

10 years later, Vicki Robinson's murder still makes us tremble

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Not long ago, Tampa defense lawyer Dee Ann Athan went to Plant High School to speak to a government class. She figured they would talk about the Constitution and such.

But the kids wanted to hear about Valessa. How is Valessa, and what's it like in prison, and how could she do it?

Never mind they were only 6 or 7 when it happened. Like a lot of people Athan runs into, they want to talk about her infamous teenage client. How, they're still wondering, could it happen? How could the age-old struggle between a mother and daughter go so completely and utterly wrong?

The boys there that night, Athan says. The LSD. Out-of-control kids.

"The perfect storm," she says.

Ten years ago today, 49-year-old real estate agent Vicki Robinson disappeared.

The morning before, she had awakened in her suburban house-with-a-pool on a quiet Carrollwood cul-de-sac. Maybe she looked forward to dinner that night with her boyfriend. Maybe she thought about Valessa, 15, her youngest.

Valessa's boyfriend was a nightmare, good looking, 19 and tattooed, with a jail record and a taste for drugs. And Valessa was more defiant by the day. Talking of wanting a baby, even.

But Vicki had a plan. Less than two weeks and Valessa would be in a Christian residential program for troubled girls out in the country called Steppin' Stone Farm. For at least a year.

But on the day an unsuspecting Valessa was supposed to arrive, everyone was gathering for a funeral.

The perfect storm, Athan calls what exploded in the house that night. Valessa and Adam Davis and a friend on drugs. The attempt to kill Vicki, in her nightgown, with a bleach-filled syringe and finally a knife.

They ran and were caught. The friend testified and Adam got death. His sentence was upheld just this month by the Florida Supreme Court.

Valessa's trial — with its pretty divorced mom victim and its every-parent's-nightmare theme — caught the eye of shows like *48 hours*. Animal Planet even did a piece on Vicki's sheltie, Lady, called *As Dog Is My Witness*.

Valessa came to court looking like a child, not the thug she had wanted to be. She got 20 years.

In the first four years she was in, she lost gain time for "sex acts" with another inmate, "spoken threats," possession of contraband and disorderly conduct. She cleaned housing units, worked in the laundry and was a wellness aide. She took classes in architectural drafting and dog training. She picked up trash. She is now 25 and scheduled to get out in 2015. She'll be 32, jailed more than half of her life, her childhood long gone.

After she died, Vicki's friends started a foundation in her name to help parents like her. They raised more than \$10,000 to donate to Steppin' Stone to help another girl there.

They plan a private memorial. They will have dinner and talk about her life. "She was like a sister to me, and I loved her," says friend Ed Philips. He has been thinking about seeing Valessa.

The house on the quiet cul-de-sac has changed little. The neighborhood is still all muted beiges and shady oaks and perfect lawns. Flowers are in full bloom, just like they were 10 years ago. A riot of butterflies passes over what was once Vicki's front yard, as if nothing bad could happen here.