

Later Workers

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Murder of Sister Worker Velma Filener, Nov. 1993

Rev Dec. 28, 2008

Casper Star-Tribune (Wyoming)

By Deidre Stoelzle

RE: Velma May Filener died Nov. 30, 1993; Memorial Service Dec. 6, 1993

Dec 2, 1993 – Police: No arrests in Casper homicide. Elderly visitor dies after apparent stabling

Dec 3, 1993 – Still no arrest in Filener stabbing

Dec 4, 1993 – Police still looking for motive in Filener killing

Dec 7, 1993 – No arrest, motive in Filener stabbing

Dec 21, 1993 – Police won't comment on Filener stabbing

Dec 31, 1993 – Filener murder suspect charged (19 yr old Victor M. Madrid)

Dec 31, 1993 – Suspect: Madrid nabbed after medical call

P.O. Box 146

Rozet, WY 82727-0146

December 8 1993

Our dear workers and friends,

VELMA FILENER labored in Wyoming for the past eight years. She spent a total of forty six years in the work. She worked in Alaska for seven years and her home state of Colorado. There was five sisters and six brothers in the family. Of that number, there is four sisters and two brothers that are still living. Velma has a nephew living in Cody, WY, Dave & Cheryl Filener. They have been helping us facilitate some of the funeral arrangements with relatives in Colorado. There was a funeral service in Casper on Saturday at 1 PM in the Industrial building at the fair grounds. Stanley Sullivan, Gary Paul and I conducted the service. There was a second funeral service for the family and Colorado friends in Delta, CO with a burial in the family plot in Crawford, CO. Leslie White and Elsworth Shilling conducted the Colorado service.

Velma had just finished the Wyoming special meeting rounds and she was staying in Casper in the home of Marie Bressler, for a few days of rest. Mae Greenaway, her companion, was taking a few days of rest in Worland, WY before returning to Casper. They had made plans to resume gospel meetings in Casper on Sunday, December 5th. On Monday, November 29th, Marie, her granddaughter, Brenda Stowe, Leta Schuebel, Dorothy Christmann, Cheryl Siemens and Teresa Morrison had lunch Tuesday with Velma for Marie's 80th birthday. Velma was in good spirits but was a little weary from the recent special meetings. That evening, Marie had another dinner engagement with her two granddaughters, Cheryl and LeAnn. They took grandma out to dinner for her birthday. Marie left the house around 6:30 PM. During that time, Velma had talked with Mae on the phone. She also talked with her sister, Ethelyn, who phoned about 7:35 PM. That conversation concluded at 7:50 PM. She talked after that with a niece in Denver. Marie returned home at 8:13 PM. During that 18 minute time lapse, perpetrator(s) broke into home. The police determined that robbery was the motive. The burglar took some cash from Velma's purse and her pills. They also took a watch and a camera belonging to Marie. In the process Velma was murdered. There was no forced entry into the home.

Marie Bressler came in the front door and hung her coat up in the closet. She walked down the short hallway towards the kitchen. She found Velma lying on the floor between the utility room and the kitchen. Some time during them evening she washed some clothes. She could of been checking the washing machine at the time of the murder. Marie called her name out and then tried to arouse her but it was evident she was dead. She immediately telephoned 911 and reported the murder. She phoned Don Siemens and Dorothy Christmann to come quickly. By the time they arrived, eight police cars, numerous homicide detectives and the Fire Department arrived in force. Detectives acquired a list of the Casper friends and they began an immediate series of interviews, knocking on their doors in the early hours of the morning. The Coroner ordered an autopsy. The autopsy reported multiple stab wounds. Blood was found at the site of the body and also in the garage. Investigators dusted for finger prints and acquired a reliable print to help solve the crime. Police dogs were brought to the house to pick up any further clues.

Six hundred of our friends and workers gathered in Casper for Velma's funeral service. Two of Velma's former companions, Ronda and Tammy, fixed her hair. She was dressed in her lavender dress. The casket was situated so that each one could view the body prior to being seated. Some of the workers served as ushers. A couple detectives were on hand observing the crowd. The service began with a hymn Velma often chose in gospel meetings, hymn 105, "Sweet to tell the gospel story." I read the obituary and spoke briefly. Gary Paul read Matthew 10:13. He mentioned Velma bringing the spirit of peace into homes. He referred to Velma's last

message at Cheyenne special meeting, Philippians 4:7,8. This was a virtue that Velma had in her life. Even ___s the children of the Virtuous Woman rose up and called her blessed, many of the Lords people could say the same about her. Stanley Sullivan spoke from Romans 16 about Phebe. She had the spirit of a servant. The Church (body of Christ) gave thanks for her life. He talked about Velma at Cody preparations working so hard. She wasn't saving herself at all. Stanley prayed and the service closed with Hymn #319 – "Sweet is the rest." Some of Velma's companions chose this hymn. They said she often chose this hymn. Jana Printz, Laurel Sundin, Angie Long, Ronda Stidolph, Judy McIntyre and Dan Hare sang both hymns so beautifully. Lunch was served in the same building.

Besides the Wyoming staff, workers came from Colorado, Nebraska, Utah, So Dakota and Montana. The workers were: Jim Chafee, Joe Hobbs, Chris Postma, Leigh Bledsoe, John Wilson, Russell Erickson, Martin Wilson, Morris Grovum, Carey Tsunemori, David Silvey, Everett Swanson, Norm Tindall, Jeff Gillie, Margaret Greenaway, Eunice Modine, Pauline Loveless, Lillian Cronk, Elouise Snow, Hester Williams, Della Williams, Roxie Cotten, Sandra Boettcher, Eleanor Sandoz, Hazel Krack, Ronda Stidolph, Adele Jeske, Vera Houston, Mary Olsen, Julie Church, Cocha Smith, Laura Faulkner, Emma Raun, Shirley Doolittle, Sue Hashley and Barb Hofer. We appreciated so much each worker who could come and stand by us during this tragedy.

Gary Paul and I left with the body right afterwards for Delta, CO. Dave & Cheryl Filener and their two children, Andrea and Nathan, followed us in their car. Laura Faulkner, Angie Long, Laurel Sundin and Tammy Carr rode with the Filener's. Laura Faulkner's mother and Velma's mother were sisters. It worked out perfectly for Laura to visit some of her Colorado family that she hasn't seen for a number of years. The Cotten's on the Hotchkiss convention grounds telephoned us that they had room for all of us! Their son, Mick, Julie and family live in the same yard. It seemed fitting for the Wyoming workers to have Sunday morning meeting with Velma's relatives and close friends. There was a viewing on Sunday from 2 PM til 8 PM.

The funeral at the Taylor mortuary began at 10 a.m. there was 350 of our people on hand for the service. Danny Cotten brought extra chairs to accommodate the crowd. Carol Kay, Lauri Gador and Nancy Einspahr sang, "In Jesus Hands." Leslie White read the obituary and spoke so helpfully about peace. Velma was a peacemaker wherever she worked. He told us some have question, Why didn't God protect Velma? We don't have all the answers but the best reasoning is to leave it in Jesus hands. Why did he allow James life to be taken and Peter's life was spared? We don't have the answers but the best thing to do is leave it in Jesus hands. When Stephen was being stoned to death, he saw the heavens opened and Jesus on the right hand of God. God was standing by Stephen when he was murdered and God stood by Velma. After Leslie finished, another hymn was sung, "Where all is peaceful, calm and still." Elsworth read Revelations 22 and spoke about the river of life. The river that brought that life giving message into their community. He reminisced about the early days with Velma.

We drove 30 miles east, past the Hotchkiss convention grounds, and past the old Filener homestead, which could be seen off the highway, to the little town of Crawford where Velma attended school. She was buried next to her parents in the northwest corner of the cemetery. Gary and I spoke at the graveside. All the workers sang "All my springs arise in Jesus" at the close of the service. A dinner was served afterwards in the Crawford community hall. This building was the school that Velma and Laura attended for their primary education. Laura recalled some of those early years for us. It was nice to have a little more time with the various family members and the Colorado friends who stood by the family so loyally.

Some of the workers on hand included: Leslie White, Elsworth Shilling, Stanley Morrison, Dan Hofer, Dale DeRaad, Daylin McChord, Esther Shraw, Phyllis Harris, Hester Williams, Sara Starns, Patricia Weil, Elinor Kleeb, Yolanda Moreno, Dorothy Tessman, Cindy Christian, Charlotte Johnson, Renee Silvey, Laura Faulkner, Roxie Cotten, Marge Major and the four Wyoming workers. The Colorado workers returned to their respective special meeting places. It meant a lot to all of us to have this time together. Especially some of Velma's former companions.

We've learned since returning to Casper that police have continued to make steady progress in the case. No arrest have been made. The police work has been exemplary. Detective Jim Lein conducted exhaustive interviews with workers, friends and neighbors of Mrs. Bresslers. The outstanding remark that the police expressed about our people is that there is no anger over the murder of Velma. This is because of our strong faith in God! Jesus said that man can destroy one body but they can't touch the soul and spirit. Detective Gary Hazen oversees the famous "Crimestoppers" program that offers a reward for the arrest and conviction of the person(s) responsible for crimes. He will be meeting with some of the Casper friends this week. Twenty four law enforcement officers have been assigned to the case. Marie Bressler has been staying with her son, Bob and family at their 33 mile ranch. She has stood up remarkably well. Monday, December 8th, she returned to her home. Jean and Donna are staying with her.

Kind greetings in Christ,

Jack