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Former UC Santa Cruz student missing in Haiti

By Dennis Taylor - Monterey County Herald

POSTED: 01/14/10, 12:01 AM PST | UPDATED: ON 04/14/2015 0 COMMENTS

Editor's update to this story: Starry Sprenkle checked in with her father around 3 a.m. Thursday morning.

A former award-winning UC Santa Cruz student is unaccounted for after a devastating earthquake struck Haiti on Tuesday.

Starry Dawn Sprenkle, who graduated from UC Santa Cruz in 2004, lives in Deschappelles, a town about two and half hours from Port-au-Prince, with her husband and 20-month-old daughter, Jasmine.

Her father Steve Sprenkle, a Monterey County attorney, and his wife, Merelyn, say they were exchanging text messages with their 28-year-old daughter at the exact moment the catastrophic 7.0-magnitude earthquake rocked the Caribbean nation.

For Steve Sprenkle's daughter, the day began with other tragic news.

Her husband, Dr. Erlantz "Lantzy" Hyppolite, had received word that his mother, hospitalized the previous day with stomach and chest pains, had died at a hospital in Haiti's capital city.

Hyppolite reportedly is in Port-au-Prince, probably at the hospital where his mother had died. Starry and their infant daughter, Jasmine, were believed to be traveling to Port-au-Prince from their home to join him when the earthquake struck.

"We were e-mailing and texting because of the death of Hyppolite's mother. The last text message we received from Starry was at 1:53 p.m. Pacific time, which is the exact minute the earthquake hit," Steve Sprenkle said. "We believe Starry and Jasmine probably were in the car, traveling toward Port-au-Prince, when it happened, but we have no information because that's the last time we heard from her."

Sprenkle said his assumption is that daughter and granddaughter most likely were closer to Deschappelles than Port-au-Prince when the disaster struck, but he also says there's a likelihood that Hyppolite, his son-in-law, was at a hospital that was known to be destroyed.

While her husband was working as a physician in Haiti, Sprenkle was doing graduate research in environmental studies with UC Davis, and had been hired to oversee a reforestation project in Haiti's Artibonite Valley.

After graduating from Salinas High School in 1999, Sprenkle earned degrees from UCSC in environmental studies and plant sciences. At UCSC, Sprenkle received a Deans' and Chancellor's Award in recognition of her outstanding academic achievements, according to campus spokesman Jim Burns. She also played on the women's basketball team.

"At this point, we're operating almost entirely on guesswork," Steve Sprenkle said. "We managed to communicate with the hospital director who hired Starry and her husband, and we learned that all the phones and cell phones were out of use, so we're hoping everybody's just fine and we'll hear from her soon."

The U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince has set up a task force that is taking calls as conditions permit. The embassy is working to identify U.S. citizens in Haiti who need assistance.

U.S. citizens should e-mail the embassy at acsppap@state.gov.

The State Department has also created a task force to monitor the emergency. Those with information or inquiries about U.S. citizens in Haiti may reach the Haiti Task Force at 888-407-4747 or ca-

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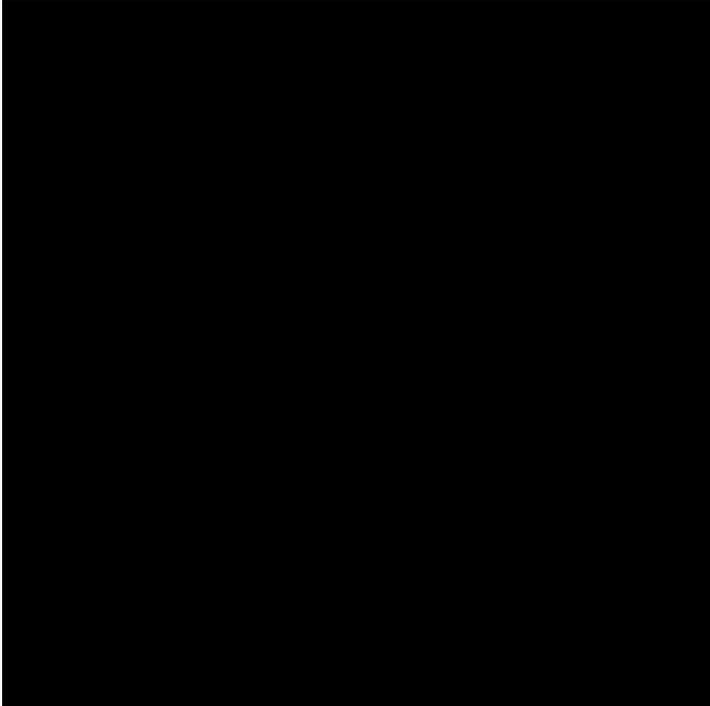
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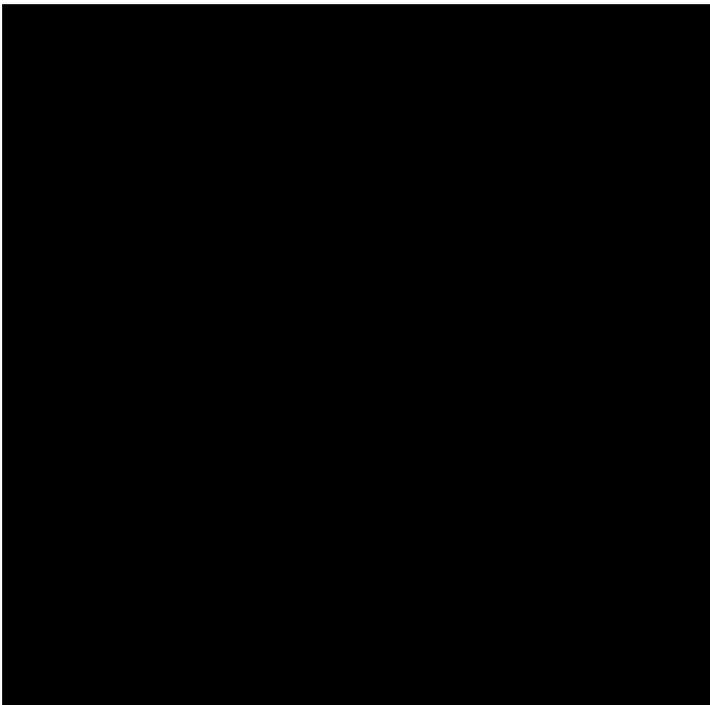
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Sentinel staff writers Jane Palmer and Janelle Weaver contributed to this report.

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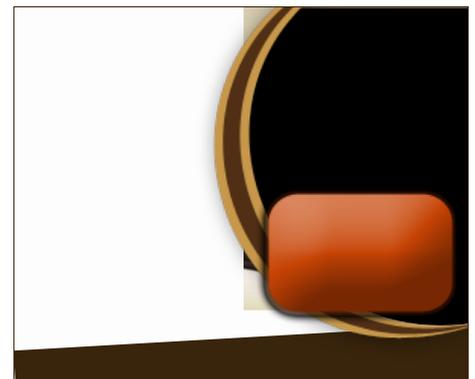
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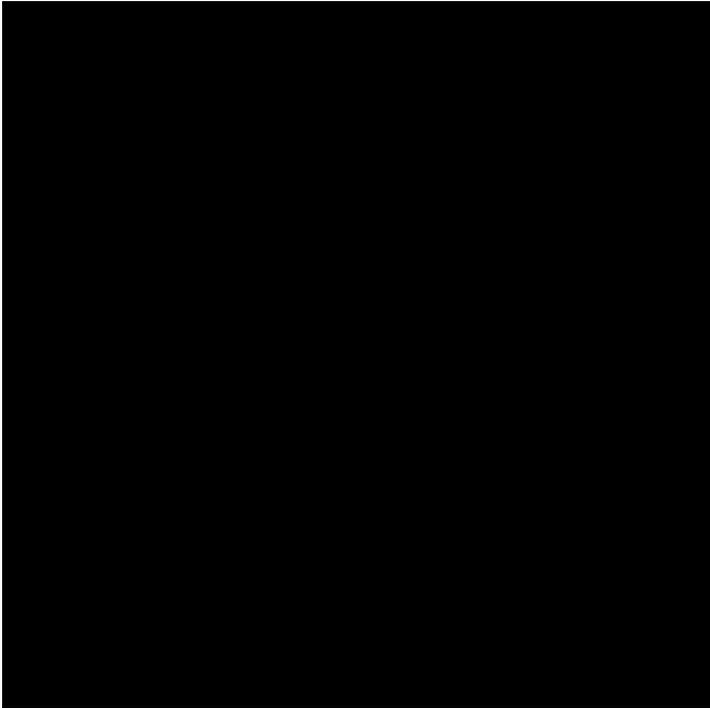
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