

Homicide

Tuesday, November 14, 1978

VICTIM(S):

SUSPECT(S):

Sam Melena

Lawrence Eugene Todd

Vicki Locklin

Wednesday, November 15, 1978 – Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph – Page A1, Column 1

2 Suspects Sought in Slaying of 83-Year-Old Grocer

A frail 83-year-old Colorado Springs grocer was stabbed to death Tuesday during an apparent robbery of his small neighborhood grocery store.

Police immediately launched an unsuccessful door-to-door search for the suspects believed to be a 19-year-old AWOL Fort Carson soldier and his wife who lived within a block of the store for the past two weeks.

Colorado Springs police and other state and local law enforcement agencies were continuing the investigation Wednesday.

Sam Melena, 83, part-owner of the Rio Grande Grocery & Market, 320 South Conejos, was pronounced dead at St. Francis Hospital at 1:33 p.m., suffering from a stab wound in the chest. His wife, Rose, 75, was listed in fair condition today, suffering from wounds she sustained in the incident when she was struck on the head with an unknown object, police said.

The robbery and murder was discovered after Melena's son, Rudy, saw the suspects run from the back door of the combination residence-grocery shortly after noon, police said.

The younger Melena, who is a board member of the Colorado Springs Housing Authority, said his father filled in for him at the store each day during the lunch hour.

When police arrived they found Melena and his wife lying on the living room floor of their home adjoining the store. Although it was not determined how much money was taken, police surmised it was a small sum.

About 20 police officers, including the heavily-armed tactical enforcement unit, cordoned off a square-block area surrounding Melena's store and commenced a door-to-door search of the dilapidated residences, many of which were abandoned.

The neighbors, meanwhile, huddled together in their homes barricading themselves from the freezing cold and fear that the murderer was still at large and perhaps hiding in the neighborhood.

The search later expanded when the suspects were not found.

Police described the suspects as a black male, weighing 140 to 150 pounds, with short hair and wearing a grey sweater and grey pants. The white woman has frizzy red hair and stands about 5-feet, 10-inches tall, according to police.

Although the suspected couple had moved into the neighborhood only about two weeks ago, they were well known to those living there. "They used to come by here all the time asking for food and cigarettes," said Henrietta Parrish, who lives two doors from the grocery store.

"Everyone knew them. They used to go begging door-to-door. They constantly wanted to use the phone," said another neighbor who asked not to be identified.

And a third neighbor, Elmer Braden, said he loaned the male suspect 20 cents to make a telephone call minutes before the murder. The only pay telephone in the area was at Melena's store.

In contrast, Melena was well-liked and respected by his neighbors who called him "a gently, easy-going and nice guy."

He moved to Colorado Springs from Mexico and opened the small grocery store in 1937, his son said Tuesday night.

It was the first mark of trouble in the store's 41-year existence, Melena said, and he doubted that his father put up a struggle with the killer.

"We had discussed it before and we decided the money wasn't worth that much," Melena said. He said the store rarely had much money on hand, "we just barely made a living."

For the most part, the elderly Melena had retired, his son said. "He would help out during lunch time between 12 and one. It gave him something to do instead of just sitting around."

Thursday, November 16, 1978 – Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph – Page A1, Column 3 – By Rick Nelson

Warrants Issued in Grocery Death

First-degree murder warrants were issued Wednesday for an AWOL 19-year-old Fort Carson soldier and his female teenager companion suspected of fatally stabbing an 83-year-old grocer during a robbery of a small neighborhood grocery store Tuesday.

Lawrence Eugene Todd and Vicki Locklin, 19, who lived together at 310½ South Conejos Street – within a block of the grocery – were named in warrants accusing them of first-degree murder and aggravated robbery.

The murder parallels a less violent 1976 slaying in California for which two of Todd's brothers were convicted.

Todd and Ms. Locklin were named by police as suspects in the fatal stabbing of Sam Melena, part-owner of the Rio Grande Grocery & Market, 320 South Conejos Street. Melena was stabbed once in the chest and twice in the back.

Melena's wife of 52 years, Rose, 75, remained in satisfactory condition at St. Francis Hospital Wednesday night, suffering from a concussion, disorientation and shock after she was struck on the head with an unknown object.

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Police Lieutenant Les Davis said Wednesday afternoon that no concrete leads as to the suspect's whereabouts have surfaced. The manhunt has been expanded throughout the western United States, police said.

Army records show that Todd, of Visalia, California, has been living in Colorado Springs since receiving his first military assignment at Fort Carson August 16. He is a private in the 10th Infantry Division, serving as a rifleman, but has not reported for duty since last Thursday. Before joining the Army, Todd was a national Guardsman in California.

Todd has an extensive criminal record dating back dating back to his days as a youngster in his hometown in central California's San Joaquin Valley.

Between 1972 and 1974, he was convicted and served time as a juvenile for numerous charges including assault with a deadly weapon, disturbing the peace, resisting arrest, burglary and petty theft, according to sources close to California law enforcement.

Ms. Locklin, of nearby Puxley, California, was involved in less serious incidents but was adjudicated a runaway and a "juvenile beyond control," sources said.

Todd's family was described by Visalia Police as "notorious."

Two of his older brothers, Dennis, 20, and Jerry, 21, were convicted for the 1976 murder of a 37-year-old Visalia man during a robbery of his home. Hugh Perry, bound and gagged during the robbery, died of suffocation after choking on his false teeth.

Visalia police Lieutenant Dale Treece said the entire family "is known" to local authorities, while other sources said seven of Todd's brothers have had brushes with the law.

Although Todd and Ms. Locklin had lived at the Conejos Street address for only the past two weeks – their previous Colorado Springs address is not known – many of their affairs were well-known to their neighbors.

According to a Colorado Springs police report filed five hours after the murder, Ms. Locklin is the prime suspect in an apparently unrelated crime – the theft last week of \$65 worth of food stamps from the woman who lives in the apartment above the pair.

After Ms. Locklin attempted to cash the checks at Melena's store, a man identified as "the owner of the store" informed the victim, Gayle Braden, of the theft, the report says.

Ms. Braden said Tuesday that Ms. Locklin, returned \$11 worth of the food stamps after Mrs. Braden confronted her with the theft.

Henrietta Parrish, who lives two doors from Melena's store, said the couple told her they have a 4-month-old child living with Todd's parents in California.

Several neighbors said the couple often went door-to-door, sometimes in their bare feet, borrowing food, cigarettes and money.

The couple's landlady, Susie Perkins, said Ms. Locklin approached her last week and asked to borrow \$40, after saying earlier she had just bought a television and stereo.

"She said she didn't have a bite of food in the house," Mrs. Perkins said of Ms. Locklin. "She said that one lady had given her a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and that was all she had to eat that day."

Unconfirmed reports said two people matching the descriptions of Todd and Ms. Locklin were seen near Interstate 25, which is only blocks from the grocery, shortly after the murder. The reports said a man gave the couple a ride to the Garden of the Gods Road.

Friday, November 17, 1978 – Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph – Page A1, Column 1 – By Rick Nelson

Two Are Arrested in Grocery Murder

A 19-year-old AWOL Fort Carson soldier and his teenage girlfriend were arrested in Utah Thursday and charged with the robbery and murder of an elderly Colorado Springs grocer earlier this week.

Lawrence E. Todd and Vicki Locklin, both 19, were arrested by the Utah Highway Patrol after they were picked up by a truck driver while hitchhiking on Interstate 70, about 75 miles from the Colorado border, apparently on their way toward their California homes.

The arrest ended a 46-hour search for the couple, who were charged with the fatal stabbing of Sam Melena, 83, part-owner of the Rio Grande Grocery & Market, 320 South Conejos Street – just doors away from the couple's apartment at 310½ South Conejos Street.

Melena's wife Rose, 75, remained in satisfactory condition at St. Francis Hospital Thursday night, suffering from a concussion, shock and disorientation after she was hit on the head with a blunt instrument.

Neither Todd nor Ms. Locklin resisted the arrest, at about 10:2- a.m. near Green River, Utah, troopers said. It was several hours before Colorado Springs police were certain of the arrested pair's identities.

They were not armed when arrested and carried nothing – including no identification or money – except the clothes on their backs, said Charles Weber, one of the arresting officers.

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"They seemed like anybody else," said trucker Dale Lang, who picked up the couple at Mack, small town about 35 miles west of Grand Junction, on I-70.

Lang, 22, said the couple rode with him in the front seat of his five-ton six-wheeler, the girl in the middle, for about two hours. When Lang, hauling epoxy and resin for Celtitle, Inc., of Grand Junction, stopped at a gas station at Crescent Junction, the pair – who had told him they had been seeking a ride since Wednesday night – got out to buy some candy bars, he said.

He speculated that somebody at the station connected the pair with reports of the murder suspects being sought, and thus notified police.

"At about Green River, Utah, the state patrol came up behind my truck, like it was for a routine weight check, and pulled me over," said Lang. "But instead of coming to me, they used a bullhorn and told me to get out and come back to them."

When the apprehensive driver complied, troopers searched him and then told him his riders were suspected killers.

"They used the bullhorn to tell them to get out of the truck with their hands up, and they did," without resistance, said Lang.

The Grand Junction resident said the delay lasted only about 15 minutes and he was on his way again, though shaken by the experience.

"It sure taught me a lesson – I ain't never gonna pick up hitchhikers anymore," he declared, adding that he didn't speak to the pair again after police took them in to custody.

Two Colorado Springs police detectives flew to Utah Thursday afternoon to interview the couple. If the suspects waive extradition, they could be returned here within a week, Captain Vic Morris said. Otherwise, extradition proceedings could take up to two months, he said.

The case will probably be presented to the El Paso County Grand Jury next week, Morris said.

Weber said he was first alerted by a police radio broadcast that a black truck out of Grand Junction had picked up a pair of hitchhikers matching the suspects' description.

A witness had seen the couple enter the truck and called authorities, Colorado Springs police said.

Weber said the couple told him they were headed for Todd's hometown of Visalia, California. Todd and Ms. Locklin, wearing stocking caps, ski sweaters and pants when arrested, and did not appear to be tired," the trooper said.

Earlier Thursday, police surmised the couple had left Colorado Springs for California.

The couple had been last sighted north of the city shortly after the murder Tuesday afternoon.

Police questioned a local motorist who said he gave the couple a ride on Interstate 25, just blocks from the murder scene, shortly after noon Tuesday, dropping them off at Garden of the Gods Road.

Police initially thought the couple would be easily spotted because of their uncommon appearance. Todd is a slim Black man of medium height, Ms. Locklin a tall white woman with frizzy red hair and freckles.

Todd has been living in Colorado Springs for the past three months after receiving his first military assignment at Fort Carson. As a youngster, he compiled an extensive criminal record and served time for several juvenile offenses including assault with a deadly weapon, resisting arrest and burglary, sources in his hometown said.

Ms. Locklin of nearby Puxley, California, was adjudicated a youngster "beyond control" by a California juvenile court, California sources said.

Melena, who had operated a small neighborhood grocery for the past 41 years, was stabbed once in the chest and twice in the back. His son Rudy, who saw the suspects run from the back of the combination residence grocery, discovered the body.

He said the cash register contained less than \$20 before the robbery.

Friday, November 17, 1978 – Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph – Page A4, Column 1

Samuel 'Sam' Melena

Services will be at 7:30 p.m. today at the Swan Funeral Home for Samuel "Sam" Melena, 320 South Conejos Street, who died here Tuesday. The Reverend Jose Ortiz and the Reverend Dr. Willard Norton will officiate. Burial will be at 10 a.m. Saturday at Evergreen Cemetery.

Born February 21, 1895, in Santiago, Michoacan, Mexico, Mr. Melena had been forced into the military service with the Mexican army when he was 14, and in 1910 came to Colorado. A self-taught man, he furthered his education by taking correspondence courses, taught Spanish lessons at the Old YMCA, and also instructed in music. At the time of his death he operated a neighborhood grocery store on Conejos Street.

Previously, he had been a miner in Georgetown, worked for the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad and at a steel mill in Pueblo, was a rancher in Walsenburg and in Trinidad, was a coal miner with Pikeview Mine and worked at the Golden Cycle mill.

He was married January 8, 1925, in Colorado Springs.

Mr. Melena was a member of Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce, the Conejos Neighborhood Improvement Organization during the 1950s, Alanzia Espano-Americans and was a past board member of Chadborn Spanish Mission.

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He is survived by his wife, Rosa Melena; a daughter Teresa Luque of Colorado Springs; two sons, Ismael Melena of Denver and Rudolph Melena of Colorado Springs; eight grandchildren; two great-grand daughters and several cousins and nieces.

Saturday, November 19, 1978 – Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph – Page A1, Column 1

Murder Suspects Waive Extradition

Two suspects arrested Thursday in Utah in connection with Tuesday's slaying and robbery of an 83-year-old Colorado Springs grocer have waived extradition and will be returned here within three days, Colorado Springs police said.

Lawrence E. Todd, and Vicki Locklin, 19, were arrested by the Utah Highway Patrol about 10:20 a.m. after a citizen spotted them hitchhiking on Interstate 70. Troopers made the arrests without incident after stopping a truck near Green River, about 75 west of the Colorado border.

The two apparently were headed for their homes near Visalia, California.

Miss Locklin will be flown to Colorado Springs today by detectives Joseph Kenda and Luis Velez, Captain Vic Morris said. Todd will be returned here Tuesday by El Paso County Sheriff's deputies, Morris added.

Warrants for first-degree murder and armed robbery were issued for the couple Wednesday in connection with the slaying of Sam Melena, part-owner of the Rio Grande Grocery and Market, 320 South Conejos Street, about 12:30 p.m. Tuesday.

The El Paso County Grand Jury will review the case Wednesday evening, and indictments are expected to be returned Thursday, authorities said.

Sunday, April 1, 1979 – Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph - Page A1, Column 4 – By Joyce Trent

Todd Found Guilty In Murder of Grocer

Lawrence Todd was convicted Saturday morning of first-degree murder in the stabbing slaying of grocer Sam Melena.

Todd, 19, also was convicted of third-degree assault on Melena's wife, Rosa; armed robbery; crime of violence and conspiracy.

A District Court jury of 11 women and one man deliberated 11 hours over two days before returning the verdict shortly before noon.

Todd took the verdict calmly. He will be sentenced to life imprisonment for the crime. Sentencing on that and the other charges will occur April 20.

Melena, 83, operated with other members of his family a neighborhood grocery store at 720 South Conejos Street. Todd and his girlfriend, Vicki Locklin, had moved into an apartment at 310½ South Conejos Street a short time before the November 14 slaying.

Between \$25 and \$30 was taken from the cash register in the robbery that led to the murder.

A man who lived in Todd's apartment had testified Todd borrowed 20 cents from him to make a phone call on November 14, corroborating Ms. Locklin's testimony that a telephone call was the ruse the couple used to enter the store.

Mrs. Melena, who was beaten in the robbery, testified that her assailant was a black man and that he was accompanied by a red-haired girl, a description fitting Todd and Ms. Locklin. She also said it was the same pair to whom her son, Rudy, had rented an apartment.

Rudy Melena positively identified Todd and Ms. Locklin as the couple he chased across the back yard of the grocery store after seeing them from the window of his home while he was eating lunch. He gave chase, then returned to the store and found his parents on the floor, badly injured.

Todd and Ms. Locklin were later arrested in Utah when authorities stopped a truck in which they had hitched a ride. Ms. Locklin later said they had been heading to California.

For her testimony, Vicki Locklin, who also is charged with the murder, will be allowed to plead guilty to being an accessory, a crime carrying up to 10 years confinement.

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SUSPECT(S):

Sam Melena

Lawrence Eugene Todd

Vicki Locklin

Sunday, April 22, 1979 – Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph - Page A4, Column 2

Lawrence Todd Gets Life Prison Sentence

Lawrence Todd, convicted of first-degree murder of grocer Sam Melena, was sentenced to life imprisonment Friday in District Court.

Todd, 19, had no comment when sentence was pronounced. He also received terms of 20 to 30 years for armed robbery, up to eight years for conspiracy and a year for third-degree assault.

Meanwhile the plea of his companion, 18-year-old Vicki Locklin, who was the key witness against him was postponed a week to complete reports. In exchange for her testimony she will be allowed to plead guilty to accessory in the November 14 crime.

Melena, 83, was stabbed to death during a robbery at his small neighborhood grocery at 720 South Conejos Street. His wife, Rosa, 75, who was attacked when she came into the room, survived.

According to testimony in the trial, Todd planned and executed the robbery because he was tired of the Army and wanted to return to California. He sent Ms. Locklin with whom he was living, to case the place and then both entered. Ms. Locklin said she did not injure anyone.

Shortly before sentencing Friday, District Judge George Gibson denied a request for a new trial.

Friday, April 27, 1979 – Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph - Page A4, Column 2

Locklin Pleads Guilty

Nineteen-year-old Vicki Locklin pleaded guilty Friday to accessory to the first-degree murder of grocer Sam Melena and was sentenced to an indeterminate term not to exceed eight years in the Colorado Women's Correctional Institution.

Saturday, April 28, 1979 – Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph - Page A8, Column 3 – By Joyce Trent

Vicki Locklin Enters Guilty Plea

Nineteen-year-old Vicki Locklin pleaded guilty Friday to being an accessory to the first-degree murder of grocer Sam Melena, and was sentenced to an indeterminate term, not to exceed eight years, in the Colorado Women's Correctional institution.

The charge was reduced from first-degree murder in return for her testimony against Lawrence Todd, not serving a life sentence for first-degree murder in the November 8 slaying.

When Judge George Gibson asked why she was entering the plea, the red-haired Ms. Locklin sniffed into a handkerchief and after a long hesitation agreed with her attorney that it was because she had faced a first-degree murder charge.

Melena, 83, was stabbed to death and his wife Rose, 75, was assaulted during a robbery that was to have given Todd enough money to return to his home in California. Ms. Locklin had testified that she cased the grocery and went with Todd to the store, but took no part in the attacks. The pair was arrested later in Utah, where they had hitchhiked.

In the sentencing hearing in District Court Friday, defense attorney Frank Simons said Ms. Locklin "had absolutely no idea when she walked in that store that what ended up happening would happen."

He described his client as a "relatively naïve, unsophisticated, passive and dependent person," who was easily led by stronger personalities such as Todd.

"She became caught up in something over which she had no control and which was not of her choosing. It must have been a nightmare for her," Simons said.

He said she had spent four years in a mental institution and was uneducated. (Ms. Locklin has a fifth-grade education.)

Simons objected to a probation report that stated that because of her lack of education and job skills, she should be sent to prison because there are no facilities for her here.

Assistant District Attorney Ronald Rowan called on the court to imprison the young woman because with the reduced charge, she "already has had every ounce of consideration she should have."

Judge Gibson said perhaps a prison could provide some of the understanding of the "morals and ethics of this society that she lacks."