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Couple found shot to death

Bodies discovered on Sonoma County beach

By Christina Jewett and Cathy Locke -- Bee Staff Writers

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SANTA ROSA - Two counselors at an El Dorado County camp who planned to marry on Sept. 11 were shot to death while camping on a Sonoma County beach, officials said Thursday.

There appears to be no motive in the killings of Lindsay Cutshall, 22, of Ohio, and Jason Allen, 26, of Michigan.

"From all indications they were very upstanding citizens," said Lt. Dave Edmonds of the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department. "They were Christian counselors - of a sort, missionaries for their faith. So the dynamics behind the case are very disturbing."

Investigators say the couple were killed while they slept in their sleeping bags, possibly Monday night.

"This is a very disturbing case. It appears to be a terrible crime" with no apparent motive, Edmonds said.

On Aug. 13, Cutshall and Allen left the Rock-n-Water camp near Coloma, where they served as rafting and climbing leaders. When they didn't return Monday, they were reported missing to the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department.

Chris Cutshall, Lindsay's father, said his daughter felt at home in the wildest currents of the world, defiant of their dangers.

"We have peace because we believe there's more to life than this life, and we believe they're in God's hands," Cutshall said one hour before officials identified the couple Thursday. "But there's going to be a lot of pain involved if it is them, and we're pretty sure it is."

Cutshall and his wife, Kathy, of southeast Ohio, and Bob and Dolores Allen of Holland, Mich., cried, prayed and waited in El Dorado County Thursday for news, which finally came about 5 p.m.

The parents had flown to California earlier in the week to help in the search for the couple.

On Wednesday, a Sonoma County sheriff's helicopter crew rescuing a teenager perched on a cliff saw the couple's campsite on the beach north of Jenner. The crew rescued a 17-year-old Cotati boy who had ventured to a crumbling bluff to retrieve his girlfriend's purse.

A crew member called in homicide detectives when there was no response to the helicopter's noise from the people in the sleeping bags.

Investigators continued to comb Fish Head Beach for evidence Thursday night and impounded the couple's red Ford Tempo as evidence, Sonoma County sheriff's officials said.

El Dorado County Sheriff's Lt. Kevin House said camp leaders reported the couple missing at 3:50 p.m.

Monday. Camp director Craig Lomax said officials first geared up for a back-country search - some of the couple's camping gear was gone - but it was called off. A credit company reported that Lindsay Cutshall had bought a souvenir set of Tabasco sauces on Pier 47 in San Francisco at 1 p.m. Saturday.

Chris Cutshall said Jason Allen had been a leader at the camp near Coloma five years earlier, and had driven up Highway 1 in Sonoma County with his parents.

"He probably wanted to see it again and show it to Lindsay," Cutshall said. "I think they were taking a last weekend trip together before she left. They were going to be apart for a couple weeks before they got married."

Lindsay Cutshall planned to fly out of Sacramento to Ohio this Sunday. Chris Cutshall, pastor of a nondenominational church, said one of the members of his Fresno, Ohio, church volunteered her farm for the wedding. The ceremony would have been in a garden, and a bluegrass band was booked to play in the barn.

Cutshall said the couple met at Appalachia Bible College in West Virginia. Lindsay Cutshall earned a two-year degree in Bible studies there, planning to be a missionary. Allen earned a four-year degree, hoping to work at a Christian adventure camp such as the one near Coloma.

Allen and Cutshall had similar personalities, Lomax said.

"They both have very, very gentle spirits, so they bring a real calm to the groups they're around," Lomax said.

On Thursday afternoon, camp guide Kyle Hutchison, 17, strum-med on a guitar with another guide in a woodsy clearing at the camp. He said the camp attracted students in junior and senior high school from youth groups throughout the state.

Hutchison, who said he grew up in El Dorado Hills and Citrus Heights, said Lindsay Cutshall would sit and talk late into the night with youths having hard times or problems at home.

Chris Cutshall said his daughter cried easily, cared a lot and was very kind.

About the Writer

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