

Murder defendants obsessed with movie

Teens talked about 'Scream' deaths prior to slaying of mother

By LINDA DEUTSCH
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The boys were obsessed with the horror movie "Scream." They talked about it many times to each other and with friends.

One of them said that the slayings depicted were "cool." And, on the way home from one of many viewings, he told a pal: "It was a perfect way to kill somebody."

Then the boys, Mario Padilla and Samuel Ramirez, began talking about real killings that would replicate those in the 1996 Wes Craven film in which teen-agers are slaughtered by killers obsessed with horror movies. A Grim Reaper costume and a voice changer are used to terrorize victims.

According to witnesses at a preliminary hearing in December 1998, the 16-year-old Mario and his 14-year-old cousin, Samuel, spoke of "doing a Scream" or "busting a Scream," terms indicating that they would duplicate the movie's mayhem.

They planned to buy costumes and a voice distorter box like the one in the film. Mario talked about going on "a killing spree."

According to the prosecution: On Jan. 13, 1998, the two boys burst into Mario's home where they grabbed Mario's mother from behind as she sat at her personal computer. With Samuel holding her down, Mario used at least four different knives and a screwdriver to stab his mother, Gina Castillo, 45 times.

The 37-year-old woman died after calling 911 and gasping out the words, "My son, he's 16, he just stabbed me. I'm bleeding. Oh, I'm bleeding."

As it turned out, there were no costumes and no voice distorter. And at the murder trial now under way in Compton Superior Court, a judge has forbidden any mention of the movies, "Scream" or "Scream 2," the sequel which opened in 1997 and became an instant box office hit.

Minimizing the volatile issue of youngsters and movie violence, Judge John Cheroske sealed all evidence, barred cameras from his courtroom and issued a gag order blocking participants from talking to the press.

Cheroske gave no public reason for his ruling, but it's unlikely to affect the outcome. The defendants, who are being tried as adults, have given authorities tape-recorded confessions. Mario admits stabbing his mother. Samuel admits holding her down. Their lawyers do not deny the pair's involvement.

"Mario Padilla killed his mother," attorney Paul Golub told jurors. "It was a brutal and horrible crime. I'm not going to sit here and say anything else."

The motive provided to jurors is vague. Deputy District Attorney Carol Rose said in opening statements that Mario was upset about being assigned chores by his mother and that he wanted to steal \$150 which was stored in a small bank beside the crib of her newborn daughter.

The Associated Press obtained the 1998 preliminary hearing transcript before it was sealed by Cheroske, and it shows that the prosecution once planned to make the trial a showcase for the effects of movie violence on teen-agers.

According to Rose, the teens planned to kill Mario's mother and stepfather and then move on to kill two girls who had been the subjects of threatening calls and letters.

Mario pleaded no-contest last week to charges of making terrorist threats against one of the girls in calls allegedly using a voice distorter.

Among the most chilling pieces of testimony at both the preliminary hearing and this week's trial was the account given by Aaron Hernandez, a friend who said he encountered Mario and Samuel at a local arcade shortly before Castillo's death.

"(Mario) said they were going to go over and kill his mom because it was a perfect day to do it," Hernandez said.

Was there further conversation?

"I was being asked to participate," Hernandez said calmly. "I said no."