

FOUR GUILTY, 2 ACQUITTED IN PRESCRIPTION MILL CASE

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A federal jury convicted four people Monday of conspiring in the prescription drug empire of **Nellie Bell Kassim**, but two of her lower-level employees were acquitted.

Found guilty after more than two weeks of deliberations were Dr. Ryan A. Krebs, 29, of Milan; pharmacist Bernard Levine, 33, of West Bloomfield; Shirley Bradley Danner, 46, of Detroit, and Linda Ricks, 35, of Detroit. They face maximum sentences of five years in prison and \$15,000 fines.

Acquitted of conspiracy in the two-month trial were Maggie Curry, 29, and John (Jersey Bull) Zellner, 53, both of Detroit.

TEN OTHERS have pleaded guilty to conspiracy or related charges, including **Kassim**, who agreed to a 10-year prison sentence in return for co-operating with federal prosecutors Ellen Dennis and James McCarthy

Kassim, 42, of Southfield, was the key witness in the trial. Others on the witness stand ran the social spectrum from a world-famous doctor, Dr. Henry Heimlich, who was a character witness for Krebs, to a cobbler, Leroy Bonham, who said he served as a gigolo to **Kassim** and her two sisters.

The sisters also figured in the trial, but by their absence. Testimony disputed by **Kassim** indicated that she had one of the sisters, Mozell Barber, 32, murdered by a contract killer in Detroit in March 1981 because Barber was suspected of informing. Authorities say they are still investigating the murder

The other sister, Nancy Lee McGinnis, 31, who was last reported living in Mississippi, was scheduled to be a defense witness who would refute some of **Kassim**'s testimony. However, she "disappeared" in mid-trial, the jury was told by Ken Robinson, Krebs' attorney.

A PLUMP, often smiling woman, **Kassim** grew up in New York City and moved to Detroit a dozen years ago. The former nurse testified that her criminal career started with welfare fraud and flim-flam schemes and evolved into a pharmaceutical drug ring that channeled hundreds of thousands of pills from several clinics to drug dealers and junkies in Detroit, Washington, New York and North Carolina.

Kassim said she started her drug empire in 1979 with a group of overweight women she sent to doctors to obtain prescriptions for stimulants

In March 1980, she said, she and her friend and former attorney, Robert Cohn, opened a diet clinic at 3800 Woodward that soon attracted hundreds of junkies. Cohn has not been indicted, but has said federal prosecutors have told him he is a target of an investigation.

KASSIM SAID she and Cohn opened several more clinics in downtown Detroit and on the east side. Pills shipped to Washington on Greyhound buses netted a fortune of several million dollars for **Kassim** , who once pulled \$23,000 from a paper bag to pay for a new Lincoln, testimony indicated.

Heimlich -- author, television personality and inventor of the Heimlich maneuver designed to save the lives of choking victims -- testified that in the decade he had known Krebs, he had found him to be "absolutely honest . . . a marvelous young man," and a brilliant medical student. Heimlich said he had met the doctor through Heimlich's son, Krebs' classmate at Stanford University.

Kassim , however, depicted Krebs as an initially naive young intern who, once he learned the scope of the drug operation, wanted to be part of it and "make a million dollars" as fast as possible.

The government claimed pharmacist Levine aided the flow of drugs from legitimate pharmaceutical manufacturers to junkies on the street. Danner and Ricks were employes in **Kassim** 's clinics.

Kassim 's testimony tended to exonerate her lower-level employes in the clinic. U.S. District Judge Anna Diggs-Taylor dismissed charges against two, Curtis Hicks and Sam Fields Jr., while the trial was in progress.

Diggs-Taylor declared a mistrial for another defendant, pharmacist Stanley Iczovitz, early in the trial when a government witness gave prejudicial testimony the witness previously had been instructed not to give.

Iczovitz, 46, of Birmingham , and John Parker, 50, of Detroit, who became ill just before the trial, will be tried on conspiracy counts later, prosecutors said.

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