

1/31/89

Death of 10-year-old boy in SM appears to be suicide

By Eric Bottjer
Staff Writer

SAN MARTIN — As the sun was setting last night, a 10-year old boy told his father he was going to their barn to feed the rabbits. About 30 minutes later, the father went to the barn to check on his son. He found the boy dead, hanging by a rope.

The boy, apparently despondent over a custody battle between his parents, committed suicide, sheriff's deputies said today.

"It has all the appearances of a suicide," said Sgt. Cary Colla. "There is no suspicious circumstances that lead us to believe any-

thing else happened. Our investigation is concerned with the reasons it happened."

The boy recently moved to his father's home in San Martin, Colla said. Deputies are still investigating the family's background, but it appears the boy was living with his mother outside Santa Clara County when his father won custody rights, Colla said.

The boy was in the process of switching schools, but Colla said he doesn't believe the victim was enrolled in a South County elementary school.

A social worker for the South

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Suicide

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County mental health office who works with South Valley Jr. High students said marital and parental battles are common causes of depression among pre-teens.

"For somebody that young, parents are everything," said Sue Villanueva. "Custody battles are very wearing on children. They carry a lot of guilt."

Villanueva said she was not familiar with Monday night's tragedy, and stressed that her comments were not intended to reveal why the boy took his life.

It is rare for a pre-teenager to commit suicide, statistics show. In 1986 in Santa Clara County, only three children under 14 — all boys — took their lives. The youngest was 10.

The same year, 17 other children 14 or younger killed themselves in California, 13 of those boys. There were more than 3.4 million children between 5 and 14 years old in California in 1986.

Teenage suicide is about 10 times more common than pre-teen suicide, according to statistics from the state.

However, workers at the state agency estimate that up to 25 percent of pre-teen suicides are classified as accidental deaths.

"When a child dies after taking a fall or after running in front of a car, we don't look at the possibility of suicide," said Dave Nielsen, coordinator of the state's youth suicide intervention service. "We don't think kids that age can conceptualize what death is."

"I've heard of kids younger than 10 (committing suicide). I talked to a woman last year who was telling me about a 6-year-old."

More boys than girls try to kill themselves, Nielsen said, and boys succeed more often.

Villanueva said elementary school children sometimes suffer from deep depression, but are not mature enough to talk about their problems.

"Sometimes you see children who have a lot of accidents. When they're 6 or 7, you don't think they might be deliberate."

People who believe their child is suffering from depression and would like advice can call the South County health department's 24-hour crisis number at 683-2482.

2/10/88
COURT MADE NO
ORDERS IN THIS CASE
RE CUSTODY OF
CHILD —
Child Returned
TO Father per
Stipulation
of atts + parties
No Ct
order
of
intervention

BBM