Witness: Sharon Rocha

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Called by: People (prosecution)

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Examinations: Direct – David Harris

Day 1 of 1 for this witness

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Direct Examination by David Harris

HARRIS: Ms. Rocha, were you Laci Peterson's mother?

ROCHA: Yes, I am.

HARRIS: And were you Conner Peterson's grandmother?

ROCHA: Yes, I am.

HARRIS: Can you tell us about Laci.

ROCHA: Laci was just somebody that people gravitated to. She just had a personality that made people feel comfortable. She was an upbeat person. She was more of a leader than a follower. She was involved. She followed her heart. She believed, when she believed in something, she believed in something. She fought really hard for beliefs. I mean, when she wanted something, she went after it. She was a strong-willed person. She wasn't somebody who, she wasn't dependent on other people. She was very independent, actually.

HARRIS: Now we've seen a number of pictures with Laci with this big smile, is that how Laci was as she grew up?

ROCHA: Laci was like that from the time she was born. I remember the mornings going in to take her out of her crib and she'd be smiling at that time. And I knew I was in for a long day. But she didn't let things get her down. A lot of things that would have upset other people, it would upset her, but she didn't dwell on the negative.

HARRIS: You were saying as she was growing up she was more of a leader than a follower, did, when people gravitated towards her did she start forming friendships at an early age?

ROCHA: As soon as she could talk, yes.

HARRIS: And those friends, are some of those friends still around?

ROCHA: Yes, there is. Yes, some of them are here today that she's known since she was a little girl.

HARRIS: The friends that are still around and the ones that she grew up with, did they come to your house on a regular basis?

ROCHA: We get together, they come over, we go out to dinner. We see each other, we talk to each other.

HARRIS: As Laci was growing up is there kind of this group of girls that blossomed and turned into women from this early age?

ROCHA: Yes, we've watched them all grow up together.

HARRIS: Describe that for us, this friendship that Laci developed.

ROCHA: Friends were her loyal friends, the people that were close to her that were all a group were all loyal to each other. They were all very much the same; they all had, they were all happy girls and great attitudes.

They're a lot of fun to be around.

HARRIS: You're saying that she got involved with things as she was going through school, did she get involved with activities?

ROCHA: Yes, she was involved in clubs and a lot of the organizations. And she was an outstanding freshman. She received the Outstanding Freshman award from Cal Poly. She worked when she was in college at a shop in a horticulture department. She worked for a florist.

HARRIS: You mentioned she worked for a florist, did Laci have an interest in flowers?

ROCHA: That was her major in horticulture, flowers and plants.

HARRIS: And did she get a degree from Cal Poly?

ROCHA: Yes, she did.

HARRIS: And this interest in plants, did she, some people like plants, some people have green thumbs, if can you describe for us about Laci.

ROCHA: Laci took an early interest in plants. She liked weeds.

She liked weeds. She liked to play in the yard and pull weeds. She had a want for putting things together and making things grow. She had talked a lot time about after moving back to Modesto she thought about opening up an herb shop and I reminded her that she was in Modesto and not San Luis Obispo and things were a little different here.

HARRIS: You're saying that Laci liked to make things grow, did she take special interest in arranging flowers?

ROCHA: Yes, she was. She was really talented. She's the kind of person that can look at things and look at something really ugly and make it very pretty. She could see how it was going to be in the future and not how it was right now.

HARRIS: Was that, this quality of seeing the good, was that something that attracted other people to her?

ROCHA: I think so because she was positive and she was upbeat and she was happy.

HARRIS: If I can have marked next a series of photographs.

JUDGE: How many?

HARRIS: I believe there's ten.

JUDGE: 305 A through J.

HARRIS: There's ten. Ms. Rocha, let me show you what's been marked as 305 A through J. You look at these and see if you recognize these as being photographs of Laci.

ROCHA: Yes.

HARRIS: Do these photographs accurately depict Laci?

ROCHA: Yes.

HARRIS: Starting with 305 A, what do we see there?

ROCHA: This was at one of the Denny High School football games. She was a cheerleader. I'm sorry, that was when she was a Ram.

JUDGE: Could you speak a little louder.

ROCHA: I have a cold so it's a little difficult.

JUDGE: I'm not sure if the jury can hear you.

HARRIS: Okay. I don't know if you can turn the microphone a little bit more towards you.

ROCHA: This was before my school. This was when she was, this is when she was a cheerleader for the Rams.

HARRIS: Now you seem to be dressed in school colors there too?

ROCHA: It was the team colors.

HARRIS: What was it like when Laci was growing up as her mom, if can you share with us that.

ROCHA: Well, I participated a lot with her. I mean, it was, it's difficult not to. She was, she was she always doing something, involved with something, and I enjoyed being with her and doing the things with her.

HARRIS: Showing you 305 B.

ROCHA: This was her graduation from junior high school. She just had her braces removed just a couple weeks before that.

HARRIS: Was she pretty happy to get the braces off?

ROCHA: She was thrilled.

HARRIS: I'll show you 305 C.

ROCHA: That was her high school graduation.

HARRIS: When Laci got to the point that she's graduating from high school did she talk to you about her plans and what she wanted to do?

ROCHA: Kind of that. She talked about she wanted to go to Cal Poly. I remember when she came home and told me what she wanted to major in.

I had to ask her what it was. I never even heard of it. But she was determined. That's what she wanted to do.

HARRIS: And did she?

ROCHA: She did. I wanted her to wait and maybe go to junior college first, but she wanted to leave and she started as freshman at Cal Poly.

HARRIS: 305 E.

ROCHA: That was in May of 2000. It was just before she moved up here. They moved back up here June. That was taken at the beach in San Simeon.

HARRIS: Is that you and Laci on the beach?

ROCHA: Yes, Scott took the picture.

HARRIS: 305 E.

ROCHA: That was taken at a restaurant in San Luis Obispo. Jackie took that picture. They had lunch together.

HARRIS: Now we see in these pictures Laci's big smile, was that just part of her personality how she always was?

ROCHA: Always. You hear her giggling. She didn't just smile, she had a little giggle. She just, to kind of bend over when she laugh and pull her knee in. She'd laugh at herself.

HARRIS: 305F.

ROCHA: That was in September of 2001. It was taken at Antonio's baptism, grandson's baptism. We didn't realize it at that time, but we were dressed almost identical.

HARRIS: Now you were talking about some of those friends that she grew up with and grew up around her. Going to 305 G.

ROCHA: That was her last birthday on May 4th, 2002. It was her 27th birthday. And those are her friends.

HARRIS: Now these women that we see in the photograph there, are these the young girls that have grown up with her?

ROCHA: Yes, all of them she met them at different ages, but they all grown up together and they were all very good friends.

HARRIS: And here they were coming to Laci's house on her birthday when she turned 27, so is that kind of, is that the friendships that she engendered with these girls?

ROCHA: Yes.

HARRIS: There's another photograph, 305 H, is that some of the same girls?

ROCHA: Yes, it is. I believe that was taken in July 2002. I didn't take the picture but –

HARRIS: Showing you 305 I.

ROCHA: That was Mother's Day of 2002. That was a week after Laci's birthday. It's at her house.

HARRIS: Who's all in this picture?

ROCHA: That's myself and my mother and Laci.

HARRIS: And you said this was taken on Mother's Day, did all of the mothers come together?

ROCHA: Yes, it was all of us and, also, Jackie Peterson and Lee Peterson were there.

HARRIS: Since Laci's murder is Mother's Day the same?

ROCHA: No, not at all.

HARRIS: How is it different?

ROCHA: First Mother's Day I laid on the floor and I cried most of the day because she should have been there. She should have been a mother, also. And that was taken away from her. She wanted to be a mother. Divorce is always an option, not murder.

HARRIS: Ms. Rocha, let me put up there the last photograph. 305 J.

ROCHA: That was her first day of teaching. Her students gave her an apple, an assignment. She was really proud of that.

HARRIS: Did Laci want to be a teacher?

ROCHA: Yes, she did. When she was younger that was, that wasn't a subject she had given any thought to, but as she became older she enjoyed being around children.

HARRIS: We heard about Laci's smile, we've heard about her friends, did Laci also touch her students as well?

ROCHA: Yes.

HARRIS: Did you get to meet one of her students after she went missing?

ROCHA: I met several of them, but one in particular came to the volunteer center with his mother and she was crying and he was really upset. He wanted to find Laci. His mother told him that he wouldn't even sleep by himself because he needed to find Laci and he came every day to look for Laci.

HARRIS: Now you said that Laci loved children, did she talk to you about becoming a mother?

ROCHA: She talked to me a lot about becoming a mother. I remember before they moved back to Modesto the picture of us at the beach. I remember when we were driving up there and Scott was driving and Laci was in the passenger seat and I was in the back seat we were talking about childbirth and she was asking me what it was like and she was really looking forward to it. Then, then it was a couple more years before she became pregnant, but she was really looking forward to becoming a mother. Actually, she was, the day she learned that Brent and Rose were going to have a baby was the day of their housewarming. She called me later that evening, she was crying because she really wanted to be pregnant. She said that Scott said he wasn't ready yet, but she really wanted to have a baby because she wanted to have a baby at the same time that Rose did.

HARRIS: When you found out she was pregnant did you start talking to her about the baby?

ROCHA: Yes.

HARRIS: When you found out she was going to have baby Conner to go shopping with you?

ROCHA: She shopped a lot. She'd call me every time she went to the doctor's, let me know what the results were. She gave me a copy of the sonogram. Saving a picture, I have the baby. And he was a baby. You could see his little body. That was taken on December 14th and the next day was the last day I saw her, December 15th. She wanted me to put my hand on her stomach and feel him. I never felt him, but I sat there the rest of the evening with my hand on her stomach. I talked to him. I put my fact next to her stomach and I talked to him. She was anxious. She was ready to have him.

HARRIS: On Christmas Eve of 2002 when you had the phone call that Laci was missing, tell us about how you felt.

ROCHA: I was scared to death because I knew she wouldn't just be missing. Laci didn't just disappear. I knew something had happened to her. And it was cold that night. And I had my friend, Sandy, take me back to the house and get blankets and coats for everybody because it was so cold. I needed one for her because I knew she'd be freezing when we found her.

HARRIS: Did Laci come home to you that night?

ROCHA: No, I never saw her again. I never saw her after December 15th.

HARRIS: After Laci went missing could you sleep?

ROCHA: No, we came home that night and Brent and I and Ron stayed up all night in the living room. I didn't go to bed for weeks. I didn't sleep in my bed for weeks. I couldn't get comfortable and warm and not know where she was.

HARRIS: Did you try to stay awake for a long period of time?

ROCHA: Yeah, I felt I needed to be awake just in case she called so I could go to her as soon as she called. I was afraid to go to sleep. I was afraid I'd have nightmares about what would happen to her. And I knew she wouldn't be sleeping, she would be afraid. She was scared. Every day did she know she was being murdered. Did she know what was happening to her.

HARRIS: During the time that she was missing did you have to go out in the public and make statements to try and get support to help find her?

ROCHA: Yes, we did it all the time. I begged and asked to let us know, tell us where she was. And there was somebody who knew all along. And you wouldn't tell us. You knew where she was. Instead you just let us go through this every day.

HARRIS: When you finally found Laci and Conner, tell us about that.

ROCHA: The day they were found I wasn't feeling well. I was at home and I heard footsteps come to my door and I didn't answer the door because I knew. I hadn't heard anything, but I just knew. I knew. And then when they went into the backyard to the back door I knew I had to answer the door. But I knew, in my soul I knew they'd been found. And later when I was told it would be several days before they'd be identified and I asked why. Because they told me that they could use dental charts immediately if it was her. And then when I was told she didn't have a head, I, I didn't believe. I just dropped the phone and I fell to the floor. It never occurred to me what condition she might be in.

HARRIS: When you were told that Laci and Conner had been recovered from the bay was there something about that that upset you because of Laci?

ROCHA: Laci always got motion sickness very easily. I, And you knew that and that's the place you took her and you put her in the bay. You knew she'd be sick for all eternity. You did that to her anyway.

HARRIS: Did it take the authorities several days until you were finally notified that the bodies were Laci and Conner?

ROCHA: Yes, she was found on Monday and they identified her on Friday, but I knew it was her. I knew it was her from the beginning.

HARRIS: When Laci's body was returned to you and Conner's body was returned to you was there something about that and their burial that was troubling to you?

ROCHA: I knew that I needed to spend some time with her and to have the opportunity to say good-bye to her alone. And I knew she was in the casket and I knew her baby was there, but I knew she didn't have arms to hold him either. She should have had her arms and her head on her entire body.

It just haunts me all the time. I just hope she didn't know what was happening.

HARRIS: Now a short time after that was there a memorial service on Laci's birthday?

ROCHA: Her 28th birthday. It was a beautiful, beautiful tribute to Laci. She just would have been astounded to see so many people interested in her, concerned about her. We were told over 3,000 people there.

HARRIS: I want to turn to somewhat of a hard question. How has this changed, how has this affected you in your daily life now?

ROCHA: Every morning when I get up I, I cry. It takes me a long time just to be able to get out of the house because I just keep thinking why did this happen. I miss her. I wanted to know my grandson. I wanted Laci to be a mother. I wanted to hear her called mom. When I go to buy birthday cards, Mother's Day cards, I just can't stand it. I always look at the ones with daughter and mom or mom to daughter. And she's gone. I don't sleep well. I think about her all of the time.

HARRIS: What happens when the phone rings?

ROCHA: There's been several times, but I remember the first time it happened I was on my way outside. I already locked the door. I heard the phone ring and then I unlocked the door and went back in. I, I was thinking it was Laci. I hadn't heard from her in a long time. I hadn't heard from her. And then I realized it wasn't. It will never be her. I remember one time walking into the

house. I opened the door and walked into the entryway and I had to stop and she turned around and said, "Hi, Mom." It was though she was right there. I saw her. A lot of times I think when I have a question about something that's been going on, I'll just ask her and she'll tell me. But I can't. She'll always be here for me. Laci didn't deserve to die.

HARRIS: I have no other questions.