Rosa wife: Help keys hope

By Francis Scarcella Apr 17, 2010

Maggie Rosa, the wido of the Rev. Jose Rosa, talks about the recent discovery of his body after he had been missing for almost a year.

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Trouble is coming.

Maggie Rosa weeps as she sits in her two-story home in Kelly Township, recalling her husband's prediction one night nearly 10 months ago.

The Rev. Jose "Joe" Rosa informed his wife that he would be accused of inappropriately touching a young male and former member of his New Columbia church.

Is it true? she asked her husband.

"He told me, 'No. They were not true' and I went on to explain to him that if that was the case, then we would fight it," Maggie Rosa said. "And he said to me, 'No. It doesn't matter. It's over."

She awakened the next morning to find a store receipt for rope and hooks.

And her husband missing.

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Maggie Rosa says she looked for her husband on her own the next two days. She called friends, relatives, hospitals and anyone who might know where Rosa was.

“I wasn’t in the right state of mind at that point,” Maggie Rosa said. “I was searching myself and was very confused. I didn’t know where he was. I just had no idea.”

About 9 p.m. May 23, about 60 hours after she found the rope receipt, she reported her husband missing to authorities.

Minutes beforehand, according to court documents, Bishop Samuel Lopez, the leader of the Spanish Mennonite Council of Churches — which oversees Rosa’s Congregacion Menonita Shalom in New Columbia — notified Milton state police that his council had received a letter from a young male claiming Rosa had sexual contact with him.

For the next 10 months, Maggie Rosa heard nothing of her husband’s whereabouts, only that he was last seen by a neighbor May 21, walking toward the U.S. Penitentiary at Lewisburg, near the Rosas’ Union County home.

In the days and weeks that followed, Milton state police began building a case against Rosa. Trooper Patrick Beaver interviewed two other boys, both 14, who claim they were sexually abused by Rosa after moving in temporarily with his family in 2005.

Beaver issued a warrant for Rosa’s arrest.

The alleged victims, 9 and 10 in 2005, described being touched inappropriately and being pressured to sleep in the same bed as Rosa at his home.

The younger boy said Rosa kissed him on the lips and grabbed his buttocks inside the church. The abuse ended early when his family stopped attending the church, court documents said.

The other boy said he and his family lived in the Rosa home for two months in 2005, and during the next two years, Rosa touched his genitals on 10 or more occasions whenever they were alone in the house.

Five counts of indecent assault, two counts of recklessly endangering the welfare of children and four

counts of corruption of minors were filed.

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“The wounds,” Maggie Rosa said, “were starting to heal over the course of the time he was missing.

“And now they have opened back up.”

Two weeks ago she learned the badly decomposed body of her husband had been found.

He apparently hanged himself, according to Union County Coroner Wanda Walters, in a wooded area off Route 1005, in White Deer Township, Union County.

While she says she doesn’t know what to think about the child molestation charges against her husband, “I want ... everyone that know no matter how much burden an individual has in their lives, there is always hope.

“There is never a time when a person has to take their own life, and I am deeply saddened by my late husband for feeling like he couldn’t come and talk to me.”

If the allegations were true, she told her husband the night before he left, the couple would get help and help Rosa get through it.

“But I looked right at him and explained that if he was lying to me, that I would be the first one to put him in jail,” she said.

“He looked at me and said, 'I am so sorry for all of this’ and the next day, when I got up, he was gone.”

She awakened on May 21 and thought her husband was at work.

Then she found the receipt, his identification cards, his passport and his money.

“I knew in my heart that something was wrong and I couldn’t get rid of the thoughts that I wish he would have come to me and spoke with me,” Rosa said.

“My husband was in the process of losing his mind. I don’t know why. I just don’t know.”

She said she gave the evidence to police, but she was still told he was a fugitive.

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Since then, authorities and acquaintances have given the Rosa family comfort, she said.

“The police and many friends have been so kind to us, and I let everyone know that no matter, we have a relationship with a person we must always stand by the truth,” Rosa said.

“It’s the media that was harassing us and asking questions, and that is why I wanted to speak out and let the public know that I want to be able to help the next wife or husband or anyone that would need my advice or help, and I don’t want anyone to feel as overwhelmed as I did.”

Public opinion regarding her husband no longer matters to her, Rosa said.

“I will remember him as a husband, a father and my friend.”

What matters to Maggie Rosa is this: “I just want to make sure that this doesn’t happen to anyone else, and I want to make sure I can be a person to help people who might think they have no one to talk to. No matter what life brings, there is always another way.”