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## A family failed

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Posted: Sunday, August 6, 2006 12:00 am

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### Suspicion swirls around family friend

*Editor's note: The following articles comprise the third installment in a three-week series on the suspicious gunshot death in 2002 of Gilroy resident Jon Robbins. Some names have been changed to protect the safety of those involved in the case. The Pinnacle will revisit the story as developments occur in the case. The first two installments of this three-part series may be viewed online at [www.pinnaclenews.com](http://www.pinnaclenews.com).*

A month after Jon Robbins died of a gunshot wound to the head – a death authorities ruled suicide – his long-time girlfriend "Debra" received the first of many threatening letters from an unknown stalker.

The first letter, received Oct. 27, 2002 appeared to be written by a woman stating "I know that you are dating my man. You better stay away from him." The letter threatened to "put a bullet between your eyes" if Debra didn't leave him alone.

"I was in great fear for my life, the life of my son and the lives of my parents, with whom I live," she wrote in a declaration to the police in March 2003.

In her grieving over Robbins – a man she had planned to spend the rest of her life with – Debra had given no thought to dating anyone. However, her work with a family-owned trucking company brought her into contact with several men who worked as truck drivers.

"I never thought I would be with anyone else," Debra had said of Robbins.

Oswaldo Gonzalez, a friend and employee, had found the first threatening letter, which he said had been stuffed into the door handle of one of her trucks. He read it before he handed it over to Debra. She met Gonzalez in 1996, when he began working at Gilroy Foods. The trucking company hauled organic waste from the plant. She had been his confidant and he told her about separating from his wife.

Debra trusted Gonzalez enough that she relied on him from time to time to pick her son up from school. He was a friend of the family who sometimes ate dinner with her and her parents.

"Oswaldo would help us out, help my family out," Debra said. "He would go the extra mile and I let him be with my son."

A week later, on Nov. 7, Gonzalez told Debra he had been held at gunpoint by unknown assailants who told him that something bad would happen to Debra's family if she didn't take heed of the first letter.

That same day while driving her son to school, the brakes failed on Debra's Chevrolet truck. Debra trusted Gonzalez to look at the truck and he reported that the brakes had, in fact, been cut. He changed the brake lines for her. The letters and threats had started to take a toll on her.

"I slept in the front room by the window with a gun at my side," Debra said. "I barely got any sleep until [the stalker] was arrested. I didn't even get to mourn Jon."

As Gonzalez had found each of the letters, sometimes seeming to go out of the way to spot them on her truck, the suspicion began to shift toward the likelihood that Gonzalez might be writing them, according to a private investigation conducted that same year.

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The letters continued – the third one blaming her for Robbins' death.

"[Jon] was my friend and he is not around us anymore because of you," the stalker wrote.

The letter warned that her mother would be hurt if she didn't stay away from two male acquaintances, but the letter writer said it was okay for Gonzalez to be around.

"I seen Oswaldo at the house. He's cool," the writer stated. "He did so much for Jon. Jon knew Oswaldo's feelings ... Don't do to him what you did to Jon."

By February 2003, Debra enlisted the help of Private Investigator Ed Elliott to verify the identity of her stalker.

"Immediately after Jon's death, I was treated rudely and with disrespect by a Gilroy Police Department investigator," she wrote in a March 14, 2003 declaration with the police. "I felt insulted and marginalized, causing me not to feel any confidence for a positive response from the police department regarding my safety..."

A further look at Debra's and Gonzalez' relationship found that he had an unhealthy obsession with her for years – and a history obsessive behavior.

In 1999, while Gonzalez worked at Gilroy Foods, he got a dove tattoo on his right arm and shoulder.

"He said I'm his [dove] because I helped him through tough times," Debra said. "He said it was about friendship."

Debra made it clear that the two were just friends and she was serious about Robbins.

"I told him to control that because we were friends and that's it," she said.

Nevertheless, the dove was the first of four tattoos Gonzalez would get in Debra's honor. The last included a tattoo asking her to marry him, according to photographs obtained by Elliot in his investigation. Through it all Debra remained friends with him though she always told him that was all there was to the relationship.

"My father came from a background of not having anything. People helped him along the way," Debra said. "So we always helped everyone we could along the way."

Gonzalez used his break-up with ex-wife to garner sympathy from Debra. But he left out many of the negative details of the relationship.

"He said his ex-wife and he had split up and he needed to talk," Debra said. "I have lots of friends I talk with when they need someone to talk to."

A 1996 Gilroy police report describes an officer response to the Gonzalez residence after he told his wife he had been beaten up. He said the suspects had stolen at least \$500 and hit him in the head with a pistol. Further investigation found little evidence of a struggle and contradictions in the statements given by Gonzalez, according to the police reports. Gonzalez maintained that he had been attacked.

Private Investigator Elliott noted in his report that Gonzalez had "faked a home invasion robbery and inflicted injuries on himself in order to win [his ex-wife's] sympathy." She filed for a restraining order against Gonzalez in January 1997 after he hid outside a local movie theater while she was out with a friend. They finalized a divorce shortly after, with the wife citing emotional abuse.

"According to [his ex-wife], Oswaldo's method of operation for asserting control is to physically attack anyone he sees as a rival to the love interest in his life," Elliott wrote. "[his ex-wife] was hoping Oswaldo would fixate on someone else and leave her alone."

Gonzalez found a new obsession in Debra, whom he confessed his love to more than once – before and after Robbins' death. In December 2000, he even bought Debra a black truck as a gift. She turned it down, saying it was inappropriate for her to accept such a gift from a friend. She bought out Gonzalez' interest in the truck and made the remaining payments herself.

"I didn't want anyone to think I was leading him on," she said.

Despite her reservations about Gonzalez, she allowed him to move into the house that had been occupied by Robbins when he said he and his father had gotten into a fight. She allowed him to stay for several days when he showed up with a black eye.

As she kept receiving letters, Gonzalez would sometimes ask her if she thought he was sending them or if he had been responsible for Robbins' death.

But she had no proof her supposed friend was the stalker until February, when she discovered a tape dispenser and a black-bound spiral notebook that she turned over to Elliott. The notebook contained impressions from some of the notes that had been written and bore the name of Gonzalez' sister.

Elliott contacted Gilroy Police Sgt. Jack Robinson about the stalking. He shared with him information from interviews with Debra, the notebook and other evidence. The police arrested Gonzalez on charges of stalking March 3, 2003.

In police interviews, when asked if he would like to marry Debra, Gonzalez said, "If she allows me. I will not force her." Throughout the interview, he maintained that he had found the letters.

When confronted with the notebook, he said he didn't know how that got there. Robinson upped the pressure and asked Gonzalez to show his tattoos.

"At this, Gonzalez appeared shocked and slowly began to remove his sweatshirt," Robinson wrote in his report. "I took photographs of Gonzalez' tattoos and told him he needed a few minutes to think about what he was going to say to me next."

Gonzalez refused to confess until police brought Debra into the interview room. He eventually admitted to writing four of the notes and cutting her brakes, though he retracted the statement with police by implying that he had only confessed for Debra's peace of mind. Police issued a

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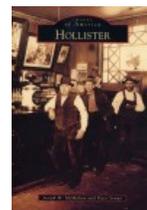


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restraining order against Gonzalez, which he apparently broke while in jail when he sent a letter to Debra. In the letter the author claimed, "There is a girl that wants to hurt you...she knows that your driver was arrested."

Gonzalez was charged with one count of felony stalking, but was never charged for breaking the restraining order or for stalking based on the March 5, 2003 letter he allegedly mailed after his arrest.

Since the stalking by Gonzalez came to light, Debra and Robbins' parents are convinced that Robbins' death was not a suicide as ruled by authorities.

In his investigation, Elliott had found what he considered ample evidence to consider Gonzalez a person of interest in Robbins death.

Gonzalez had been one of the first people to show up at the scene of the crime after Debra discovered Robbins' body – even though no one had called him.

Starting just before 5 a.m. on the morning Robbins died, Gonzalez placed 12 calls to Debra, Robbins and Debra's father – some of the calls just minutes apart.

Elliott reported that Gonzalez had seldom called Robbins or Debra's father on the weekends.

Debra's father reported that Gonzalez had called him that day and had said he was looking for Robbins because he had a buyer for a car an acquaintance was selling, according to Elliott's report. No evidence of the purposed transaction was ever found, according to Elliott.

A few weeks after Robbins' death, while Gonzalez was working on a trailer hitch of a pickup at Robbins' former residence, he found a .22 caliber semi-automatic pistol sticking out from under a toolbox. The gun, which was usually kept in the right, lower drawer of a dresser in Robbins' bedroom, had been missing since the police investigation. Debra thought the police had taken it as evidence.

"I thought the Gilroy Police Department had taken it and months later Oswald found the gun in the garage out of the case," Debra said.

Photos from the scene of the crime showed that the drawer where the .22 caliber had been was open at the time Robbins' body was discovered.

Debra told Elliott that Robbins would never have left the gun out of its case in the garage since her 11-year-old son had access to the area.

"He was a fanatic about the guns being in their right places," Debra said.

But despite pressure from the family and the conclusions drawn by Private Investigator Elliott, the Gilroy Police Department has not looked at Gonzalez as a suspect in Robbins' death. The Gilroy Police Department was not available for comment by deadline, despite numerous calls and e-mails to various department officials.

Law enforcement authorities have not revealed the whereabouts of Gonzalez since his conviction so it is unclear if he was deported to Mexico by Immigration and Naturalization Service, as some believe, or is still in the United States.

Debra has imagined the possible circumstances of Robbins' death many times.

"Startled by a noise, Jon might have jumped up and grabbed the gun [a gun kept under the mattress] Debra said. "Seeing Oswald, he would have let his guard down...he would have thought something happened."

At 5-feet-8, 155 pounds, the dark haired Gonzalez was strong.

"Oswaldo was powerful, quick and athletic," Debra said. "He was like a roadrunner. Little, but quick."

Sandy and Al Ludlow expressed frustration that Gonzalez was not looked at as a suspect or person of interest in Robbins' death.

"We could never reconcile the method or the way he died," Al said. "It's like if your tires were slashed you might start to think you must have ran something over. But then if you later hear there was someone running around the neighborhood slashing tires it would click."

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Melissa Flores City Editor



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