

**NEWS FOCUS**

Continued from page A-1

strongest arguments for religion," he observed softly, inhaling deeply on the smoke. "Because without that spirit of life, the human body is just a piece of meat."

Driving the unmarked police car north on the deserted Hollywood Freeway — heading back to precinct headquarters — Hodel explained that a visit to the morgue has always had a strong effect on him.

"Seeing the victim's body personalizes the case real fast."

For Hodel, this case began with a telephone call a few hours earlier, as he was sitting down to watch a TV movie with his wife Marsha at their Eagle Rock home. The downtown robbery-homicide detail was on the line, requesting that he take over the Gloria Ford "undetermined death" case since the victim had lived in Hollywood.

Hodel, 38, a 17-year veteran of the force, activated his videotape machine to record the movie for later viewing. Then he dressed in a gray polyester suit as his wife filled a quart thermos with hot black coffee.

Arriving at Hollywood precinct at 9:50 p.m., he took out a black leather belt from his desk drawer and strapped it around his waist. Attached to the belt and resting on his left hip was a snub-nosed .38. Pinned on the other side was a shiny badge.

Hodel has never fired his weapon in the line of duty, although he's had "several opportunities... but always selected another option."

After returning from the coroner's office, Hodel began working the telephone.

"This is Detective Hodel at LAPD Hollywood homicide," he said in a call to the hospital where the woman had died. "Checking on a Gloria Ford, who was transported by R.A. (rescue ambulance) from her home early this morning around 3 a.m. Do you know how the call came in? And I'd like to talk to a doctor who examined her."

Within 30 minutes, Hodel found out that the woman's son, James Ford (not his real name), had called the Fire Department and reported finding his mother unconscious on the floor. And he had since visited her twice in the hospital.



Detective Steve Hodel at Hollywood Division.

"From the time she hit the emergency room her prognosis was very poor," the examining doctor explained to Hodel. "She remained on minimal life support and in a coma until she was pronounced (dead)."

"What about the bruises?"  
"Some looked very fresh," the doctor continued. "Can you give an initial indication of death," Hodel asked.

"It's hard to figure," the doctor said. "She had the high blood-alcohol level. The (brain) scan showed massive cranial bleeding. Beyond that I just don't know."

Hodel's next call went to the manager of the run-down, five-story apartment house near Sunset and

swers to attain. A witness is not likely to tell you, "Yes, I was more inclined to lie in extended media coverage."

Another fairly common issue is the question of fearfulness and reluctance to testify — for example, the perennial Mafia witness who doesn't want to be recognized on television.

Q: If the Supreme Court decides in the Florida case that all parties must consent to the media coverage, there may be very few instances where trials are televised.

A: The consensus seems to be that, if that is the Supreme Court's decision, there will be substantially less criminal proceedings that will receive extended media coverage. People agree that in the majority of the cases, defendants and many of the prosecutors will not give consent.

However, there will be certain types of criminal proceedings in which the parties' consent will be given. You could have a case where there is a significant issue to publicize. The parties might consent because they want to voice their views on some public issues.

Q: Today's technology is certainly a far cry from the days of Billy Sol Estes and Sam Sheppard. Is that why cameras in the courtroom may not cause any major problems?

A: The technological advancements in recent years have served to soften the objections of any judiciary who feared, in particular, that cameras would cause a circus-like atmosphere of blinding lights and 20 cameras staring you in the face.

We are not going to see that scenario in California courts. The experiment with media coverage is going to be very controlled, and as unobtrusive as possible. Of course, it just takes one camera to relay to the trial participants that television and radio media are in the courtroom, and that their behavior and visual image will be broadcast. Whether it's one camera or 100 cameras, it will still have that impact.

**Q&A**

Continued from page A-1

tions during the experimental year.

Another time we can compare data between trials is when, during the experimental year, extended media coverage of a high-interest trial is denied by the judge or the parties. We'd go in and collect data from the trial and compare its conventional coverage to extended media coverage for other trials.

Q: What are the variables you're going to be looking at, as far as the data is concerned?

A: The first question we will look at is whether the camera equipment is distracting or destructive in the proceedings. The second question deals with the behavior of trial participants — is that behavior altered because the participants know that they're being recorded on electronic media, and that recording will be broadcast on television and radio?

We are not deeply exploring the positive factors of extended media coverage. We want to see if there are any negative factors — are there any reasons why extended media coverage of the courts should not be allowed? So first of all, we're looking at certain attitudes of individuals. We're administering an attitudinal survey to judges and lawyers prior to this experimental year, and again after some experiments.

Q: What kinds of attitudes are you looking at?

A: The contents of the questionnaire will include such questions as: Is there general distraction because of media coverage in courtroom decorum? Are the jurors attentive in an extended media coverage case, or are they distracted by the cameras? Are witnesses more reluctant to testify? Are they more nervous in their testimonies?

One could ask questions about the effect of extended media coverage on the judge — whether it affects his ability to maintain order in the courtroom. Or if the judge or the attorneys are playing up to the media. Or if they are using the media as a vehicle for their own interests, such as an upcoming election for the judge.

One might ask questions about unfair damage to the participants' reputations. One might look at potential depiction of the available juror pool — are jurors more reluctant to serve in a trial with extended media coverage? One might look at juror deliberations — are they more concerned about their friends' or the public's attitude, in terms of whether they are making a popular decision, because of their exposure?

And there is the question of witness truthfulness — is the witness more apt to lie because of the extended media coverage, or is his testimony somehow not as good as it would be without the media coverage?

Q: Or the witness could be more apt to tell the truth.

A: That will be one of the more difficult an-



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Highland where the victim lived with her 22-year-old son.

The manager reported that the mother and son were always fighting, and she had received occasional beatings from him. He said the mother drank a lot; the son was a meat cutter by trade.

"Homicide investigations are like chess games," Hodel said between phone calls. "First are the opening moves. Then the middle game, and finally the end game, which hopefully is prosecution and conviction."

Clearly, the opening moves in the Gloria Ford case were focusing on her son. He had become the likely suspect because of the past beatings.

Next, Hodel telephoned the police computer records system. "Give me anything you've got on James Harold Ford, DOB 1-3-58, address..."

Bingo. Five arrests in the last four years, all of a violent nature — resisting arrest, assault on a fireman, attempted robbery, carrying a concealed weapon.

"Now I remember this turkey," Skiles said suddenly. A 10-year veteran of the force, Skiles is in his third year on homicide. "I handled his assault on a fireman. He flips out against authority. He can be crazy, and he's a big guy, about 6 feet tall and 220 pounds. We'd better be careful."

It was 3 a.m. when Hodel picked up the phone and asked for a patrol unit to back them up in their anticipated confrontation with the son.

While waiting for the other officers to come in out

of the field, Hodel said, "Now we're getting into a gray area when it comes to the Miranda decision. Once we begin focusing on him as a suspect, we're required to Miranda-ize him — read him his rights."

"But we'll go out there and bring him back here. It's important to get him on our own turf. We'll get his story, and let him come up with a rational explanation."

"Maybe he'll cop out," Skiles said hopefully.

"Let's hope so, otherwise it's going to be a tough case," Hodel admitted. "It's been 24 hours since she was found. That's a long time for someone to clean up the crime scene."

Two hefty uniformed officers came into the squad room. "We hear you want police protection," joked one of the patrolmen.

"We don't think we'll have any trouble," Hodel said evenly. "But you never know."

Tomorrow: Detectives interrogate a murder suspect and solve the Gloria Ford case.

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