

Brazilian Police Arrest Man Who Raped and Strangled One-Year-Old Girl in Church

Contributed by Elma Lia Nascimento
Tuesday, 13 March 2007

The Brazilian police say they have solved a macabre crime involving a rapist and a one and a half year old girl, who after being raped was thrown in the baptismal font of an Adventist church in Joinville, a small town in the southern state of Santa Catarina.

Gabrielli Cristina Eichholz, was violated and strangled on March 3, during the church's Saturday services. According to authorities, the murderer is Oscar Gonçalves do Rosário, a 22-year-old jobless mason who has confessed to the crime that shocked Brazil and the world.

When arrested in Canoinhas, at 7 in the morning, while sleeping at his parents house, about 200 miles from the place where he committed the crime, Rosário didn't try to react or to escape. He has other three siblings, all of them minors. Later, in the police bureau, he said that he couldn't recall exactly what happened that day because he was drunk.

While the police had initially suspected that the murderer was someone who knew the little girl and was a church faithful many leads ended up at a dead end. Rosário was among the suspects from the start because he had arrived in December in Joinville looking for a job and had left town the same day of the crime.

Rodrigo Gusso, the police chief in charge of the investigations, informed that the suspect had been booked previously by the police for theft and was also suspect of molesting two girls who were about 9 years old. At that time, the mothers of the girls decided not to press charges and nothing was done against the offender.

Authorities say that Rosário seemed very cold and didn't show any emotion while telling his story. The mason told police that he was drunk that Saturday morning and was walking on the street when he saw the little girl by herself in the church's patio.

He said that he followed her when she went back into the temple. Police believe the rape occurred inside the men's bathroom. The man said that he didn't know the church and had no idea that the tank where he left the girl was for baptism. He thought it was just a bathtub.

Authorities are afraid somebody will try to kill Rosário before he can be brought to justice. The mason arrived at the Joinville police bureau accompanied by 20 policemen and 4 police chiefs. He left the police car wearing a hood in the middle of several hooded policemen. Fearing for his security, the police are not telling in which prison he is going to be held.

Gabrielli had been taken by relatives to the Saturday's services and left in a room to play with other children who were being overseen by church's employees. Apparently she left the room without been notice by the woman that should be caring for her.

Felipe Lemos, a church spokesman, said that all parishioners were extremely mortified: "Everybody is in shock. Nothing like that ever happened in any of our churches all around the world," he said soon after the murder.

Gabrielli's mother, Andréia Pereira Eichholz, had told reporters that she felt no hatred in her heart: "I can't understand how something like that could happen inside a church. I want to know who grabbed my daughter. I don't feel any anger or hate. I just want to understand why."

"I have no more tears," she told Joinville's newspaper, A Notícia. "They dried up. I prefer to think that my daughter drowned. It hurts less. She was a sweet girl, always smiling. Everyone was drawn to her beauty."

The mother says she allowed Gabrielli to go with her cousin and her boyfriend because the girl loved to be with them. Both have been living with Gabrielli's parents for four months. Saturday when they were leaving to the church - Andréia goes to another evangelical church, the Assembly of God - the girl started to cry to go with them. The mother saw no problem.

Márcia Machado, the cousin, informed the day after the incident: "She was going to stay with us during the services. But one of teachers asked to take her to the playing room and we authorized it."