



Karen Buchholz tears up Friday while talking to reporters outside the Sacramento County Jail as the last of the suspects in the shooting death of her husband, Thomas Buchholz, was arraigned.

Suspect in 2000 slaying of car salesman arraigned

By Ramon Coronado

MURKIN WRITER
Alejandro "Alex" Santana, the alleged triggerman in the fatal shooting of a used-car salesman five years ago, was arraigned Friday in Sacramento Superior Court on charges that carry the death penalty.

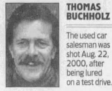
Santana, who turned 25 two weeks ago, is accused of the murder of 49-year-old Thomas "Bucky" Buchholz. Santana, who was arrested last week in Mexico, where he was working as a hairstylist, also is charged with robbery, kidnaping and carjacking, each filed as special circumstances, which make him eligible for death by lethal injection.

As Judge Patrick Marlette advised Santana that he might be subject to the death penalty, a gasp could be heard coming from the crowded courtroom filled with family members and friends of the defendant and the victim.

Outside the courtroom during a sidewalk press conference, Buchholz's wife, Karen Buchholz, was asked twice if she supported execution for the accused killer of her husband.

"That is up to the DA to make that decision," Buchholz said, surrounded by news photographers and reporters.

Buchholz, who learned she was pregnant with the couple's only child a week after the Aug. 22, 2000, murder, said her son,



THOMAS BUCHHOLZ

The used car salesman was shot Aug. 22, 2000, after being lured on a test drive.

who is now 4, has recently started to ask about his father.

"Before, he knew he had a dad, but he didn't know where he was. He now knows he is in heaven," Buchholz said, her eyes filled with tears.

According to court records, Buchholz's husband was tricked into going on a test drive with four men seeking parts for their two Camaros.

After he was carjacked, Buchholz was shot in the back of the head and his body pushed out the door of the car in the westbound lane of the Capital City Freeway between Marconi and El Camino avenues during noontime traffic.

Three of Santana's friends were arrested days later and have been tried and convicted for their roles.

Jose Luis Rivera, then 24, was convicted of murder and carjacking and is serving a life term in prison with no parole. Anthony Flores Camacho, 25, was convicted of carjacking and murder and was sentenced to 26 years to life in prison.

Theodore Santos, 23, who was 17 at the time of the crime but was prosecuted as an adult, was convicted of being an accessory to murder. He has since been released.

Santana and Rivera followed the car carrying Buchholz, Camacho and Santana as they drove away from the Sport Time Auto Center on Fulton Avenue, Deputy District Attorney Rod Norgaard argued during the trial.

Although Rivera, Camacho and Santos also were charged with special circumstances, the District Attorney's Office elected not to seek the death penalty against them.

The special circumstances carry only one other maximum penalty, which is life in prison without parole.

Prosecutors have no time limit for deciding if they will seek capital punishment on a given case, but in Sacramento Superior Court such decisions routinely take about 90 days.

Death penalty cases require special expenses and procedures, such as having two defense attorneys, which the U.S. Supreme Court has said must be put in place in a timely fashion.

Santana, who is being held without bail, was appointed a public defender. He comes back to court July 23 to set future court dates.

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Alejandro "Alex" Santana, left, with his public defender, Linda Parilla, appears before Superior Court Judge Patrick Marlette on Friday. Santana could be eligible for the death penalty.

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