

## NANNY STRIKES A BABY DEATH DEAL

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The Australian Newspaper

19 jan 99

NANNY Louise Sullivan last night pleaded guilty at London's Central Court to the manslaughter of baby Caroline Jongen.

After a morning of last-minute plea bargaining, ahead of the start of Sullivan's murder trial, the Crown prosecutor agreed to reduce the charge to manslaughter in return for a guilty plea by the 27-year-old Australian.

Sullivan was charged with murder last September after the death, while in her care, of Caroline in a case which had chilling similarities to that of Louise Woodward, the British nanny whose case became a sensation in the US.

Caroline died on April 21 last year, four days after being rushed to Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital in a critical condition.

Sullivan was accompanied to court yesterday by her parents. Her trial was due to start at 10.30am London time but was delayed twice before starting almost four hours later – amid strong rumours of the plea-bargaining taking place behind closed doors.

The prosecution accepted Sullivan's plea of guilty to manslaughter with gross negligence, saying it could not disprove her lawyer's assertions that a convulsion may have occurred that required her to shake the baby to arouse it.

The child carer now faces a minimum four years' imprisonment with parole after two years but the judge has the authority to suspend any sentence.

Sullivan has spent the past nine months in hiding, avoiding all media contact and speaking to Australian consular officials rarely and then only through a secret contact.

She was initially charged with grievous bodily harm after the baby died from head injuries but the charge was upgraded to murder in July.

During committal proceedings, Sullivan pleaded not guilty to murder.

At a pre-trial hearing in December, the charge was varied to include the alternative offence of manslaughter.

The prosecution had planned to rely on medical evidence and the testimony of the Jongens and some of Sullivan's previous employers in Australia.

Lawyers for Sullivan had said they would attempt to disprove the murder charge by calling a team of expert witnesses to show the baby might have died from a pre-existing condition, rather than by shaking, as a coroner ruled.

Sullivan, originally of Sydney, has been free on bail since April but has been obliged to remain in Britain.

The trial – which had been expected to last up to five weeks – was initially delayed by half an hour to await the arrival of the baby's parents, Marcel and Muriel Jongen.

The couple had not been due to give evidence until the later stages of the trial.

They are considered to be wealthy high-fliers in the City of London where Dutch-born Marcel Jongen heads finance company Adelphi Capital and French-born Muriel works as a financial analyst.

Like Sullivan, the Jongens, who were at their baby's bedside when the life support system was turned off, have refused to speak publicly since the death of Caroline

[Baby had died shortly after being vaccinated]