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New York 17, N. Y.

MANFRED BOWDITCH
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH AND SAFETY

June 20, 1956

Mr. Jerome Trichter
Assistant Commissioner
N. Y. City Department of Health
125 Worth Street
New York 13, New York

Dear Jerry:

I suppose you saw the enclosed shocking story in yesterday's Herald Tribune.

Though lead has apparently no place in the picture, it is one that seems to me to have a real bearing on the problem of childhood lead poisoning, for it is my understanding that the great majority of our New York City cases stem from this stratum of our population.

How is the warning labeling required by your Department going to mean anything to people such as these, or how, for that matter, is the parental education that we advocate to be put across to them?

Our long-term objective should of course be to get rid of our slums, but I still think that your proposal of some years ago to hold regional meetings of the city's paint dealers and educate them to the importance of the problem, would do more than any one other preventive step and should be carried out.

Sincerely yours,



MB:GW
Enclosure
cc: Dr. Wheatley

N13642

Mother in Bellevue, 2 Babies Starve, Die

By Martin C. Berck

A Welfare Department worker on a routine call yesterday found the bodies of two babies who apparently had been left alone and starved to death after their mother was taken to the Bellevue Hospital psychiatric ward eight days ago.

Police tentatively identified the children as Josephina Velez, one year and nine months, and her brother, Antonio, eight months.

Chief of Detectives James B. Leggett, who launched an immediate investigation with Chief Inspector Thomas Neilson, said the mother, Mrs. Anastasia Rios Martinez Velez, thirty-two, was incoherent when she was picked up and neither the police nor hospital authorities knew that she was on relief or that she had children at home.

Mrs. Velez, police said, was

the mother of seven children, five of them in Catholic institutions.

The welfare worker, Martin Lutenberg, called at her three-room sixth-floor rear apartment at 306 E. 32d St. shortly before 5 p.m. He said he entered—the door was unlocked—when no one answered his knock and found the place piled deep in dust and litter.

Mr. Lutenberg, spotting the girl lying dead in her crib, raced down the building's iron staircase and summoned police. The dead baby boy was found later in a carriage in the same room.

The welfare worker, who had been making a routine check, last visited the Velez family on June 1.

Assistant Chief Medical Examiner Emanuel Neuren said a preliminary examination indicated the children died last Thursday or Friday from lack of food. An autopsy has been ordered for today.

On June 10 Mrs. Velez was picked up by police of the E. 22d St. Station after she had allegedly kicked out the plate-glass window of the Murray Hill Beer Tavern at 603 E. 26th St.

Chief Leggett said their records at the station house showed no known address or relatives for the woman. He said police were notified the next day that she had given Bellevue authorities an address that did not exist.

Police of the Missing Persons Bureau spoke to her at Bellevue Hospital, but finding her incoherent, were not able to ascertain her real address, the chief said.

Detectives said they learned tonight from Welfare Department records that Mrs. Velez had been separated last February from her husband, Jose Velez, who is believed to be staying somewhere in New Jersey. The couple came from Puerto Rico eight years ago and has been on relief since August, 1953, according to the records.

Police records indicated Mrs. Velez had reported her husband missing last March 26, but the Missing Persons Bureau later listed the case as one of abandonment.

Chief Leggett said that "when all the facts are found, if there

is any laxity, we won't hide it, you can be sure of that."

Mrs. Velez, questioned at Bellevue last night, said she had left the children in the care of a woman neighbor, whose name was withheld. Police said the neighbor denied that and added that she had not seen Mrs. Velez for more than a month.

Other neighbors in the dingy tenement described Mrs. Velez as a short, wiry woman who kept to herself and was friendly with no one in the building.

Mrs. Velez, it was said, was often heard shouting at her two children. No one apparently noticed her eight-day absence, however.

A Bellevue Hospital spokesman said that Mrs. Velez, on admission to the hospital, had said nothing about having any children. "She was an incoherent person and I don't assume we even knew she was on relief," the spokesman said.

She was brought to the hospital for observation and normally would be kept ten to fourteen days, he said.

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