

Mom lies about love letters at trial

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Missives sent to accused killer

The mother of a 3-year-old girl who was brutally killed lied on the witness stand Friday about whether she wrote the accused killer love letters while he was in jail charged with her daughter's death.

Christina Arredondo repeatedly told the jury that the letters were not from her and said it was not her handwriting. After the defense reminded her that she was under oath and could be charged with perjury, Arredondo admitted sending the love letters to Tomas Gallo.

In some of the letters Arredondo wrote her name as "Christina Gallo," and told Gallo that she was "his property," "his true love," and that "C loves T," defense attorney Gerald Bourque told the jury.

Gallo, 27, is charged with capital murder in the Dec. 11 death of Destiny Marie Flores. The child was savagely beaten, bitten and sexually assaulted. Gallo faces the death penalty if convicted.

The letters were produced by the defense after prosecutor Craig Goodhart had painstakingly questioned Arredondo about several inconsistencies in her statements to South Houston Police about the day her daughter died.

After Arredondo confessed about the letters, Bourque threw his pen onto the defense table as he made his way back to his chair.

"Wow, that was dramatic. I see that on TV once or twice a week," Goodhart said to his adversary as he rose to look at the letters before he forcefully questioned his own witness.

"Are you still in love with him?" Goodhart asked Arredondo. "It says 'I love you,' ... Why are you writing the man you claimed killed your child? ... You love a man who killed your child?"

"... I had done that so that way



Chronicle file photo

Tomas Gallo, 27, is charged with capital murder in the death of 3-year-old Destiny Marie Flores on Dec. 11.

he would still be here when we came to court," Arredondo said. "... I was just doing that. ... I don't love him. I hate him."

When Goodhart asked her where she thought Gallo would go while he was in jail awaiting trial, she said she had heard that he wanted to kill himself. She wanted the state to kill him instead.

"You wanted to give him hope so you could dash it when he gets here?" Goodhart said. "That's pretty damn vindictive, isn't it?"

Goodhart then asked Arredondo if she killed her daughter and was falsely accusing Gallo. She denied it.

"How can this jury believe anything you have to say?" he asked.

"I didn't do that to my daughter," she replied.

Destiny died on her third birthday. She suffered bite marks and bruises over most of her body. She had broken ribs, a crushed skull and two tears on her vagina. Her heart, lungs and kidneys also were bruised.

Bourque has previously told the jury that the South Houston Police did not investigate the case thoroughly and the real killer is a convict with a proclivity for biting during sex.

Gallo had been living with Arredondo, Destiny, and her 5-year-old sister for only a few months in a duplex at 1016 Ave. N. In addition to the four, Arredondo's sister and her two sons lived there.

Gallo was watching the girls that day while the mothers were at work and the two boys were in school.

Gallo called Arredondo at work about 1:45 p.m. to tell her that Destiny was not breathing. Arredondo did not call 911. Instead she called a friend who met her at the home about 30 minutes later.

When Arredondo arrived home about 2:15 p.m. Destiny was unconscious. South Houston EMS crews saw Gallo driving away from the home as they arrived. He was arrested two days later.

Destiny was pronounced dead shortly after her arrival at Columbia Bayshore Medical Center in Pasadena.

Swabs from the bite marks on Destiny's body produced DNA that matches Gallo's, prosecutors have said. The child's DNA was found on a pair of Gallo's boxers.

Under direct questioning by Goodhart earlier Friday, Arredondo admitted that she lied to police after the death, including telling them that another baby sitter was watching the girls.

Other testimony has revealed that Arredondo may have given her car keys to Gallo so he could leave before paramedics arrived. She said Friday that she didn't remember doing that.

Arredondo said she made up the baby sitter story because she was afraid that the Children's

Protective Services of Harris County would take her daughters from her.

A social worker had visited the Arredondo home in September 2001 after learning that Arredondo was not filling out the paperwork necessary for Destiny to see a dermatologist, as recommended, for her thinning hair. No signs of abuse were detected then.

CPS spokeswoman Judy Hay said Friday that Arredondo's older daughter is legally in the custody of the agency and has been placed with relatives.

Goodhart made it clear to the jury that Arredondo had not been given any special treatment and that her inconsistent statements were not being overlooked by prosecutors.

During cross-examination, shortly before the letters were introduced, Bourque told the jury that a call to 911 was made about 8 a.m. the morning Destiny died from Arredondo's sister's mobile telephone. Arredondo said she was not aware of that call. She said the child was fine and had no visible bruises when she left for work about 9:30 a.m.

Bourque indicated that Arredondo may have told a CPS official after the death that she had gone to work about 7 a.m.

Arredondo denied that, saying she had stayed up until about 5 a.m. with Gallo playing video games and having sex. When she awoke at 8:30 a.m. she called her boss to say she would be late because her daughter wasn't feeling well. Arredondo said she made up the story because she was afraid that her boss might be angry with her if she told him she overslept.

After she finished testifying, Arredondo was allowed to leave state District Judge Jeannine Barr's courtroom through a back door instead of the front door where reporters were waiting for her.

The trial continues Monday.