

# Poisoned Aspirin Kills Couple

## *Cyanide-tainted Medication Implicated in Death of Retirees*

By Harold Stamp

Poisoned aspirin claimed the lives of two Marshall City residents yesterday.

Their frantic children found David and Rita Stern unconscious on the kitchen floor. A 911 call promptly brought paramedics, but they were too late to save the barely breathing couple. Doctors at the Thompson County Medical Center emergency room worked in vain to save them. It was too late.

"We came over for our weekly dinner with mom and dad. When we walked in, they were lying lifeless on the floor," sobbed Kelly Block, their 28-year-old daughter. "I talked to mom earlier in the day and she said that she and dad were coming down with colds. But they still wanted us over for dinner."

At first Doctors were unwilling to state the exact cause of death. Police, however, provided the crucial answer. They noticed the open bottle of aspirin capsules on the counter in the Stern's home.

"It hit something inside me," said Detective Daniel Profit. "I saw the bottle on the counter, and I thought of the Tylenol cyanide poisonings of years ago. I knew I should bring this evidence to the hospital to be tested."

This was the quick break the police needed to issue a warning to all local distributors of the name-brand aspirin. Tests of the aspirin showed traces of

cyanide. Autopsies on the Sterns showed cyanide to be the cause of both deaths.

"It's frightening to think this [medication tampering] is happening again," commented one doctor.

A receipt found in the victim's home revealed that the national brand of aspirin had been purchased from Lonnie's Cut-Rate, a local retail store.

Lonnie Hawkins, owner of the store, was unavailable for comment.

Marshall City Police Chief Michael Vincent has ordered a sweeping investigation. "The murderer could be anyone. We ask the people of Marshall City to call our new hotline, P-O-I-S-O-N-S with any information. This investigation is our highest priority"

No other deaths have been linked to this strain of cyanide poisoning since 1982 when a number of people died from cyanide poisoning in the Chicago area. Those cases remain unsolved, although one person was convicted of a related offense when he tried to extort money from the manufacturers of Tylenol.

David and Rita Stern, ages 65 and 67 respectively, had lived in Marshall City for over 50 years. Mr. Stern was a retired municipal employee. Until recently he worked as a food services inspector in the Marshall City Ordinance Enforcement Unit. Mrs. Stern was a retired clerk in the County Office of Revenue Collection. Funeral arrangements are pending.