

## Estranged couple's 'talk' ends in tragic stabbing in front of young children

Written by Marty Randall

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A young mother was stabbed multiple times in front of her two children, allegedly by her estranged husband on Thursday evening, March 28, in an Austin home.

Tara Blankenbaker was flown from the scene of the stabbing by medical helicopter to University of Louisville Hospital. Latest word from law enforcement officials was that she was in critical condition in the hospital's ICU, having suffered one wound to her upper left chest and several others around the back of her neck and along her spine.

Sheriff Dan McClain, Chief Deputy Don Campbell and deputies Jeremy Arnold and Joe Guarneri were dispatched by a 9-1-1 call from Tara Blankenbaker's grandparents shortly before 8 p.m. Austin Major/Detective Lonnie Noble and Patrolman Nathan Hall were also alerted by the dispatch and met the county officers at the ranch-style home at 3996 West State Road 256.

They found the young woman bleeding profusely from her wounds and lying on the floor of a back bedroom. Her grandparents said her estranged husband, Charles "Ross" Blankenbaker, had come to the house earlier that evening to talk to their granddaughter.

Tara and the children had been living at the house for about a week. According to information given to the Sheriff's Department, the couple had previously been living with Ross Blankenbaker's parents in Washington County.

Sheriff McClain said that when Ross Blankenbaker arrived, the couple stepped outside and then went for a short drive. When they returned to the house, Tara went to the basement, and Ross followed. They came back up with their children, ages two and four. Tara took the children to the back bedroom. Ross allegedly followed and knocked on the door, which Tara opened and allowed him to enter.

The grandparents said they heard nothing further until the door reopened and Ross Blankenbaker quickly left the residence, the children crying and screaming in his wake. When the grandparents checked the bedroom, they said they found their wounded granddaughter and called 9-1-1 for help.

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As Scott County EMS and the medical team from the Air Methods helicopter got the woman on the aircraft, officers secured the scene and called the Sellersburg post of the Indiana State Police for assistance in collecting and preserving evidence. Sheriff McClain said a knife was recovered from the bedroom.

An NCIC bulletin was issued alerting law enforcement agencies that Ross Blankenbaker was wanted for questioning. Officers with the Washington County Sheriff's Department began searching for him, presuming that he may try to reach his parents' home.

Blankenbaker's empty car was found off State Road 160. Blankenbaker was located a short time later by Washington County deputies. He was suffering from a stab wound to the chest and was also flown to U of L Hospital.

Sheriff McClain said his department is still investigating if Ross Blankenbaker's injury was self-inflicted. He also stated that a deputy from his department is waiting for Ross to be released this weekend from the hospital. A warrant for his arrest has been prepared and will be served on him, it was learned.

An extradition process from Kentucky may occur after the warrant is served, the sheriff said.

Ross Blankenbaker is expected to be formally charged in Scott Circuit Court next week as soon as extradition is completed and paperwork is completed by the Scott County Prosecutor's Office.