NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

NEW YORK POST, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2001

S.I. HORROR HOUSE

Mom confesses in torture-slay of tot

By TODD VENEZIA and IKIMULISA SOCKWELL-MASON

In a chilling confession, accused child-killer Julie Herrnkind describes how she and her husband, Matthew, tortured their daughter Sylena to death — just because the terrified 3-year-old soiled her pants.

The 24-year-old Staten Island woman said her hulking 6-foot-3 husband pulled off the girl's pants, wiped the mess away with a skin-ripping wire scouring pad and then held her head under water to stifle her screams.

It was only after the girl went cold and still that Mrs. Herrnkind realized something was wrong.

"She was not moving," Julie told cops in a statement released yesterday. "I thought we went too far this time ... I then called 911 and said 'Oh, my god, we killed this kid.'"

The Herrnkinds were arraigned in Staten Island criminal court yesterday for second-degree murder, second-degree assault and two counts of endangering the welfare of a child.

After the hearing, authorities released confessions given by both Julie and Matthew. Julie's statement tells how the couples', anger drove them into a homicidal frenzy.

"[I] was screaming at her, 'Where do you go to the bathroom? Why do you s--- your pants?' ... I hit her head and it went backwards and she hit the back of" her head on the tub.

"She was screaming and crying and I told her to 'Shut the f--- up.'" Julie told cops. "My husband took out the Brillo pad ... and said, 'If you want to s--- and piss your pants, I will clean you like this.'

"He took the Brillo pad ... and he pushed her down and she hit her head on the tub. He then began to scrub her legs and a-- with the Brillo pad. She was screaming in pain and saying 'No!'"

Julie, now eight months pregnant with the couple's sixth child, said they then shoved soap in the girl's mouth and held her head under cold water in the bathrub until the girl stopped moving.

"She's sad beyond words," said Julie's lawyer, Leo Duval. "If anyone is criminally responsible, it's much too early to make that judgment."

Matthew, formerly known as Matthew Poppe, was a police cadet in the 122nd Precinct on Staten Island when he met Julie, who worked at the station house, sources said.

Matthew, the son of a retired Brooklyn NYPD detective, took Julie's last name when they married.

The Herrnkinds, who are unemployed, have been investigated half a dozen times for child abuse by the city's Administration for Children's Services.

In 1998, both parents were locked up after the couple allegedly assaulted Sylena's older sister. The charges were later dropped for lack of evidence, officials said.

The couple also were probed for abuse in August when Sylena was found with a bruise under her eye. But ACS determined the abuse was unfounded after the parents said her sister, Diane, hit the 3-year-old.

In another incident, the couple last year were charged with extreme corporal punishment, after daughter Alexia, now 2, was found with bruises, a source told The Post.

ACS agreed to drop the charge without getting a social worker's report, the source said.



VICTIM: Sylena Herrnkind (left, as a baby), with sister Diane, was abused all her life, cops say.



DAD DEAREST: Matt Herrnkind is led into court yesterday.



MOMMY DEAREST: Julie Herrnkind, who once worked at a precinct station house, is led into court on Staten Island yesterday to face charges in the torture death of one of her daughters, Sylena. N.Y. Post photos: Tamara Beckwith (left & above)

CITY_21MC100_013367743

NYC-WTC_000416499