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## Orange County man charged with wife's murder

Officials think Richard Forsberg beat Marcia Forsberg to death in February at their Rancho Santa Margarita home, then took her body to Ventura County. He is arrested after an apparent suicide attempt.

By My-Thuan Tran, Los Angeles Times

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Marcia and Richard Forsberg had the appearance of the perfect couple — holding hands, stealing kisses and still joking around after 39 years of marriage.

The Rancho Santa Margarita couple met in a journalism class at Ventura College. She became a newspaper features writer and editor, while he went to work for a community college. They were active in their homeowners association and always seemed to be in a good mood. They were the kind of people who stayed in touch with old friends.

So their neighbors in south Orange County noticed when they did not see Marcia, 61, waving to her husband as he drove off to work in February. Friends wondered why they weren't receiving birthday cards. Phone calls weren't returned.

On Tuesday, some grisly answers began to emerge. Richard Forsberg, 61, was arrested Monday night at a Palm Springs hospital after an apparent suicide attempt and was charged with his wife's murder. Detectives, meanwhile, searched around campsites at Lake Piru in Ventura County for her body and sifted through the fire rings.

Deputies said they suspect that the couple, who had no children, got into a fight in their home in February and that Richard Forsberg struck his wife repeatedly in the head with a small statue, according to the Orange County district attorney's office.

Authorities believe Forsberg kept his wife's body in their home for several days before renting an RV and driving the body to the Lake Piru area.

For the next six months, Forsberg covered up his wife's death, telling friends and neighbors a variety of stories, authorities said.

Caren Aburto, who lives next to the couple's tan two-story condominium, noticed in March that it had been several weeks since she had seen Marcia Forsberg, who used to light fireworks with her on the Fourth of July and walk down the street banging pots on New Year's Eve.

Aburto said Richard Forsberg was acting differently too: He started planting strawberries and

tomatoes in the backyard, strung up a hammock, parked his car in front of the house instead of in the garage.

"These things struck me as odd," she said. "It was out of character for him."

Forsberg told her that the couple were having marital problems and that his wife was staying in Arizona but would return for their 40th anniversary in September, Aburto said.

Several weeks later, Forsberg told her that the couple were separated and that Marcia was not returning, Aburto said. She found it strange that he did not appear upset at this news. "He acted almost jovial," she said. "It was ridiculous."

Then, Aburto said, she received a letter from an old friend of Marcia's that worried her.

Cathleen DeRemer had not heard from her best friend for months. The two met in seventh grade in Ojai and had kept in touch over the decades, exchanging e-mails and letters between visits. At first, DeRemer thought the Forsbergs were on vacation.

She said she knew something was very wrong when she did not receive a birthday card from her old friend in May. DeRemer said other close friends were worried as well.

DeRemer said she contacted Richard Forsberg, who wrote in an e-mail that he and his wife were having marital problems and that she was staying with a friend.

"That made me feel better," said DeRemer, 61. "I never had a reason to disbelieve him."

When August came without any word, she said, she wrote letters to Marcia Forsberg's brother and Aburto. DeRemer said both shared her concerns.

On Aug. 23 — roughly six months after the alleged beating death — DeRemer filed a missing person's report with the Orange County Sheriff's Department. The next day, deputies interviewed Richard Forsberg, said Jim Amormino, spokesman for the department. Deputies returned several days later with a search warrant and found that Forsberg had disappeared.

On Monday, Forsberg was admitted to a Palm Springs hospital, where a worker recognized him from a newscast and contacted authorities, Amormino said. Forsberg, who authorities said took an overdose of sleeping pills after a night of gambling, was arrested and held without bail.

The next day, sheriff's investigators recovered several items in the fire pits at Lake Piru's recreational area, Amormino said. The items will be tested, said Amormino, who declined to elaborate on the nature of the items.

As the story unfolded, friends reacted with surprise. They remember Marcia as a bubbly woman who had a master's degree in art, worked as a features writer at the Daily Pilot and later at Modern Maturity magazine, and seemed happily married. Richard worked in applications

development at the Coast Community College District.

"They were a real golden couple," said Rick Manly, a longtime friend of the couple and senior writer of university publications at Cal State Long Beach. "This is the last couple I ever would have expected this to happen to."