

A HUSBAND'S RAGE

As trial nears, man charged in slayings of wife,
mother-in-law recounts events that led to '04 stabbings

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Christopher Reynart is named after his son.

"He's senior, I'm junior," Reynart joked about his first-born son, Christopher, 12, whom he cared for so deeply that years ago, he legally changed his given name of Rudy so he would be his child's namesake.

And it was his children's safety, Reynart says, that was on his mind the morning he fatally stabbed his estranged wife and mother-in-law in their North Bay Shore home, as sons Chris and Kevin listened in another room.

"Hell was unleashed," Reynart recalled of that night in 2004, speaking with a Newsday reporter in an exclusive interview from the Riverhead jail where he has spent nearly two years awaiting trial in the murders of his wife, Karina Reyna, 30, and mother-in-law, Azucena Villegas, 63.

Today, jury selection begins for a trial expected to open next week. If convicted on the top charge of first-degree murder, Reynart faces a maximum sentence of life without parole.

His hair unkempt and his face shadowed with stubble, Reynart spoke about his trial, his wife, Karina - "the only woman who I ever cried over" - the mother-in-law who he says undermined their marriage, and a path of rage that began with a nightmare.

Reynart, who grew up in the Dominican Republic, met Karina in 1990 when she was 16. The two quickly fell in love, he said, but Villegas never liked him. They married in 1993 in a civil ceremony in Islip Town Hall.

Reynart said he told Karina that he would never hurt her, having once seen his own father pin his mother on the ground and bite her "on the neck like a vampire."

But after learning in 2001 that Villegas had encouraged Karina to terminate her first pregnancy, Reynart said he began having nightmares about "her mother and my father killing my son."

"I would wake up punching the walls and the ceiling," Reynart said. "I still loved her, but I couldn't trust her. I would look at her and see an angel and a demon," he said of his wife.

Family members of Reyna and Villegas could not be reached for comment.

Prosecutors say Reynart got a legal divorce in the Dominican Republic in June 2001 without Karina's consent. Still, they continued living together.

Reynart said he became suspicious of the time Karina spent chatting online, once telling her that if she ever came home with a sexually transmitted disease, he would "make Jeffrey Dahmer look like a pre-school kid."

"The first time I ever made her bleed" came in January 2004, when, suspecting Karina was seeing other men, Reynart whipped her with a computer cord. As the blood poured from her forehead, Reynart told her, "See what you made me do?"

After that, Reynart was arrested, and kept out of his home by protection order. He was staying with his brother in Brooklyn on April 10, 2004, when Alberto Gomez - a friend of Karina's who Reynart believed was her boyfriend - called. During the call, Reynart learned Gomez was spending time with his sons.

Afterward, Reynart said he drank about a dozen glasses of whiskey and became fearful for his sons' safety from Gomez.

"A hunter can't be a sitting duck," said Reynart, comparing the slaying to his deer hunting hobby. "A hunter doesn't wait." He drove to the family's house on Rhode Island Avenue, kicked in the door, grabbed a kitchen knife and attacked his wife, police say. When his mother-in-law interfered, he killed her, too, police say. The commotion awoke his two sons.

"It's a brutal double murder committed against two innocent women, for which there is no reasonable excuse," said Janet Albertson, the district attorney's deputy chief of homicide.

Suffolk County Court Judge Barbara Kahn offered Reynart a sentence of 28 years to life in exchange for his guilty plea, attorneys in the case say. Reynart refused, believing he could convince a jury that he suffered an extreme emotional disturbance at the time of the killings.

"He was acting irrationally. He was acting in a rage, an explosive rage," said Michael Brown, Reynart's attorney.

"This is not about saying he's going to get off. It's not about beating the case," said Brown, of Central Islip. "It's acknowledging that different homicides are treated differently."