



Wiets and Rita Botes are inconsolable after the murder of their son, five-month-old Wiehan (ABOVE).



LEFT: The home of Margrietha de Goede (ABOVE) where her and Wiehan's bodies were found.

SO LOVED, SO CRUELLY TAKEN

Wiehan was their miracle child, born through IVF – then at five months he was brutally murdered along with his trusted day mother

By GLORIA EDWARDS Pictures: ER LOMBARD

‘Something has to be done about crime in this country’

(66) was found under a rug in her garage. Everyone in Delmas, Mpumalanga, knows her as the loving woman who took care of their children so well.

The death of the innocent baby and his kindly carer shocked the local community. Singer Corlea Botha, who's from Delmas, sang at a night vigil for Wiehan and Margrietha. And on 19 June more than 100 celebrities will take part in a march to pay tribute to the victims.

“Something has to be done about crime in this country. Wiehan shouldn't become just another statistic,” his father says sadly.

Then he adds bitterly, “He was so friendly he probably smiled at his killer.”

IT'S very hard for the bereaved parents to talk about their child's death but they'd like to share their story with YOU readers. They say they want to make people aware that a human life has become virtually worthless.

“I have so much hatred and wrath for the murderer in my heart. I won't leave this country until he's behind bars,” Wiets (32) says in their home, a stone's throw from the house where the crime was committed. He holds his inconsolable wife tightly.

On the morning of 23 May Rita (31), a teller co-ordinator at a Delmas bank, dropped her son at Margrietha's home as she'd done every other work day in the past two months. She remembers Reané Visser, the other baby Margrietha looked after, was already there.

At 11 am she made her usual call to the day mother to find out if everything was okay. But Margrietha didn't answer the phone. “I thought she might be busy feeding the children.”

When she called again at noon and still received no answer Rita drove to the house

to investigate.

“The garden gate was open but the doors were locked and she didn't come to the door. I called a friend, walked around to the back door and pushed it open but the security gate was locked,” she says.

“I saw Wiehan's pram and heard Reané crying hysterically. There was so much going through my head. I thought perhaps Margrietha had had a heart attack or she or Wiehan had been kidnapped. Anything but murder . . .”

She and her friend broke a window but there was no sign of her child or the day mother. They called the police, who searched the house thoroughly and found the bodies.

“I waited outside and when they came out I just knew my son was dead,” she says tearfully. “Mercifully I didn't look under that bed and find him myself. Luckily there was no blood. The death certificate confirmed he'd been strangled.”

Wiets, an engineering foreman, says he and Rita went through eight artificial insemination attempts. “We worked overtime and saved because the treatments are incredibly expensive. A few years ago we lost twins in a miscarriage but we kept trying. Then we went for in vitro.”

When that didn't work the couple, who've been inseparable since high school, gave up hope – but two weeks later they discovered Rita was pregnant.

“I can't begin to describe how happy we were. Wiehan was the greatest gift we ever received,” Rita says. “Now he's gone. He didn't even have a chance to live.”

The baby's bed in his blue bedroom is empty. “He was a real little bull. He already weighed 10 kg and loved his Blue Bulls clothes and rugby ball,” Rita says, heartbroken.

(Turn over)



LEFT: A pregnant Rita in the room she and Wiets had prepared for Wiehan. RIGHT: The couple in the same room – now empty.



SUPPLIED

(From previous page)

Wiehan's grandmother, Olga Botes, fears another tragedy. "They [Wiets and Rita] have said they would rather commit suicide so they can be with Wiehan."

Wiehan was cremated in his Blue Bulls outfit on 28 May after a joint funeral ceremony was held for him and Margrietha.

Everyone heaps praise on this woman who over the years took care of a great many young children "for the love of it". She's survived by her daughters, Dina White and Maretha Günther.

Dina says she rushed from Marble Hall, Limpopo, to Delmas after a family friend broke the news to her. "My mom was my best friend. She loved children and they loved her."

Her mother always said she was afraid of her gardener, Dina says. "All we know is there was a dispute between them over money."

The police declined to comment on possible suspects. There was no sign of a break-

in or a struggle in the house, police spokesman Colonel Leonard Hlathi says.

Margrietha was bashed over the head and strangled. All that seems missing are jewellery and sweets.

The murders have also dealt Andries and Loraine Visser a hard blow. On that fateful day their 16-month-old daughter, Reané, was also sleeping in her cot in Margrietha's house, but escaped unharmed.

"It's grim for us too. We don't understand why our child was spared and Wiets and Rita's wasn't. All we can do is be grateful," Loraine says.

Andries and Loraine are still struggling to make sense of the incident. "We all loved Margrietha and Reané adored her. When our son, Hanno (4), was younger she sometimes looked after him too," Loraine (33) says.

On the morning of the incident Andries (35) prayed for his family's safety as he always does. "Reané was probably already asleep when it happened," Loraine says as their daughter runs around the house, laughing and blissfully unaware of what happened.

"We can only be thankful God blinded the killer at that moment so he didn't see our child. We don't know how long she'd been crying hysterically before they found her. But the counsellor says she'll be fine. Maybe one day she'll do something special for the Lord."

They're struggling with mixed emotions, Andries says. "We're not better than Wiets and Rita. We're all in the same church and we all pray together. You can't explain why one child was spared when another wasn't. All we know is we're grateful for the mercy we received and our hearts go out to Wiets and Rita and Margrietha's family."

The events have come as a severe shock to the entire town, says Reverend Gawie Snyman of the Delmas West Dutch Reformed church. He was due to baptise Wiehan and Reané on 10 June. "Prayers are pouring in from all over, even from overseas."

At the Botes home, where the couple now have to learn to live with their loss, Wiets says, "My child's life was taken for a few items of jewellery and a handful of sweets. It's so pointless."

"But if Wiehan's death can make a few people stand together [against crime] it wasn't all for nothing." ■



GALLO IMAGES/FOTO24/LISA HNATOWICZ

LEFT: Loraine, Reané, Hanno and Andries Visser. Reané was in Margrietha's house during the murders. RIGHT: Wiets and Rita listen to Corlea Botha sing at the vigil for Wiehan and Margrietha.

