

How Could She Do It?

Cops say Lisa Montgomery killed Bobbie Jo Stinnett for the baby in her womb. But why?

LISA MONTGOMERY
claimed she was pregnant



BOBBIE JO STINNETT
was overjoyed to be expecting her baby



Five days after Bobbie Jo Stinnett's brutal murder, hundreds of her Skidmore, Mo., neighbors lined up in a mile-long procession to bury her. Her husband, Zeb Stinnett, 23, and mother, Becky Harper, led the cortege, but the whole town seemed to share their hurt. Even her pastor faltered on the pulpit. "This is something none of us can begin to understand," said the Reverend Harold Hamon. "I've been a preacher for 50 years, and I've seen some terrible things. But this has got to be the apex."

Indeed, the nation was stunned by the horror of the crime for which Lisa Montgomery, 36, was arrested. Police say that on the afternoon of Dec. 16, Montgomery came to Bobbie Jo's home and strangled the eight-



VICTORIA JO STINNETT
survived in good health

months-pregnant woman, then cut the live child from the dead mother's body. Montgomery, who knew Stinnett from the dog-show circuit, then fled back to

Kansas, telling her husband, Kevin, 44, she had just given birth to their child. The crime sparked an Amber Alert and a states-wide manhunt and devastated two families. "Lisa Montgomery has hell to pay," says Hamon. "Bobbie Jo and Zeb had all those plans to live happily ever after—so much hope for the future—and now that's all been wasted and lost forever."

Soft-spoken Bobbie Jo, 23, was an honor student and cheerleader at Nodaway-Holt High School and loved ani-

mals. She began breeding rat terriers after graduation, becoming a favorite at dog shows and on rat terrier message boards. "She and her husband, Zeb, were country people who were very happy, and Bobbie was doing what she absolutely loved," says fellow breeder Pat Kennedy. Bobbie Jo and Zeb, a factory worker, had known each other since grade school and married in April 2003. She was thrilled at being pregnant, says Zeb's grandmother Jo Ann Stinnett. "What's that?" I asked her [pointing to Bobbie Jo's rising stomach]. She said "That's our little girl." They were ecstatic."

Montgomery, who lived in Melvern, Kans., had two things

in common with Bobbie Jo: She bred rat terriers and also wanted a baby. Although she already had four children with her first husband, Carl Boman, 43, "she was desperate to please Kevin and have a baby with him," says Melvern pastor Mike Wheatly. Though Boman told investigators his ex-wife had her



Bobbie Jo's mother found her mutilated body in a back room of this house.

Crime



Despite their grief, Bobbie Jo's grandparents Patty (right) and Gene Day hosted a dinner to mark Victoria's first Christmas.

tubes tied in 1990, Montgomery claimed to have had a miscarriage in 2003. By April, she started telling folks she was once again pregnant, even wearing maternity clothes and explaining her flat stomach by saying she never showed much during her pregnancies. Some local residents say they were skeptical, but the ruse fooled Kevin, her husband of four years. "He said he felt the baby kicking," says Wheatly. Montgomery discussed her pregnancy on rat terrier message boards, even saying how difficult it was to take a good photo of her dogs when she couldn't bend. Her due date, she said, was around Dec. 16.

Bobbie Jo, who also discussed her pregnancy online, apparently first met Montgomery in November 2003 at a dog show. On Dec. 15, Montgomery—using the alias Darlene Fischer—allegedly e-mailed Bobbie Jo that she was interested in buying one of her dogs. In their final exchange, Bobbie Jo typed "I've e-mailed you directions so we can meet. . . . [I] look forward to chatting with you tomorrow morning."

The next afternoon, Bobbie Jo was on the phone with her mother, but the

Stealing a Fetus

Kidnapping a child from the womb is rare, with just six U.S. cases from 1983 to 2000. While perpetrators may be psychotic, the crime requires detailed planning. "The skill set to perform a C-section is incredible," says forensic psychologist Dr. Joseph McEllistrem. Loss, say the experts, may trigger the act. "But it's not a rational thought process," says Susan Kraus, a Kansas therapist. "Montgomery constructed this huge story about being pregnant, and rather than expose the lie, she allegedly resorts to horrible violence."

conversation was cut short when a visitor arrived at Bobbie Jo's house. "I've got to go," Bobbie Jo said, according to an FBI affidavit. About an hour later Harper dropped by to discover her daughter lying in a pool of blood. Harper called 911, "terrified and screaming. She said, 'It looked like her



Bobbie Jo "knew Zeb was the one she wanted to be with," says a cousin.

intestines had exploded," says Nodaway County Sheriff Ben Espey. On the scene minutes later, a paramedic saw the umbilical cord was cut and told Espey the baby was gone. He then realized, "This lady has been murdered because someone came to get the child out of her body."

Investigators quickly mobilized. They noticed Bobbie Jo was clutching strands of blondish-brown hair in both hands and there were no signs of forced entry. They soon focused on Bobbie Jo's e-mail and traced Darlene Fischer's phone number to Kevin Montgomery. On Dec. 17, after parading the infant around Melvern with Kevin, Lisa was arrested at her home. She was charged with kidnapping across state lines resulting in murder and could face the death penalty. The baby, named Victoria Jo by her parents, was healthy. "She has big brown eyes, just like her mother," says Patty Day, Bobbie Jo's grandmother.

Kevin Montgomery sent flowers to Bobbie Jo's funeral, which drew virtually the entire town of Skidmore, and offered condolences to her family, including the baby he briefly thought was his. For now, Victoria Jo is what keeps Zeb Stinnett going. "The baby is his salvation. If he didn't have that baby, he wouldn't have any sunshine in his life at all," says Reverend Hamon. "Zeb will smile again. Bobbie Jo would want him to smile."

By Bob Meadows, Grant Pick in Melvern, Barbara Sandler and Pam Grout in Skidmore and Anne Lang in Austin