

MOM CHARGED WITH KILLING TOT - SHE'S ALSO ACCUSED OF BATTERING BOY'S TWIN

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A 33-year-old Detroit woman who regained custody of her twin babies from foster care by remaining drug free for several months was **charged** Tuesday **with killing** one of the twins.

Francina Shepherd, who has been in jail for three weeks on a first-degree child abuse charge in the battering of the surviving twin, was **charged with** first-degree murder and felony murder in the strangulation of the other, said Maria Miller, a spokeswoman for the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office.

Ulans Shepherd, age 16 months, was killed Jan. 22 in Shepherd's home in the 4200 block of Pennsylvania on Detroit's east side, investigators said. A police report filed in 36th District Court said Shepherd's female roommate found the boy not breathing and unresponsive in his crib the next day.

When EMS workers and police arrived, the roommate was holding Ulans' twin sister in her lap. The child's face was red and swollen, the police report said. She was taken to Children's Hospital of Michigan, where she was treated and released days later.

Officer Ben Biddle of the Detroit Police Child Abuse Unit wrote in the report that Shepherd confessed to hitting the children because they wouldn't stop crying and Ulans had soiled himself.

Shepherd said she hit Ulans "several times and, after he was unresponsive, she put him to bed," the report said.

Wayne County medical examiners ruled this week that the child was strangled.

Shepherd's grandmother, Francine Shepherd, said Tuesday that she often saw the family because they lived nearby.

"Why is she in jail?" asked Francine Shepherd, blaming "all that pressure that they put on her" to get a job before she could get the twins back.

"Every time she got a little part-time job **with** a temp service, she didn't have no babysitter," Francine Shepherd said.

Francina Shepherd has a documented history of drug abuse dating to January 2003, when she gave birth to a daughter who had cocaine in her system, according to Wayne County Family Court records.

Because Shepherd failed to get treatment for drug addiction, a judge terminated her parental rights to that child. Court records show that Shepherd's parental rights to two older children - a girl now 16 and a boy now 10 - also would have been terminated except that the children objected. They now live **with** relatives.

In March 2005, Francina Shepherd was using illegal drugs, according to court records, but quit when she found out she was pregnant **with** twins. The babies were born Sept. 13, 2005, and they and their mother tested negative for illegal drugs.

But because of her history, the state Department of Human Services placed the twins in a foster home supervised by Homes for Black Children of Detroit, and the DHS filed a petition to terminate Shepherd's rights to the twins.

In November 2005, then-Family Court Judge James A. Callahan denied the request to terminate her rights to the twins. Though Shepherd had missed several random drug screens, Callahan noted that she tested negative for illegal drugs that Oct. 7 and Nov. 3.

"There hasn't been any hard evidence to indicate that the mother has been abusing controlled substances since the beginning of March of this year," Callahan wrote in his order.

On Jan. 28, 2006, Callahan ordered that the twins be returned to their mother, citing her clean drug history and involvement **with** a family reunification program offered by the Judson Center of Royal Oak.

Callahan transferred to the court's criminal division last February, and another judge ended the court's jurisdiction over the twins in October.

On Tuesday, Callahan said he couldn't recall the case, but "I feel terrible about what happened to the children."

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION: Francina Shepherd of Detroit

MEMO: DETROIT

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