

LAURA HART PROVED UNSHAKABLE

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Through months of an extraordinarily personal ordeal, **Laura Hart** stood with dignity, loyalty and spunk beside her husband, disgraced former Detroit Police Chief **William Hart** .

Even as the most intimate details and tribulations of their 41-year marriage were publicly dissected in a 1992 federal corruption trial, Mrs. **Hart** remained steadfast, holding her husband's hand as they walked the halls of the U.S. District Courthouse.

Mrs. **Hart** , 63, died of a heart attack late Monday night at Harper Hospital. She had suffered from heart disease and had undergone a bypass operation.

" **Laura Hart** was a woman of immense courage and personal dignity," said her husband's attorney, Thomas Cranmer. "She was strong. She never wavered."

Cranmer said that Mrs. **Hart** had been in less than robust health, but that her condition was not thought to be life threatening.

Her husband was "absolutely shocked and devastated" by the news, Cranmer said. The former chief is serving a 10-year prison term in Pleasanton, Calif., for embezzlement and tax evasion in connection with the theft of more than \$2 million from the police secret service fund.

Acting U.S. Attorney Alan Gershel, the lead prosecutor in the **Hart** trial, said he is arranging to bring **Hart** to the funeral.

"From seeing Mrs. **Hart** in court every day she appeared to me to be a courageous woman who stood with her husband in the best and really the worst of times," Gershel said. "She was a woman of some fortitude."

A former beautician and pediatric nurse, Mrs. **Hart** defended her husband in two days of extraordinary testimony.

She said they were high school sweethearts from Apollo, Pa., who kept a modest bungalow on St. Aubin Street as **Hart** rose through police ranks until he became the city's longest serving chief.

After a parade of witnesses told of **Hart** amassing thousands of dollars in cash and lavishing money, furs, designer clothing and vacations on a series of mistresses, Mrs. **Hart** took the stand to relate a life of homey thrift.

The cash piles, she said, were the fruits of years of squirreling away money in tin boxes hidden around the house. Frugality, hand-sewn clothes, home-baked bread, kitchen canning and a Depression-bred distrust of banks allowed the secret stash to grow, she said.

"I know where my money's at," she told prosecutors. "I bake the bread . . . buy meat by the hind quarter."

Despite her husband's lavish philandering, she said she was not about to abandon a marriage of more than 40 years.

At the time of her death, negotiations were under way to resolve a federal court order to impound **Hart**'s pension, back pay and assets to satisfy a \$2.3-million fine.

As the former chief's wife, Mrs. **Hart** had rights to a portion of his pension and a stake in their personal property.

Funeral arrangements are pending, Cranmer said.

Mrs. **Hart** also is survived by two daughters, Cynthia Bangs and Jennifer **Hart**, and two grandsons.

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