Sour love life, child's death hint at mind of slaying suspect

BY SCOTT WILLIAMS
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GRAPEVINE — As Florence Barfield talks about her son, the anger of a mother betrayed pierces her soft, trembling voice.

"We believed in him. We tried to help him. And we found it was all a lie," says the 73-year-old widow.

Her disappointment is shared by others close to Lawrence Wilson Barfield, a man they remember as troubled but mild-mannered — not someone capable of the grisly crime with which he is charged.

Friends and relatives say that if Barfield is guilty of killing and dismembering Veronica Stone, his 21-year-old roommate, he must have suffered a mental breakdown.

They recount a series of failed relationships that he had with women and cite the accidental death of his 15-month-old daughter in 1980 as a particularly traumatic time for him.

But even those who knew Barfield when his daughter died say they are stunned by the slaying accusation.

"This is not the man I once lived with," said former wife Carla Barfield, mother of the infant girl. "If this is a different Larry, I thank the Lord I left when I did, because it could have been me."

Barfield, 38, has been charged in what Grapevine police describe as one of the most horrifying crimes in recent memory.

Stone's dismembered body, its parts in plastic bags in a closet, was found Oct. 25 in the apartment she had shared for several months with Barfield at 421 E. Worth St. Authorities said she may have been dead for a week.

The couple's living arrangement was to have been platonic, but friends said Barfield harbored romantic inclinations toward Stone and may have been spurned.

Barfield was found in the apartment with an apparently self-inflicted gunshot wound in the head. Hospitalized for several days, he is now recovering in Tarrant County Jail awaiting grand jury action later this month.

In a brief jailhouse interview Dec. 2, Barfield declined to discuss Stone's death. Sitting in a wheelchair, he appeared groggy and sluggish. At one point, he said quietly, "I've got a good family."

Florence Barfield said the family had stood behind him through a child molestation conviction in California and a more recent rape charge in Grapevine.

Now, she says, he refuses to let her visit him in jail.

"I don't want him out," she said in an interview from her home near Hot Springs, Ark. "I don't want him out on the community the way he is. I think he's gone crazy.

"When we had him, he was a sweet boy. There was no sign of this," Florence Barfield said. "Of course, kids keep things from their parents."

Asked if she believes her son is guilty, the mother referred to letters Barfield wrote after Stone's death and before he tried to kill himself.

Described as confessions and suicide notes by those who have seen them, the

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