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## Couple allegedly showed off kidnapped baby

Dad united with daughter

**(CNN) -- Before Lisa Montgomery was arrested and charged with kidnapping resulting in death, she and her husband showed the abducted infant to people in their Kansas town, residents said Saturday.**

The Montgomerys said they had named the baby Abigail, a local pastor, Mike Wheatly, told CNN. Montgomery told him she had given birth to the child at a Topeka birthing center.

Wheatly said he and others, including Montgomery's husband, Kevin, believed she was pregnant and due in December. Wheatly recounted that he once commented to Lisa Montgomery that she was "kind of small to be having a baby that soon. She said, 'I've always had small babies,' and I just let it go at that."

But police said the baby did not belong to Montgomery.

Now, the 36-year-old Melvern, Kansas, woman is in federal custody in Leavenworth, Kansas. If convicted, she could face a maximum of life in prison or the death penalty.

Arrested Friday, Montgomery allegedly confessed to strangling Bobbie Joe Stinnett at Stinnett's Skidmore, Missouri, home and cutting the fetus out of her womb, police said.

Authorities issued an Amber Alert for the baby, who was recovered Friday night at the same time Montgomery was arrested.

The baby was brought to a Topeka hospital, where she was united with her father and named Victoria Jo. She was in good condition Saturday at the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit of Stormont-Vail Regional Medical Center, according to a hospital statement.

Zeb Stinnett -- who traveled from Missouri to see the baby, the Stinnetts' first child -- called his daughter "a miracle" and thanked family, friends, the Amber Alert and law enforcement for their support, according to the statement issued by the hospital.

Todd Graves, U.S. attorney for the western district of Missouri, told CNN anchor Carol Lin on Saturday his office had not decided whether to seek the death penalty.

"It's way too early to make that determination," he said. Although the crime was shocking, he continued, "ironically enough, for those of us in the criminal justice system, it isn't as unusual as you might think."

But his district has a history of seeking the death penalty, he said, and has gotten death sentences on the same charge Montgomery is facing twice in the past three years.

Community in shock

Stinnett was found dead in a pool of blood in her home Thursday afternoon by her mother, who called 911 saying it looked "as though her daughter's stomach had exploded," according to an FBI affidavit filed in support of the charges. The sheriff said the crime was the most gruesome he had ever seen.

Crime scene investigators later determined her womb had been cut laterally, the baby removed and the umbilical cord cut, the

affidavit said.

Asked whether someone would have had to have medical knowledge in order to cut the baby from Stinnett's body, Graves told CNN, "I think that maybe it's not as complicated as it might seem. I'm not a medical expert, but I think anyone with a reasonable amount of skill could probably accomplish this."

Authorities have said they believe Stinnett struggled with her assailant. Blond hair was found clutched in the victim's fist, FBI spokesman Jeff Lanza said.

The crime shocked Skidmore, a town of just over 300 people, with some residents shuttering their doors, saying they no longer felt safe.

"It's very hard for me to accept this," Nodaway County, Missouri, Sheriff Ben Espey told reporters. "Nobody here could ever perceive this taking place -- to have a fetus taken out of someone's womb and then doing an Amber Alert to try to find a child."

Residents of Melvern were also shocked.

"We felt betrayed. We were angry," Wheatly said. "But most of all, we're very, very, very sad."

#### Deceit and premeditation

The affidavit paints a picture of deceit and premeditation on the part of Montgomery. It alleges that the woman, using a fictitious name, contacted Stinnett on Wednesday through an Internet chat room about looking at rat terriers the Stinnetts sold over the Internet. The two agreed to meet Thursday at Stinnett's home.

Montgomery knew Stinnett was pregnant because of pictures posted on her dog-breeding Web site, Lanza said. On Thursday afternoon, a neighbor reported seeing a dirty, red pinkish, two-door vehicle -- most likely an import -- outside the Stinnett home.

With a search for the child under way after Stinnett's body was found, computer investigators began talking with Internet providers and were able to trace the fictitious e-mailer to the Montgomery's home, more than 130 miles away.

Authorities immediately began surveillance of the home and saw Montgomery Friday with a "newborn female infant," according to the affidavit. They also noticed a vehicle matching the description of the one seen outside the Stinnett's home.

The affidavit alleges that Kevin Montgomery told authorities his wife called him shortly after he arrived home from work Thursday, around 5:15 p.m., saying she had gone shopping in Topeka, went into labor and had a baby.

The husband and the couple's two high-school age children drove to Topeka and met Lisa Montgomery in the parking lot of a Long John Silver's restaurant. He, his wife and the child drove home in his pickup truck, and the older children drove his wife's car, a red Toyota Corolla, the affidavit alleges.

A check with the Topeka women's clinic where Montgomery claimed to have given birth revealed no babies were born there Thursday.

Once in custody, the affidavit alleges, Montgomery "confessed to having strangled Stinnett and removing the fetus. Lisa Montgomery further admitted the baby she had was Stinnett's baby and that she had lied to her husband about giving birth to a child."

Kevin Montgomery has not been charged in connection with the case.

Espey and Graves said Lisa Montgomery had a miscarriage at some point this year, although they would not say how recently it occurred. Espey told CNN the pregnancy was six months along when the child was lost.

Of the possible motive in this case, Espey said Friday, "I think she was probably going to take it because she had lost one through a miscarriage at about six months."

Authorities expressed great relief that the child was recovered alive, and attributed that success to the Amber Alert system.

"We may have not ever recovered this little baby if the Amber Alert system was not put into place," Espey told reporters. "I'm overwhelmed with the fact that we're gonna be able to get this baby back."

Sgt. Sheldon Lyon, a spokesman with the Missouri State Highway Patrol, said, "This is a great day for law enforcement in northwest Missouri."

The Internet chat room "Ratter Chatter," a haven for rat terrier lovers in cyberspace, was overwhelmed with responses from its users, many of whom indicated they knew both the victim and suspect in the case. At the same time computer experts were tracing Stinnett's activities, authorities learned of the chat room from a tipster in North Carolina.

"I cannot believe how sorrowful I am. They have taken Lisa into custody. I don't know what is worse -- the horrible crime -- or the

possibility that it might be Lisa. Someone just shoot me," wrote one chat room user by the name of Jill.

Another user named Teresa wrote, "I am sitting here in shock, not knowing how to break this. I just received a phone call from a reporter in Missouri saying that Bobbie was killed today and her fetus stolen! I am absolutely horrified!"

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