

# A family torn, two lives in balance

□ **Gutierrez sexual abuse trial gets under way with starkly different versions of what led to a child's suicide attempt**

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The Columbian

Everyone agrees that the 15-year-old alleged victim at the center of the Paul Gutierrez sexual abuse trial is a talented and gifted girl, an Honor Society president and born dancer who played volleyball and spent two years on the Covington Junior High School rally squad.

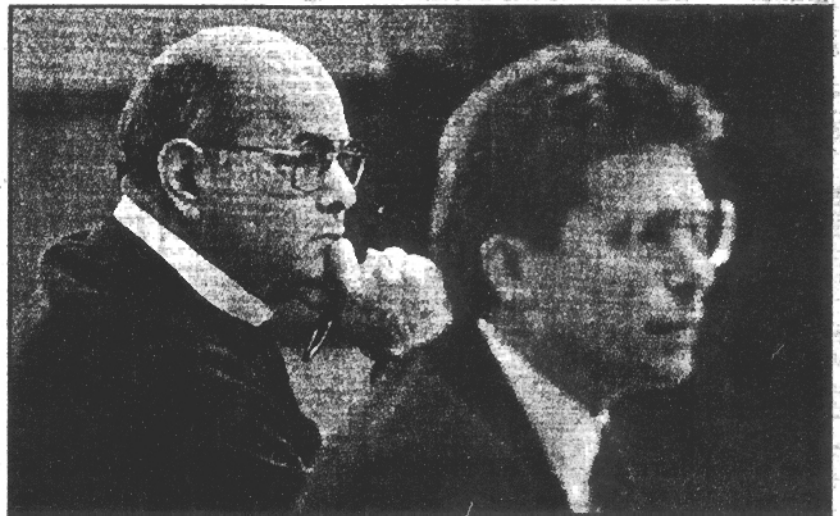
And nobody disputes that her life took a nosedive in 1991 as she began to grapple with some most difficult events.

But attorneys for the state and for the 68-year-old Gutierrez gave jurors starkly different versions Tuesday of what drove a happy, playful girl to swallow a bottle of aspirin a year ago in a suicide attempt.

Prosecutors allege it was the five years of sexual abuse at the hands of her grandfather.

Defense attorney Steve Thayer told the eight-woman, four-man jury it might have been instead a bad relationship with her new stepfather.

Thus, the scene was set for what promises to be several days of graphic, emotional testimony in a dispute that has torn a family apart and tainted the reputation of Gutierrez, a well-known school official and current member of the Vancouver School Board.



**Paul Gutierrez and his attorney, Steve Thayer, listen intently during Tuesday's jury selection.**

## 'This dramatic child'

In opening statements late Tuesday afternoon, Thayer told the 12-member jury the abuse allegations were "a dramatic accusation by this dramatic child." While the girl claimed that Gutierrez fondled her as many as 50 times, he said, there was no medical evidence to support it.

He said Gutierrez himself would take the stand in his own defense.

"He will tell you this did not happen," Thayer promised. And the defense attorney said the accusations arose only after her mother married a man the youngster "resented and disliked."

Meanwhile, Deputy Prosecutor Kim Farr detailed the allegations of abuse to the jury, saying that Gutierrez fondled the youngster on many occasions while the two of them lay together in his bed watching television.

It began, Farr, told the jury, when the girl was a fourth grader — 9 years old — and continued until she was 14.

Farr said the girl's testimony would show that Gutierrez picked her up at dance class regularly to save her mother a trip. She stayed overnight with Gutierrez and his wife, Pat, so she could attend school the next day at Martin Luther King Elementary. The

school is only about a block and a half from her grandparents' McLoughlin Heights home.

When his wife would go to sleep, Farr said, Gutierrez would invite the girl into his bedroom and fondle her.

"She would look away. She didn't think her grandfather would do anything to her that was wrong."

She quit dancing after an injury and stopped spending the night at the Gutierrez home on a weekly basis.

## Calls continue

Still, Gutierrez would call the girl's mother, Sandra Stokesbary, and ask if the youngster could come stay. Though the girl had a younger sister, the sister was never invited, Stokesbary testified Tuesday.

By seventh grade, the girl was increasingly aware that "this was not quite what was supposed to happen between grandfather and granddaughter," Farr said. But the girl "was in a terrible bind. She was not able to tell and not able to stop it. She knew if it got out it would ruin her family."

Farr said, the girl told some Covington School friends she had been molested but begged them not to repeat it. Meanwhile, she began

to withdraw from friends and family. Her grades plummeted.

Stokesbary testified that in late 1992, she and her husband confronted the girl and pressed her about what was wrong. She cried, "It's not a normal teen-age problem," and, Stokesbary continued, at that moment, "everything clicked into place. I knew what it was."

### **'Grandpa'**

Stokesbary asked her, "Who's doing this to you?"

"Grandpa," the Stokesbary quoted her daughter as saying. The youngster is said to have asked that nobody be told except for two of her aunts, both of whom had young daughters.

But she finally told a school counselor. Then in January of 1993, the alleged victim swallowed an overdose of aspirin in a botched suicide attempt. She was booked into the psychiatric ward at St. Vincent Hospital and Medical Center in Portland and then into a private clinic in Gresham where she stayed for 50 days.

She then moved to California to stay with her father, where she continues to live.

Today, the girl's testimony — the centerpiece of the prosecution's case — began.

"It's a case about a life that's torn in two," Farr told the jurors. Because of her allegations, "she's lost her grandfather and grandmother, her aunts and uncles. She's lost her hometown and her school.

"It's a story of love and trust," he concluded. "Twisted love and violated trust."

## **Gutierrez trial at a glance ...**

**DEFENDANT:** Paul Gutierrez, 68, current member of the Vancouver School Board, former assistant superintendent for the Vancouver School District and an ex-principal at Hudson's Bay High School.

**ALLEGED VICTIM:** Gutierrez's 15-year-old granddaughter, a talented dancer and singer, athlete, cheerleader and Honor Society member.

**THE CHARGES:** Seven counts of child sexual abuse, including indecent liberties, statutory rape, first-, second- and third-degree child molestation and first- and second-degree rape of a child.

**IF CONVICTED:** Gutierrez would face a prison sentence of at least 17½ years.

**DEFENSE ATTORNEY STEVE THAYER:** "Dramatic accusations by this dramatic child."

**DEPUTY PROSECUTOR KIM FARR:** "A story of trust and love; twisted love and violated trust."