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NEW YORK POST, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2001

SAVE THE CHILDREN

These heartless fiends deserve death penalty

JULIE and Matthew Herrnkind deserve to die for allegedly killing their tiny daughter in an orgiastic frenzy of hate.

But as Andrea Yates has demonstrated, our society is more likely to pump sympathy than lethal chemicals into moms who take their babies' lives.

Julie Herrnkind, a pregnant Staten Island mother of five, and her hulking husband admit they snuffed the life out of little Sylena as the child cried out in agony, police say.

The Herrnkinds are charged with



ANDREA PEYSER

second-degree murder, a crime not punishable by death — although there's a remote chance prosecutors could upgrade the charges.

Whatever the outcome, let's pray this duo never again breathes the same air as decent folk.

The girl's father, a fat, 6-foot-3 former police cadet, confessed that he rubbed the child's backside and legs raw with a scouring pad, then poured alcohol and peroxide onto the wounds.

The last thing little Sylena saw as her life slipped away was the face of her wretched, cursing mother shoving soap into her mouth. Julie Herrnkind also admits she smacked Sylena's head against a bathtub, before leaving her to die in the cold water, police say.

Sylena was killed because she soiled her pants. She was 3 years old.

Herrnkind apologists suggest the couple was overwhelmed by children with developmental problems.

Julie Herrnkind "has a long history of emotional and mental illness," her lawyer, Leo Duval, told me yesterday.

Sound familiar?

Sylena's uncle, Joseph Herrnkind, blames the city's Administration for Children's Services, while absolving his sister.

But the government did not kill this child.

The next time someone tries to forgive these monsters, remember the poor child's final, anguished cries.



HELL HOUSE: Toys are strewn in the background of the home where the Herrnkinds allegedly beat Sylena to death. Sam Costanza

Foster mother wants 'killer' mom's kids

By TODD VENEZIA and IKIMUUSA SOCKWELL-MASON

The 62-year-old foster mother of accused child killer Julie Herrnkind has launched a legal campaign to win custody of the Staten Island woman's four surviving children.

Mary Del Grippo and her son David Del Grippo are trying to win the right to raise the young brothers and sisters of little Sylena Herrnkind. The 3-year-old was allegedly beaten and tortured to death by her mother Julie, 24, and father Matthew, 27, on Monday.

Lawyer Stephen A. Spinelli said the Del Grippos had previously tried to gain control of the children because of the long pattern of abuse the parents have allegedly foisted on the children.

"They have nothing to do with the criminal side of this," Spinelli said. "They just want to help the children."

Mary Del Grippo raised Julie from the age of 7 months, and had custody from age 12 until Julie became an adult.

Del Grippo, who lived in Staten Island at the time, now lives in Virginia with her husband.

"Julie always thought of her like a grandmother, so did the kids," Spinelli said. Right now the Herrnkinds' children, Missy, 5, and Alexia 2, are in foster care while Diane, 4, and Jose, 1, are hospitalized.

Meanwhile, the probe in the case continues.

Nicholas Scoppetta, head of the city's Administration for Children's Services, yesterday said the family had received numerous social services and that one official or another had visited the family's home on Oct. 5, 10, 21 and 24.



TRAGIC TOT: Sylena Herrnkind when she was a few months old.

"On Oct. 24 the caseworker spoke to the children, examined the children. They seemed fine. Spoke with the homemaker ... also the physical therapist," he said. "There were just no indications up until that time," of what was coming.

"Then 11 days later the parents called 911 ... Sylena eventually was announced D.O.A.," Scoppetta said.

He said that after a 1998 incident in which the kids were taken away from the family for alleged abuse, they were returned because the district attorney's office found insufficient evidence.

He conceded there was a complaint by the foster parent that the children had possibly been sexually abused.

Scopetta said they were examined physically and doctors found no signs of sexual abuse.

On Feb. 4, 2000, there was a conference in Family Court at which Seamen's Society for Children and Families, which organized foster care for the children, objected to their return.

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