for about 26 years and giggled after she recalled Evans as a child, riding along on his father's garbage removal route so he could see her.

Evans, who grew up in Keene, lived at 191 Milton Road in Rochester until he was charged with second-degree murder and assault in connection with Kassidy's death in November 2000. Kassidy and her mother, 19-year-old Amanda Bortner, lived with Evans for about three months.

Kassidy's cause of death was ruled a blunt force injury to her head; however, medical doctors have testified and told police the child showed multiple signs of child abuse, including severe bruises of different ages.

When Evans was charged with killing Kassidy, his bail conditions stipulated no contact with Bortner, but in court Monday Mansson and Evans' close friend Jeremy Hinton both testified to assisting the pair in violating that order.

Mansson said she offered her apartment to Evans in December after learning he had been charged with the crime "so he could just get away from



everything." Shortly after Evans began staying with her, she testified, he came home very upset and told her he had heard from Bortner and she had nowhere to go.

"I knew how important the two of them were to each other ... He loved her very much and missed her," she said, testifying Bortner moved into her apartment around the first or second week of December 2000 and the pair helped Mansson and her two children decorate a Christmas tree.

Mansson said she gave up her bed and slept on the couch so Bortner and

Evans could be together.

"They were like honeymooners ... They were always holding hands and were sitting very close to each other," she said.

While Bortner and Evans used Mansson's apartment in Keene, they also had access to Hinton's apartment in the Seacoast area on several occasions. He testified Evans always had a key to his apartment, and he gave one to Bortner after she told him she had no one and nowhere to go.

Earlier in the day's proceedings, the state called two of Amanda Bortner's



**CHAD EVANS, above, listens to the testimony of his ex-wife, Tristan Evans, during his murder trial in Strafford County Superior Court on Monday. At left, while the judge and counselors met in chambers, Vanessa Mansson of Keene, Chad Evans' childhood sweetheart, mouthed affectionate messages to Evans in Strafford County Superior Court.**

Craig Osborne/Staff photographer

close friends from the years before Kassidy's death.

Tracy Foley and Melissa Chick both testified about witnessing bruises on Kassidy and Foley testified she had asked Bortner to bring Kassidy and live with her in the Sanford area in October. Bortner baby-sat for Foley's daughter for about three years prior to moving away with her family when Kassidy was about nine months old. Foley did not see Bortner again until she was living with Evans and went to Sanford to visit Chick, she testified.

Foley spoke directly and calmly as

she testified to seeing Bortner during the weekend of Oct. 14, 2000, and seeing bruises on Kassidy's face. She said Bortner told her the story of Evans catching Kassidy by the face as she fell off a trampoline. Chick also testified to seeing bruises during that same weekend — and on several other occasions.

On that October weekend, according to the testimony of several witnesses, including Bortner, she was in Sanford shopping for Evans' birthday presents while he celebrated with his family and ex-wife in Rochester.

Although she tried several times to see Bortner and Kassidy again, Foley said Bortner kept in touch only by telephone until Evans was arrested on Nov. 16, 2000, in connection with Kassidy's death one week earlier.

"Amanda showed up at my kitchen door hysterical, crying ... She said, 'And you knew and I didn't listen.' I hugged her and we both cried," Foley said, entering testimony the defense had hoped to keep the jury from hearing. She described Bortner as disheveled, chain-smoking and incoherent.

Earlier in the day, Senior Assistant Attorneys General N. William Delker and Simon Brown and defense attorneys Mark Sisti and Alan Cronheim questioned Foley in a hearing with Judge Tina L. Nadeau to determine whether Bortner's comments to Foley could be entered into the record as

☆ **Trial**

Please turn to Page 5B

## MORE ABOUT

# Trial

Continued from Page 1B

"excited utterances." Nadeau ruled in favor of the state, allowing Bortner's statement and her later comments to Foley that Evans' threw Kassidy onto a bed or into the corner of the house were admissible.

Later in the morning, when Foley testified before the jury, the defense contended Bortner was reacting to police pressure.

"Did you know police told her they thought Chad was responsible six hours after Kassidy's death?" defense attorney Cronheim asked Foley.

"I did not," Foley replied.

Foley testified Bortner stayed with her that night and returned to Foley's home after shopping for Kassidy's funeral attire on Nov. 17, 2000. Foley was unable to attend Kassidy's funeral on Nov. 18, 2000, due to a trip out of the area, she testified. Bortner never returned to her home, she said, although she would have given her a key if she had ever asked for a place to stay.

Chick, who went to high school with Bortner, did attend Kassidy's funeral and she cried softly as she recalled the day.

The 21-year-old began working for the Springvale YMCA's day-care on Sept. 10, 2000, she testified — which is why she said she could recall seeing serious bruises on Kassidy's body during the first days of that month. Chick said she took care of Kassidy for Evans and Bortner so that they could have some time to themselves and knew it had to be prior to taking her job.

Under cross-examination, Cronheim pressed that Chick told police she recalled those bruises from the October visit. Chick maintained Kassidy always had bruises,

but that the severe ones on her body were there in early September and if she told police differently, it was a mistake.

Chick's assertion is in direct contradiction with the defense's effort to show the jury Kassidy's injuries occurred in the final weeks before her death on Nov. 9, 2000. The defense's strategy so far has been to blame Kassidy's many injuries on her aunt's boyfriend, F. Jefferey Marshall, who baby-sat Kassidy fairly regularly in the weeks before the toddler died.

"I noticed bruises," Chick said of

the September visit, recalling that she observed several older bruises on Kassidy's abdomen and upper legs and a newer bruise on her bottom while giving the then 19-month-old child a bath. She said she had looked for a camera to take a photograph and ask someone for advice, but could not find one in her house that worked. Chick said there were always bruises on Kassidy's face after Bortner brought her to live with Evans, but that Bortner always had an excuse for them.

Chick also testified Kassidy had

once been a happy, outgoing toddler but that changed after she lived with Evans. She described Kassidy as very quiet, withdrawn and afraid of men.

During cross-examination, the defense countered that Chick had noticed only that Kassidy was afraid of large men and Chick recalled believing that at the time.

Marshall testified last week that he stands about 6 feet, 3 inches tall and weighs 240 pounds. Evans is about 5 feet, 6 inches in height.

When her testimony for the state reached its end, Brown asked Chick why she did not intervene on Kassidy's behalf when she saw the many bruises.

"She (Bortner) had an excuse for everything ... You can't accuse someone of something you don't know," she replied.

The state also called Cory Merrill, Evans' cellmate at Strafford County House of Corrections for the six days he spent there prior to making bail in November 2000. Merrill testified he is serving a term at New Hampshire State Prison in Concord for felonious sexual assault against a 15-year-old girl.

Merrill said Evans was very depressed while at Strafford County last November, and said "maybe I should just hang it up now" when Merrill asked him why he was so worried if he had nothing to do with the toddler's death. Merrill said Evans told him he repeatedly spanked Kassidy with his hand and with a belt.

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## MORE ABOUT

**Trial** Continued from Page 1B

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Heather Hamilton, who works with Cassidy's aunt Jennifer Conley at a store in Kittery, Maine, also remembered bruises on Cassidy's face and Bortner telling the story of the trampoline incident.

"She was giggly ... She was trying to play it up as a funny thing that happened," Hamilton recalled.

The defense then asked Hamilton about calls Conley received from her boyfriend, Marshall, at work on the day of Cassidy's death. Hamilton said she only knew about the calls Conley received after 1 p.m. and could not answer about any she received earlier in the day.

After Marshall called, Hamilton said, Conley was not in a panic, but did seem nervous. When Conley learned later that Cassidy had died, Hamilton said "she was very frantic ... she was very upset, crying."

Hinton was among those who saw bruises on Cassidy on more than one occasion, and testified he asked Evans about severe bruising on the child's back, legs and buttocks and that Evans "did not say he did it." Hinton described Cassidy's condition at the time as "bruises on top of bruises."

Unlike others who testified earlier in the day and last week about Cassidy's formerly outgoing nature, Hinton said Cassidy was never a normal toddler. He described her as withdrawn from the first time Bortner brought the toddler to his McDonald's restaurant after moving in with Evans.

Hinton also admitted to registering a car in his name for Evans after Evans told him the Keene police were harassing him. He said he drove with Evans, his brother Jason Evans and Bortner in the spring to spend two days and two nights sightseeing and going to a baseball game in New York City. Hinton and Mansson testified to seeing Bortner drive the car on multiple occasions.

Mansson said when Bortner left her apartment in the late spring it was not on good terms because Bortner had twice forgotten to pick her children up at school. Mansson, who described herself as Evans' one-time girlfriend, said their relationship ended in high school because they were more like siblings than a couple.

According to Bortner's testimony last week, she and Evans lived with many friends and ultimately in a camper in the woods behind his grandparents' farm before being subpoenaed to the grand jury in August. Evans' bail was revoked at that time for living with Bortner.

Mansson told the state she encouraged Bortner to get an attorney to answer her questions, and said Evans was concerned about Bortner contacting the police.

Under cross-examination by the defense, however, she said Evans was only concerned that Bortner would have to go through another "four-hour grill session" with police as she did after Cassidy's death.

When Evans left the courtroom at the end of the day, his family and friends stood out in the lobby — including Hinton, Mansson and his ex-wife, Tristan Evans.

"I love you," Mansson called, waving to Evans as he entered the elevator.