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Documents: Camas woman accused of killing husband suspected an affair

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Stephanie "Sam" Westby makes a first appearance Sept. 17 in Clark County Superior Court on suspicion of first-degree domestic violence murder in the slaying of her husband, 51-year-old Joseph Westby. Sam Westby, who posted bail and appeared out of custody Friday, entered a not-guilty plea to the charge. (Amanda Cowan/The Columbian)

A woman accused of killing her husband had apparently learned he was having an affair and planned to confront him about it before she shot him, according to new information released in court documents.

Stephanie “Sam” Westby, 47, is facing a charge of first-degree domestic violence murder in the Sept. 15 slaying of her husband, 51-year-old Joseph Westby, at their Camas residence. She previously posted bail and appeared out of custody Friday to enter a not-guilty plea in Clark County Superior Court. Trial is scheduled for April 20.

Sam Westby told both 911 dispatchers and investigators that her husband attacked her, and she thought he was going to kill her, court records show. Her attorney, Steve Thayer, said at her first court appearance that she was acting in “lawful self-defense.”

However, an amended probable cause affidavit sheds new light on what transpired before the shooting.

Sam Westby’s best friend contacted investigators two days after the shooting and said she spoke to her friend about an hour before Joseph Westby was killed. Sam Westby told her she discovered the day before that Joseph Westby was having an affair and that she wanted a divorce. She found “provocative pictures and text messages on his phone, and was going to confront him that evening,” the affidavit reads.

The couple’s teenage children also told investigators their parents were having marital issues and that their mother had asked them to leave the house that evening, court records say.

Their 18-year-old son said his father wanted to get an apartment to have space. Investigators later learned that Joseph Westby had rented a place in Washougal. He signed the paperwork, picked up his keys and started moving in earlier that weekend, according to the amended probable cause affidavit.

But at 8:21 p.m. Sept. 15, police, fire and medical crews were dispatched to 19408 S.E. 42nd Circle. Sam Westby told an emergency dispatcher: “My husband and I just had a big fight ... I thought he was going to kill me and I shot him,” court records state. “I think he’s dead,” she added.

Throughout the 911 call, she was hysterical and crying, and was often inaudible, the affidavit says.

A Vancouver police officer responded, contacted her in front of the home and placed her in handcuffs. Joseph Westby was found dead inside.

When investigators tried to interview Sam Westby, she said, “I don’t want to say anything without representation,” according to the affidavit. Still distraught, she said her chest hurt and requested medical aid.

Investigators say there was no record of police calls to the couple’s address. According to the Westbys’ children, there was no history of domestic violence in the home, and they said “any type of violence would be out of character for either Sam or Joe,” the affidavit reads.

In May, the couple started having marital issues, however. Sam Westby was depressed, and the marriage had been “in a constant state of turmoil since,” according to the court document.

The couple's son told investigators his mother asked him to leave the house before the shooting. He said he didn't find that odd because his parents kept their fighting discreet, and he "knew this meant they were going to argue," the affidavit reads.

But the couple's 16-year-old daughter said she asked her mother if she could go to her boyfriend's house and found it odd that she said yes without an argument, court records say. The original probable cause affidavit incorrectly stated that Sam Westby suggested her daughter stay the night there.

Investigators said that when they searched the couple's home, they found it to be neat and orderly. "There were no overt signs normally associated with a physical altercation. There was no broken or damaged furniture or personal belongings," the affidavit reads.

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