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Amanda Bortner departs the courtroom on Thursday. Mike Ross/chief photographer

## Mother blamed boyfriend in hours after Cassidy Blortner's death

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DOVER — If Cassidy Bortner died from a head injury, then her boyfriend, Chad Evans, was to blame, Amanda Bortner told police in the hours after her daughter's death.

Those were Bortner's own words, as recorded in a taped interview with Maine

State Police Detective Angela Blodgett in the hours after Cassidy's death on Nov. 9, 2000.

During the fourth day of testimony in Bortner's child endangerment trial in Strafford County Superior Court on Thursday, Blodgett testified about Bortner's description of Evans' treatment of Cassidy.

In response to questions by David Ruoff of the attorney general's office, Blodgett referred to Bortner's words in the transcripts of four audiotaped interviews. Evans' family members, who have been in court showing support for Bortner throughout her trial, listened intently as Bortner's statements from the hours and days after Cassidy's death were repeated in court.

Evans was convicted in December of second-degree murder for causing Cassidy's death. He was also convicted on multiple counts of assault related to incidents that occurred in his Milton Road residence in Rochester, where Bortner currently resides.

Referencing statements in the interviews, Blodgett testified Thursday that Bortner told police Evans grabbed Cassidy's face with enough force to leave bruises, held her head under water to stop her from crying, picked her up by the arm or the face and threw her into the corner with enough force so that she would hit her head.

"Like, I'd see him hurt her ... He'd pick her up by the back of the neck and toss her into the corner — like, bang her head on the closet so it would keep her there," Bortner said in her first interview with Blodgett a few hours after Cassidy's death.

Bortner told police Evans would yell at Cassidy to be quiet, and if she did not stop crying, he would grab her face.

"If she screamed louder, it was worse," Bortner told police.

During that same interview, Bortner told Blodgett she had seen the bruises on Cassidy's face on the morning of her death. However, Bortner said she was in a rush and did not have her contacts in, so she had not noticed any other bruises. She described Cassidy as sleepy and unwilling to eat.

"Yeah — it looks like my fault ... because I didn't leave. I should have seen it," Bortner said during that interview.

In her second interview on the day of Cassidy's death, Bortner was asked who would be responsible for Cassidy's death if the cause of the toddler's death was from a blow to the head. Bortner replied, "Chad." In testimony earlier this week, Maine Chief Medical Examiner Margaret Greenwald established that Cassidy died from multiple blunt-force injuries to the head and abdomen.

When investigators asked Bortner during the interview if she believed Evans was responsible for Cassidy's death, Bortner replied, "Yeah. I know he is."

Bortner told police she and Evans purposely kept Cassidy away from the home of Bortner's mother, Jackie Conley, because Conley had questioned the bruises on Cassidy's face. She also stated they had discussed taking Cassidy to a doctor, but agreed to wait until the bruises faded. She said they asked her

sister, Jennifer Conley, and Conley's boyfriend, F. Jefferey Marshall, to watch Cassidy because they did not want to bring her to daycare with the bruises.

"He was paranoid about this — about his getting in trouble with her," Bortner said in the transcribed interview.

In a third interview, held three days later on Nov. 12, 2000, Bortner again described Evans as giving Cassidy facial bruises several times a week and throwing her into the corners of the house. She said her friends asked about the bruises.

"I didn't think it was that big of a deal ... I didn't think she was hurting from it," Bortner said of the abuse Evans inflicted on the toddler.

During her final interview with Bortner, on Nov. 16, 2000, Blodgett said Bortner informed her she was in contact with Evans. Blodgett said they discussed other options of places she could stay. Blodgett testified that Bortner told her it made her feel better to discuss her feelings about the case.

When Evans was arrested that evening, Blodgett said, police found Bortner at his house.

Blodgett's testimony and reading of sections of the interview transcripts took up the major portion of the afternoon proceedings following several hours of morning testimony by a line of witnesses — including friends of Bortner and Evans' ex-wife, Tristan Evans. The four witnesses testified to seeing bruises on Cassidy's face and body after Bortner and Evans began living together. Several described Cassidy as being frightened of Evans and withdrawn in his presence.

Cathy Nuernberg, who was close friends with Bortner prior to Cassidy's birth and remained close to her until about six months after the toddler's death, said that while she believed many of Bortner's excuses for the bruises, she "couldn't get over the fact of the grab marks" on Cassidy's face.

Bortner lived with Nuernberg in Sanford, Maine, when Cassidy was about 6 months old, Nuernberg testified, but left the baby at her mother's home.

"I feel she didn't want the responsibility (of Cassidy) at that time," Nuernberg testified.

After Evans' arrest, Bortner stayed with Nuernberg in Texas, where she resides. Nuernberg described Bortner as going out a lot with friends in the weeks after Cassidy's death.

"I never stopped worrying about her, but I stopped being able to help her. I felt she was lying so much that I just couldn't help her anymore," Nuernberg testified.

Bortner's childhood friend, Melissa Chick of Sanford, Maine, recalled seeing Cassidy with bruises on her many times after Bortner began living with Evans.

In tearful testimony, Chick told the jury that after Bortner brought her to live with Evans she "always had bruises" on her face. On one occasion, Chick testified, she took care of Cassidy and gave her a bath. She said she saw

severe bruises on Cassidy's stomach and legs.

"I didn't want to give her back — I wanted to take a picture of the bruises ... I couldn't find my camera," Chick said, weeping.

Bortner looked on, showing no emotion as Chick recounted the bruises she saw on the 21-month-old child.

Ruoff asked Chick why she didn't do anything to protect Cassidy other than asking Bortner questions.

"I thought if I asked too many questions ... That I wouldn't see her (Cassidy) again," Chick said, her voice breaking.

During her cross-examination of Chick, Bortner's court-appointed attorney, Patricia Wiberg, brought up the sexual abuse Bortner allegedly suffered at the hands of her stepfather.

"I don't think her mom did enough for her. I don't think she stood behind her ... I was suspecting her stepfather was molesting her," Chick said of her recollections of staying over at Bortner's house when they became friends in high school.

During Chick's testimony about Bortner's treatment in the Bortner-Conley household in her early teens, Bortner wept.

Tristan Evans of Exeter, testified that she called the Department of Human Services' Division of Children, Youth and Families about nine days before Cassidy's death to report the bruises she had seen on Cassidy's face.

Although it was not discussed in court Thursday, at the time of Cassidy's death, Evans had been on probation after pleading guilty to assaulting Tristan.

A former X-ray technician and current CT scan technician, Tristan Evans said she called DCYF because she did not know what was going on with the child's injuries.

"To make myself feel better, I called," she said.

Under cross-examination, Tristan Evans alleged that two unnamed witnesses for the state had been discussing their testimony in violation of a court order.

Tristan Evans, who also testified for the state in the Evans murder trial, had voiced her support for her ex-husband throughout his trial. Following her testimony Thursday, she joined the Evans to watch the afternoon proceedings.

Heather Hamilton LaValley, a store manager at Perfumania in Kittery, Maine, described Bortner bringing Cassidy into the store to visit with her sister, Jennifer Conley, who is employed there. LaValley, who was the first to testify on Thursday, said Bortner only brought Cassidy into the store once, and that there were bruises on the child's face.

LaValley testified that Bortner was laughing when she answered LaValley's questions about Cassidy's injuries.

Tracey Foley, the first witness called to the stand after the noon break, testified to seeing bruises on Cassidy's face and to speaking with Bortner about her relationship with Evans prior to Cassidy's death.

The final witness before Blodgett's testimony was Amanda Donnell of Somersworth, an acquaintance of Bortner and Evans. She described seeing Bortner and Evans out shopping at a clothing store in the days after Cassidy's death. She said Bortner was trying on a jacket and the two were very affectionate "hugging, kissing, giggling" in the store. She said Bortner never cried or appeared upset, but that they did argue over who should pay for the jacket.

Bortner's trial is scheduled to resume this morning. Ruoff said at the close of the proceedings Thursday that he expects to call his final witnesses today.

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