

Attentive sleuthing spurs arrest in old case

■ **Murder:** A man is charged in the 1975 death of his young stepson.

By **JOE HARWOOD**

The Register-Guard

A chance glimpse of a 21-year-old death investigation report by an alert records clerk last May and solid gumshoe detective work by investigators led to the arrest Friday of a man suspected of drowning his 2½-year-old stepson in a bathtub in west Eugene in 1975.

Police arrested Stephen Miles Hinkle, 40, shortly after noon at a south Eugene homeless shelter and charged him with murdering Christopher Alan Butler on Jan. 7, 1975.

A Lane County grand jury indicted Hinkle on the murder charge Wednesday.

The child died sometime between 7 p.m. and 7:50 p.m. Jan. 7, 1975, said Eugene police detective Les Rainey, who worked the case along with Joe Kosydak of the Lane County district attorney's office.

Hinkle told police more than 20 years ago that he put the boy in the bathtub shortly after 7 p.m. at the family's home on Dove Lane and left him alone for about 15 minutes. When he returned, Christopher was under water, according to police reports reported in The Register-Guard at the time.

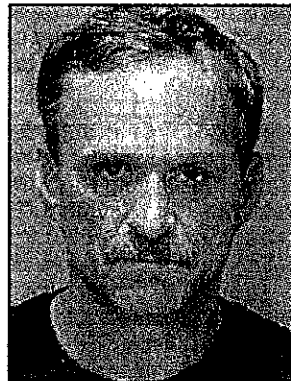
The boy's mother, Jaylene Rae Hinkle, was attending a class when the incident occurred, Rainey said.

Hinkle said he tried mouth-to-mouth resuscitation but couldn't revive the boy. When the child didn't respond, Hinkle ran to a neighbor's house and called his mother-in-law, Darlene Hamlin, Rainey said.

"He called the mother-in-law to report that he allegedly found his stepson in the tub," Rainey said.

It was Hamlin who called the ambulance. When the medics arrived shortly before 8 p.m., her grandson was dead.

"He called from the neighbor's house because (he and his wife) were behind on their telephone bill and



Stephen Hinkle

Boy's stepfather

Turn to **MURDER**, Page 4A