



‘This was a life of beauty.’ Au pairs grieve for mentor and friend killed on Maplewood street

By Blake Nelson

NJ Advance Media for NJ.com and The Star-Ledger

Published Aug. 7, 2019

Karen Bermudez-Rodriguez gave gifts.

Chocolate for Valentine’s Day, one friend said. Hand cream and perfume for Christmas, said another.

Barbara Mota, 22, received pearl earrings from Bermudez-Rodriguez when Mota moved away. The two au pairs had planned on seeing each other again soon, and Mota messaged with Bermudez-Rodriguez Aug. 1 about when they could get together.

They never got the chance. On Wednesday evening, Mota joined about 150 others to raise candles in memory of Bermudez-Rodriguez, 26, who was allegedly murdered Saturday in Maplewood by a man she had dated.

Inside Morrow Memorial United Methodist Church were members of the Colombian Consulate, Maplewood police officers, a representative from Bermudez-Rodriguez’s au pair agency and many, many young women.

Ana Ojeda, a 25-year-old au pair from Mexico, said Bermudez-Rodriguez would often remind them how far away they were from home.

“We’re our own family,” Ojeda remembered Bermudez-Rodriguez saying.

They are also part of a growing community. Last year, there were more than 1,700 registered au pairs from other countries in New Jersey, according to the U.S. State Department, the highest number in a decade.

Brenda Ehlers, an associate pastor who helped lead the service, said Bermudez-Rodriguez helped mentor au pairs in the area, and sought out new arrivals to welcome them to the U.S., a sentiment echoed by other women who spoke.

“This was a life of beauty,” Ehlers said.

About a mile away from the church is the Walton Road home where Bermudez-Rodriguez lived and worked. Police said a 27-year-old man she had been dating, Joseph D. Porter, stabbed her and her boss early Saturday morning after she told Porter the relationship was over.

Neighbors found her bleeding in the street and tried to save her, according to 911 calls released Wednesday. She was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital. Her boss, a 40-year-old New York comedy club owner named David Kimowitz, also died.

She was paired with the Kimowitz family through AuPairCare, one of 15 registered agencies in the country. An AuPairCare spokeswoman named Joanne Hritz said they were supporting police with an ongoing investigation.

“We are deeply saddened by this tragedy,” Hritz wrote in an email.

One of the women at Wednesday’s service has raised more than \$35,000 online to help return Bermudez-Rodriguez’s remains to Colombia, where she was from. Friends in Colombia wrote online in Spanish that she had been a funny classmate and a good friend.

Bermudez-Rodriguez’s father and sister were supposed to be at the service, several people in attendance said, but stormy weather diverted their flight.

Porter, her alleged killer, was caught trying to flee the country and is scheduled to appear in court next week, authorities said.

Domestic violence homicides have generally increased in New Jersey since 2010, according to state police. Fifty-two people, most of them women, were killed in 2016, the most recent year available.