

Woman

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neers, Planners and Surveyors, for 10 years.

Now friends and family remember those things about Paula instead of just thinking about her as a murder victim.

Paula was shot to death at her parents' Merry Hill home early the morning of May 25 by her estranged husband, John David "Buck" Sutton, 50, ending months

of escalating domestic violence. She was just 37 years old.

The Suttons had been a couple for 10 or 12 years, her family said, and got along well until they wed about two years ago. After the marriage, Buck Sutton became obsessively possessive. He began talking about suicide pacts and killing himself.

Paula got him to go see marriage counselors and psychologists, but he stopped going when doctors indicated he was the problem.

"She lived in fear all the time," her father said. "He (husband) could be as nice as anybody you'd

ever want to meet and then he'd just crack."

Sutton told Paula there was no need to go to the law, because it would be her word against his and no one would believe her. So she never asked for help.

By March 13, Paula couldn't take any more and moved out. She stayed with her grandfather, "T-Bud" Smithwick on Avoca Farm Road in Merry Hill and commuted to work in Greenville, NC. Rivers and Associates hired off-duty law enforcement officers to provide bodyguard services.

Her husband worked on the Pitt

Community College Police Force since 1998 and had also worked for the Pitt Sheriff's Office. He still had "buddies" working with the department, according to Paula's mother, Amelia Davenport. "And he knew every trick in the book," she added.

On April 28, Sutton resigned his job with campus security and hid in the trunk of his wife's car in Pitt County. While she was driving home to Bertie County, he pushed the back seat out and kidnapped her.

Paula drove into a service station in Stokes and screamed until

he let her go. Sutton was arrested April 29, but the same Pitt County magistrate who had married Paula and Buck said he couldn't issue charges.

Deputy Walt Stancil took the husband of Ayden, NC and another magistrate charged Buck with second degree kidnapping, assault on a female and communicating threats.

Representatives of Pitt County's Domestic Violence Program took Paula to a safe house overnight and wouldn't let her parents know where she was because they feared no one would charge the former

law enforcement officer.

District Court Judge Joe Blick set an unusually high bond at \$165,000 and signed a protective order barring Sutton from contacting his wife and carrying a weapon if he made bail.

Judge Blick claimed jurisdiction on the case so bond could not be reduced.

On May 3, Sutton's brother and others joined forces to stand the bond and he was released from custody. Sutton's "buddies" asked the brother if he intended to "let Buck rot in jail," said Amelia Davenport.

Paula was notified of the release, moved to the safety of her parents' home and still commuted to work in Greenville.

She began working with the Domestic Violence Division of the Pitt County Sheriff's Office. Two officers who tried really hard to help her were Glenn Ferrell, who heads the Domestic Violence Unit, and Stancil, who said "the buddy system doesn't work with me."

On Thursday, May 25, evidence indicates that Sutton drove to Merry Hill, parked his vehicle at a car dealership across U.S. 17 and walked to the Davenport home, where he hid in the woods just beside the house.

His wife walked out of the house just before 6:38 a.m. and got into her car, which was parked with the license toward the house because if her husband saw strange cars at her parents' house, he would get his friends in law enforcement to run the tag and get the owner's name. In fact, Paula had bought her Pontiac after the kidnapping to keep Buck from knowing what car she drove.

Evidence shows that Buck Sutton came from the woods and fired one time through the passenger window of the car with a 9 mm pistol. Officers believe the shot hit his wife because of a blood trail.

Paula managed to get the driver's side door open and ran back under the carport between her parents' van and the house, trying to get back inside the home.

Sutton ran around the front of the Pontiac and began shooting at his wife as she headed for the door. At least one shot hit the van. Paula Sutton was struck several times before she fell under the carport.

Sutton walked up to his wife and fired several more shots as she lay on the cement. Then he shot himself in the head and fell beside Paula.

The Davenports heard shots and tried to get to their daughter, but the murder/suicide was over too quickly.

Investigators said Buck Sutton, who was carrying an extra weapon, a .38 caliber, short-nose pistol, fired at his wife 10 times. A shotgun was found in his car.

Bertie Sheriff Atkins said Paula Sutton did everything right, followed all the suggestions to prevent violence and did everything possible to stay safe.

But except for keeping Sutton in jail or hiding Paula, there appears nothing else could have been done which would have prevented this tragedy.

"If anybody is willing to give up their own life, I don't know of anything that would have made any difference," Sheriff Atkins said. "It was all over in just a matter of minutes."

Paula's mother, Amelia Davenport, said she was very grateful to those who had tried to help her daughter.

"Especially Stancil, because he really tried," she said.

After the murder, flowers and plants began arriving at the Davenport home. Now those which thrive outdoors will be moved outside into a new, special garden.

"I'm going to call it Paula's bed," said her mother.

Spanish

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taught in the evenings from 5:30 p.m. until 8 p.m., Monday through Thursday evenings. Classes begin July 10 and run through Aug. 2.

The course, which is being taught by COA Spanish instructor Barbara Riccardo, will be held in at College of the Albemarle on room A-236. Pre-registration is recommended, however, you may register the first night of class if space remains available.

For more information on this course, please contact Sherry Hewitt at the COA Continuing Education office, 335-0821, ext. 2210 or ext. 2250.

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