

Tragedy in the driveway

Man accidentally runs down & kills his wife, 82, in Queens

By RUTH BASHINSKY and BILL HUTCHINSON
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITERS

As he stood in front of the Queens home where he and his wife had made their life for 55 years, Walter Yackel cried out in anguish, unable to bear the thought that he had just accidentally run over and killed his beloved Mary.

"I wish the earth could open up and swallow me. I can die now," the 83-year-old retired construction worker said as he watched firefighters try to free

his mortally wounded 82-year-old wife from under the front wheels of their car.

The heartbreaking scene unfolded around noon after Walter

and Mary Yackel returned from grocery shopping to their cream-colored, two-story house on Jay Ave. near 65th St. in Maspeth.

Police said Mary Yackel got out and began walking across the driveway in front of the couple's 1992 Dodge Shadow.

"He [Walter] thought he was in reverse, and he gave it the gas," a police source said.

Investigators said it appeared Walter Yackel panicked and accidentally hit the accelerator after the car went forward instead of backward. But they were examining the powder-blue hatchback for possible mechanical defects.

The couple's daughter Florence, who lives around the corner, raced to the scene and found her mother pinned under the car, neighbors said.

"There was no screaming," said one neighbor, Dr. Jeffrey Ahing. "The only noise I heard was from Walter. He looked like he was going to collapse. He was absolutely devastated."

Ahing, a 55-year-old physician, said Walter Yackel told him that after the car hit his wife, he ran into the house and called 911.

"I ran the car over my wife," he told Ahing. "I was trying to stop the car, and it wouldn't stop. It was an accident."

As firefighters worked to free Mary Yackel, Ahing broke the news to Walter Yackel that his wife probably wasn't going to survive her injuries.

Mary Yackel, described as a housewife and a loving grandmother who enjoyed gardening, was taken to Elmhurst Hospital Center, where she died.

Neighbors said the Yackels were married at least 55 years and moved into their house shortly after they were wed.

Ahing said Walter Yackel had just gotten his driver's license renewed and mostly used his car to drive to the doctor or the grocery store.

He said he once asked Walter Yackel if he ever thought of giving up driving. "He said, 'I can still drive. I'm still young,'" Ahing said.

Neighbor Al Emig, 64, who knew the Yackels for more than 20 years, said Walter was a cautious driver.

"I never remembered Walter having an accident since I've been living here," Emig said. "He never seemed like he wasn't in control."

With Richard Weir



ANTHONY FIORANELLI

AFTERSHOCK Walter Yackel, 83, sits in state of sorrow and disbelief on his stoop after accidentally running over his wife, Mary, 82, with family car in driveway at their Queens home yesterday. Mary Yackel died at Elmhurst Hospital Center.

Laci's hubby spent secret cash on lovers

By MARY PAPERFUSS in Modesto, Calif.
and MAKI BECKER in New York
DAILY NEWS WRITERS

With as many as three girlfriends, multiple cell phones to stay in touch and a checking account hidden from his wife, Scott Peterson had a busy secret life, a source close to the double-murder investigation revealed.

Investigators also have evidence that Peterson — accused of killing his pregnant wife, Laci, and their unborn son, named Conner — made a "significant purchase" of items that could have been used to anchor a body, a second source familiar with the case said.

Investigators need to find the items to "connect all the dots," that source said.

The bodies of Laci and Conner washed ashore last month in San Francisco Bay, near where Scott Peterson,

30, had told cops he went fishing Christmas Eve. He reported his 27-year-old wife missing after returning that night.

Peterson, a fertilizer salesman, has proclaimed his innocence. His lawyer, Mark Geragos, has vowed to help him find the real killer.

Lawyer Gloria Allred, representing Peterson's admitted mistress, Amber Frey, urged any other girlfriends to step forward yesterday. Allred also met with prosecutors to discuss their plans to call Frey as a witness, possibly during a preliminary hearing scheduled for July 16.

Peterson, who is being held without bond, showed up in court yesterday as lawyers wrangled over an array of issues, from unsealing document



Scott Peterson

to wiretaps.

His bleach blond locks had been shorn to a near-buzz cut that was back to his original dark brown. He said nothing, appearing confident and sometimes flashing a smug grin as the legal eagles duked it out.

Judge Al Girolami heard arguments from California newspapers that want sealed documents — including search warrants and autopsy results — to be made public. He said he would rule this week.

Girolami also threatened to issue a gag order. "Every day we hear about something in the paper that we don't hear in court," he said. "I think we need a protective order."

The judge ordered prosecutors to give Peterson's camp copies of 69 phone con-

versations that law enforcement intercepted between the defendant and his lawyers in the months before his arrest.

Details of those conversations were disclosed Monday on Fox News Channel, which reported that Peterson told Frey in one conversation: "I know who did it, and I'll tell you later when I see you." That meeting never occurred.

Defense sources have raised the possibility that Laci Peterson was killed as part of a satanic ritual or by a strange man spotted in the neighborhood the day she disappeared.

After the court proceedings, Geragos said the defense team has received several helpful tips from the public that the police also are looking into.

"The big cases tend to bring out the big nuts," he conceded, "but a lot of information we have received has been very good."