

FEDERAL COURT CASE DRUG DEALER SAYS LAWYERS TOOK PART

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Nellie Bell Kassim, in federal court testimony she began last week, accused two of her former lawyers of complicity in her scheme to distribute thousands of prescription pills in Detroit and Washington, D.C.

It is up to a federal jury to determine **Kassim**'s credibility as she testifies against several alleged members of a drug ring she operated between 1979 and 1981. Among **Kassim**'s claims are charges that the attorneys, Kenneth Robinson of Washington and Robert M. Cohn of Detroit, working separately, were involved in the ring's illegal activities.

It is clear from testimony in the trial of eight accused co-conspirators that the 42-year-old **Kassim** -- an admitted perjurer who allowed only that she was "an average liar" -- was capable of considerable legal manipulation while building a drug empire based on a series of clinics she operated in Detroit.

FOR EXAMPLE, according to testimony not disputed by **Kassim**, she ordered a Detroit police officer -- who was never charged but was fired after being suspected of being a member of her ring -- to falsely "arrest" a person she suspected of informing on her to the federal Drug Enforcement Administration.

Once, according to Robinson, **Kassim** had a batch of prescription blanks printed in the name of one of her clinics, intending to make the DEA believe she was the innocent victim of someone using her clinic's name to make forged prescriptions. Robinson said he arranged a meeting between **Kassim** and Washington officials involved in the investigation

Kassim later admitted that she used the meeting as an opportunity to smuggle a shipment of drugs from Detroit to Washington, presuming that narcotics officers would not suspect someone en route to an appointment with federal lawmen.

WITNESSES SAID **Kassim**, known to have pawned a rented car for cash, often bragged about stealing as much as \$1 million from airlines in a ticket scam.

Kassim has pleaded guilty to a reduced conspiracy charge, knowing she would be sentenced to a 10-year prison term, federal prosecutors said. In return, **Kassim** agreed to co-operate with federal authorities and forfeit proceeds from her drug ring.

Dr. Alan Devore Fields, who also pleaded guilty to a similar, reduced charge in return for his co-operation with authorities, was sentenced to the maximum of 10 years in prison by U.S. District Judge Anna Diggs-Taylor, who is presiding over the **Kassim** case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Ellen Dennis presented evidence that showed Fields wrote 15,900 fraudulent prescriptions while working at **Kassim**'s clinics.

BUT IT SEEMED as if Robinson and Cohn were on trial last week as **Kassim** took the witness stand. Both men are defense attorneys who have represented accused public officials. Among other clients, Robinson has defended one of the FBI's Abscam targets, U.S. Rep. John Jenrette, D.-S.C., who resigned after being convicted of bribery and conspiracy in 1980.

Cohn is known for his defense of one of two female Detroit police officers charged with cowardice in 1980. He represented **Kassim** in 1970 when she was convicted of welfare fraud shortly after she moved to Detroit from New York, where she grew up. She said she often described Cohn as "my supposed brother for 10 years." Acquaintances said **Kassim**, who is black, introduced Cohn, who is white, as her brother, explaining they had the same mother but a different father.

Kassim testified that Cohn helped her come up with idea of establishing the clinics to produce large numbers of drug prescriptions in return for a split of the profits. Cohn has not been indicted, but he has said he's been told by federal officials he is a target in the **Kassim** investigation.

Cohn tried to represent some of the defendants in the **Kassim** case, including **Kassim**, but was disqualified by the court. Cohn has not appeared at the trial, which is entering its fifth week, although a lawyer representing him has watched proceedings.

Kassim testified that she co-operated with the government by wearing a hidden radio transmitter in an August dinner meeting with Cohn at his house. While federal agents recorded the conversation, **Kassim** said, she told Cohn several lies, including a compliment of his food.

ROBINSON REPRESENTED **Kassim** in Washington grand jury proceedings and defended her sister, Nancy Lee McGinnis, who was charged with smuggling pills to Washington from Detroit. McGinnis was acquitted after **Kassim** testified that somebody may have put several thousand Preludin pills in **Kassim**'s suitcase without the knowledge of either of them. According to observers of that trial, Robinson's questioning of **Kassim** about her alleged drug-pushing activities may have confused the jury about who actually had the drugs, **Kassim** or her sister.

While testifying in the current case in Detroit, **Kassim** accused Robinson of rehearsing her for five hours on false testimony she was to give and of being involved in drug deals she knew of. She said Robinson also collected a \$100,000 legal fee in cash in an apparent attempt at tax evasion.

Robinson, now representing Dr. Ryan Krebs who faces a conspiracy count in the current trial, was sometimes referred to as "Sweetie Pie" by **Kassim** during her testimony. Robinson challenged her to produce witnesses to corroborate her allegations and promised that witnesses would later refute **Kassim**'s charges against him.

He also disputed **Kassim**'s testimony that Krebs, who had worked for the clinic for some time before joining the conspiracy in October 1981, volunteered to write prescriptions for her. Robinson noted that other testimony indicated that members of the ring forged Krebs' signature on some prescriptions after October 1981.

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