

a sister in SUBURBIA

— BY HOLLIS GILLESPIE —

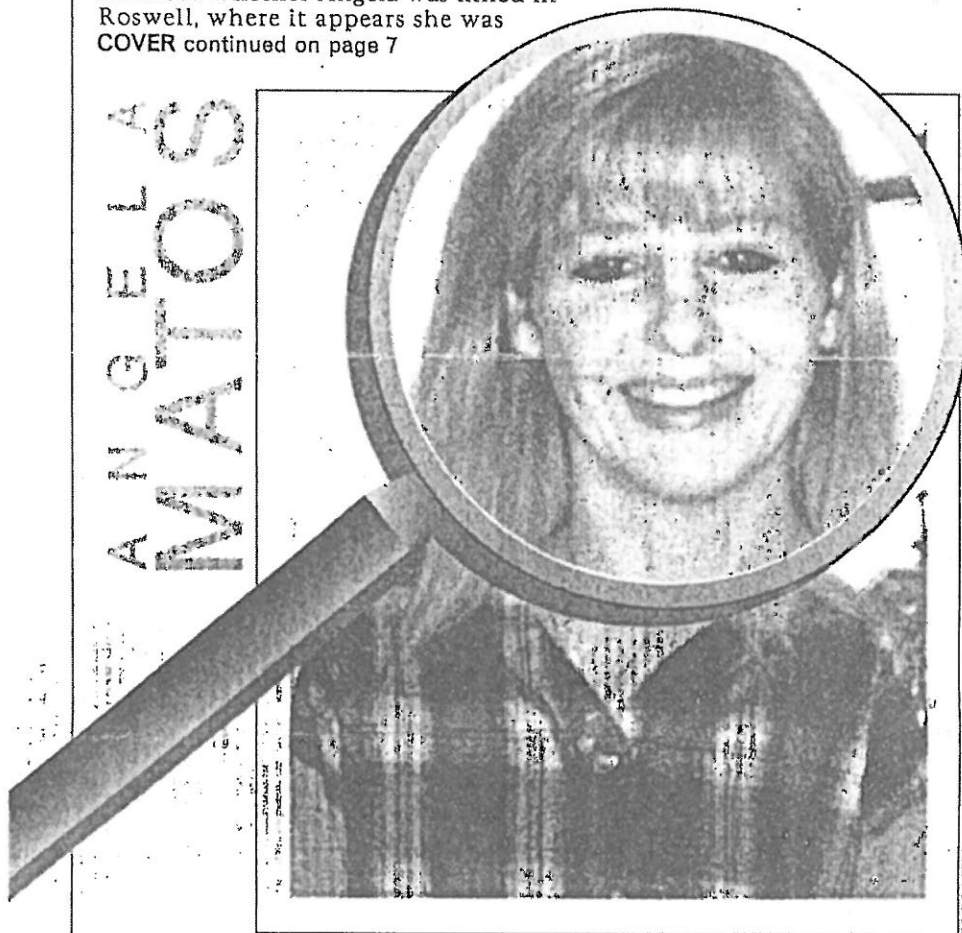
THIS WEEK MARKS ONE MONTH since a 30-year-old Roswell mother named Angela Matos, who had been missing since the day before Christmas Eve, was found. Her body was discovered behind an Alpharetta strip mall by a store owner. She had been strangled. The store owner told the media he was drawn to the spot by a glimpse of bright clothing he could see through the woods. He said he stopped short when he discovered that those clothes contained a dead woman, her blond hair rustling in the breeze, her red, manicured nails glistening in the sun.

Police were called, and the word went out: A woman fitting Angela's description had been found. A crowd of family and friends gathered in the strip mall's parking lot as investigators collected evidence before removing the body. The mourners also included strangers — people in the community who had bonded because of a face on a flyer, a heart-shaped face with uncommonly large eyes. It was the face of a beautiful mother, a sister in suburbia, a victim of murder.

"That's what's so scary," said Joanne Boo, an Alpharetta resident who performed volunteer work with Angela at the South Cherokee Recreation Center. "Most of us here are suburban moms, we have nice homes, and we do all the right thing. It's pretty scary to us that this happened to someone so close to us and so much like us. Shocking, is what it is."

Yes, shocking. Murder in north Fulton is rare, and when it does happen it usually becomes a focus of curiosity and fear for surrounding residents. One reason for that is the rarity of random killings in the north metro area. In 1995, there were no homicides in Roswell, Ga. But that could change, because it has yet to be disclosed whether Angela was killed in Roswell, where it appears she was

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abducted, or in Alpharetta, where she was ultimately discovered.

"It's progressing," said Roswell Police Chief Ed Williams of Angela's case. "Finding the body was a major break for us," now it's a matter of processing the evidence, he finished.

Detectives in both Roswell and Alpharetta are tight-lipped about any leads in the case. Alpharetta police Det. Wes Vrendenburgh had little more to say about the case than, "the investigation is still going strong, but nothing is reportable at this time."

Roswell police Det. Barry Evans, who is investigating the murder along with Vrendenburgh, said the case is developing "painfully slow, but we're still making progress. We have some of the picture, but not all of the picture."

When it comes to the victim, though, Evans didn't hold back. "I tell you," he said, "nobody has anything bad to say about this lady. She didn't have any enemies. She was just a charming person."

Dan Carmichael, who also volunteered with Angela at the recreation center, said, "Angela had a welcoming, comforting smile. When I heard she was missing, I was hoping it was just a miscommunication, that somehow everything could be explained and that she would be coming back. But as time went by, we knew it was more than that. She would never have left her children during the holidays, not on her own will."

Carmichael's most vivid memories of Angela are of a night less than two months prior to her disappearance, when Angela's cheerleading squad of 8- and 9-year-old girls won first place after a grueling competition at the North Georgia Youth Cheerleading Conference.

"I was the president, and I knew the results ahead of time, and she knew I knew," Carmichael said, chuckling softly at the memory of Angela's face beaming at him from the field below, eager for a sign of how her squad's performance fared. "She looked up at me, and I smiled at her. She probably knew then, but once she really won, she had the biggest smile of excitement on her face that you could ever see. She was so proud of the children she coached. They worked so hard all year."

Perhaps it's the victim's bond with the community that makes it common for suburban murder cases to garner such high-profile attention. Another reason could be this: Absent the random-murder factor found in the inner city, suburban killings often come with a story. Evidence of this can be found in cases like the Sarah Tokars murder, in which the Cobb County mother was shot in the face in front of her children. Her husband, Frederick Tokars, was charged with ordering her assassination. Another is the case of college student Andrew DeYoung, again in Cobb County, convicted of slaughtering his parents and younger sister for a meager sum of insurance money. And then there was Gwinnett County's Kenny Hardwick, who, after leading the community on a parade in search for his missing baby daughter, finally led police to her shallow grave on a barren land parcel.

Suburban cases such as these illustrate the difference between a random killing in a city atmosphere, and a murder with a history, one that includes meditation of some kind, which is often the case

behind killings in suburban areas.

"This is not like Los Angeles, where (murder) is an everyday occurrence," said Evans. "Here, it's different."

A bizarre twist in the Angela Matos case is that the store owner who discovered her body, Anas Daker, is the father of a teenage suspect in another suburban

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murder case of some notoriety. Waseem Daker, 18, was arrested in last year's stabbing death of Delta flight attendant Karmen Smith in Cobb County. Presently, the younger Daker is awaiting trial.

As for Angela, the truth behind her murder is still to be learned. Angela's estranged husband, Carlos Matos, was subject to public criticism by some in the two months before her body was found over his perceived lack of participation in efforts to find his wife. Tammy Cobern, Angela's sister, said she found Carlos' behavior "baffling."

"There has been no help from him," Cobern said of Carlos back during the searches for her sister. "Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

On the night she disappeared, Angela was last heard from when she spoke to friends on the telephone from her mother's home on Hembree Road in Roswell. Angela's two children, ages 5 and 9, were with Carlos for a weekend visit. On the

morning of Dec. 23, Angela's mother, Blonnie Summerour, returned to find her daughter's car still parked in the driveway, the door to the house had been forcibly opened and the house had been ransacked. There was no sign of Angela.

The following New Year's weekend, Roswell police searched Carlos' home and car. What they found, if anything, has not been divulged. In a domestic incident last spring, police arrested Carlos for allegedly attempting to enter a neighbor's house where Angela was said to be seeking refuge. When he was refused access to the house, Carlos allegedly wielded a gun, though no gun was found when police arrested him.

Police spoke briefly to Carlos on the day his wife was reported missing. Shortly after, Carlos retained the counsel of one of Atlanta's most recognizable defense attorneys, Jerry Froelich. Since then, Carlos' participation in the investigation has been described by police as "guarded." Carlos Matos has not been charged by police with any crime, nor have police named him as a suspect in Angela's murder.

"My client has an air-tight alibi," Froelich said last week. "(The police) know that. He has told them where he was, who was with him, and it has checked out 100 percent. There is no physical evidence that connects him to this crime, and (the police) should be looking for other people, and I hope that's what they're doing."

As counsel to Frederick Tokars, Froelich's name is regularly peppered throughout local media reports, and he is often quoted as an authority in local stories about legal cases of national prominence, such as the O.J. Simpson circus. In short, Froelich is shrewd, irreverent and unafraid of public opinion — a formidable opponent for any prosecution team.

"Unfortunately, our society perceives that if you're charged, you're guilty," Froelich said. "The press jumps to conclusion, and the public jumps to conclusions. God forbid your relative is murdered, because you're going to be suspected, particularly if it's a wife or a husband who has been murdered. The police immediately look at the surviving spouse."

Detective Evans bristled at Froelich's assertion that Carlos has an "air-tight alibi" that checks out. "That's something for the courts to decide," said the detective. "Other than that, I have no comment."

While performing an investigation Evans continued, "It's not my job to prove someone guilty. It's my job to find all the facts and present them to the court. We're the fact finders. When you have the opportunity, you gather as much evidence as you can."

And so it has been one month since Angela's body was discovered, and police have yet to name a suspect. Some observers ask whether officials may be dragging their feet?

"People are supportive. Nobody is trying to hurry us," said Evans. "The courts are going to rule on how the evidence stacks up. If the jury acquits, that's your only chance. You can't try that person again for that crime with that evidence. So I think people want us to be careful, to be as meticulous as we can about this."