

## **Newlywed stabbed to death hid wedding from family**

*By Becky Schlikerman, Carlos Sadovi and Steve Schmadeke, Chicago Tribune reporters*

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The last time her family saw Estrella Carrera, she had just gotten married to the father of her youngest child.

They started worrying the next day, Saturday, when the 26-year-old Carrera failed to pick up the child, a 2-year-old boy, and her 9-year-old daughter. On Sunday, a sister called police.

Officers arriving at Carrera's apartment in Burbank found her dead of stab wounds in a dry bath tub. She was still wearing her wedding dress. Authorities said they believe the slaying originated from a domestic dispute, but they would not elaborate. No one was in custody Monday, police said.

"We never thought this would happen. She was a strong woman. ... She loved her kids," said Carrera's cousin Jaime Lopez, 27. "Reality still hasn't hit me."

Carrera had gotten married to the father of her son Friday but told few people, according to another cousin, Sandy Lopez.

Carrera called Sandy Lopez, 30, on Friday, sounding happy and inviting her to a party. But she said nothing about a wedding.

"She didn't want to tell me she had gotten married," said Sandy Lopez, who did not attend the party. "She didn't tell anybody besides her father the day before."

Carrera and the man had had an on-and-off relationship for about three years, according to relatives. The Tribune is not naming him because he has not been charged with a crime. Attempts to reach him or his relatives Monday were unsuccessful.

Jaime Lopez said Carrera called other relatives to invite them to the party Friday. She had planned a party on a bus, and the group may have gone to a bar or a club. Relatives last saw Carrera about 2 a.m. Saturday, a source said.

"This just happened out of nowhere," Jaime Lopez said of the wedding. "It was so fast I couldn't even make it to the celebration."

Carrera left her children with her father. When she failed to check in or pick them up, relatives went to her apartment Saturday and knocked on the door but got no answer, Jaime Lopez said. Her car was not parked outside, she said.

The cousins said Carrera was a strong, independent woman who worked as a Spanish-language translator for a social welfare agency.

"She was a beautiful mother, person, sister," Sandy Lopez said.

Carrera and her 30-year-old boyfriend from the Southwest Side of Chicago applied for a marriage license May 2, authorities said.

Carrera did not yet have a marriage certificate on file, according to the Cook County clerk's office.

On Monday, friends and family gathered and grieved at Carrera's father's home in Chicago's Marquette Park neighborhood.

Jason Tokarczyk, 24, a Burbank neighbor, said Carrera lived in her apartment for three or four months and he would see her with her young son. He said Carrera was very quiet, except for the occasional goodbye or hello.

"She was quiet as a mouse," Tokarczyk said.

About a month ago, she used his phone to call a locksmith after she was locked out of her home. He last saw her Thursday or Friday and did not see her in a wedding dress.

"I was shocked out of my mind to hear something had happened to her," Tokarczyk said.

Neighbor David Raska, 20, said Carrera's death was surreal.

"You see this sort of thing in the movies. You never expect it to happen next door," he said.

The death is being investigated by the South Suburban Major Crimes Task Force, police said.

Tribune reporter Will Lee and freelance reporter Joseph Ruzich contributed.

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