

SUSPECTED IN AN ACT OF EVIL

Man who police say blew smoke from drug in face of infant son to quiet him is charged in the child's death

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A Brentwood man with a long history of violence, drug addiction and Satanic worship was charged Friday with killing his 5-month-old son, an infant he often subdued by blowing marijuana laced with PCP into his mouth, authorities said.

Julio Rivera, 26, who had been living with his grandparents and the child's mother, Cynthia Morales, 25, in Colonial Heights, Va., since his son's death, was charged with second-degree murder, second-degree manslaughter and endangering the welfare of a child.

The infant was found motionless in the backseat of Rivera's car on March 31. Rivera and Morales were living then with several relatives in Brentwood.

As he stood in a Suffolk courtroom in handcuffs and green prison garb, a bearded, stocky and heavily tattooed Rivera shook his head emphatically as prosecutor Nancy Clifford detailed the pattern of abuse that culminated in his son Eric's death on March 31.

"In his short life, Eric was repeatedly exposed to PCP-laced marijuana," said Clifford.

"The child had repeated and acute brain injury consistent with shaken-baby syndrome."

The marijuana and angel dust combination was blown into the child's face "to silence the baby when he was fussing," Clifford said.

Rivera's mother, stepfather and two younger brothers attended his arraignment and declined to comment afterward. His attorney, Michael Brown, said his client was innocent.

"He's a good parent," said Brown, of Central Islip. "It's obviously a very tragic situation - it is when any child dies - but he had no hand in it."

A relative called 911 and attempted to revive the child, Clifford said.

When police arrived, Rivera ran away. His son was taken in a patrol car to Good Samaritan Hospital Medical Center in West Islip, where he was pronounced dead.

After the autopsy was conducted, a criminal investigation began.

By then, Rivera had already fled Long Island.

Sometime later, he wound up in Virginia. Clifford declined to say if Morales was also a suspect in the child's death.

Rivera was returned to Long Island by Suffolk police on July 7, after he failed to show up for an April court date on an unrelated misdemeanor charge of aggravated harassment. In that case, Rivera was accused of making threatening phone calls to the mother of his other two children, ages 6 and 7.

That the 26-year-old would end up in jail was no surprise to those who remembered Rivera from the ragged section of Brentwood where he grew up.

Rivera lived with his grandparents and two younger brothers in a tumbledown home on Suffolk Avenue. His father was seldom present.

At a young age, Rivera began using PCP, which exacerbated an already unstable personality, said several neighbors who asked not to be identified.

Encounters with police became common. Dating back to 2000, Rivera has at least eight convictions on charges including assault, drug possession and petit larceny. Brown declined to comment on Rivera's criminal past.

Rivera's childhood home is now vacant and shuttered. A "For Sale" sign stands on the front lawn. Etched into the concrete sidewalk is a pentagram, and the word "Evil" written above it.

Staff writer Eden Laikin contributed to this story.