

Loved ones of victims crowd trial - First day draws families from across the country hoping to keep Watts in prison.

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PONTIAC -- They've grown old waiting for justice for the man who slayed their young daughters. Now that the chance is here, it's tough to keep anger from becoming rage.

Coral Eugene Watts didn't strike fear into Jane Montgomery as he walked, shackled, into an Oakland County Circuit Courtroom on Tuesday, even though he's a confessed killer of 13 women including her daughter, Elizabeth Montgomery.

"I'm not afraid of him. I'm afraid of myself," said Montgomery, who lives near Boston. Her daughter was stabbed while walking a dog in Houston, Texas, five days before her 25th birthday in 1981.

"It was all I could do to keep from taking a butcher knife, cutting off both his hands and making him sit through the rest of the trial. That would be a starting point to justice."

The sentiment hardly seemed out of place during the emotional -- and often graphic -- start of a trial that authorities hope will prevent the Inkster-bred serial killer from walking free from a Texas prison in April 2006.

Even **Watts**' own lawyer, Ronald Kaplovitz, acknowledged it's tough not to hate the man the media nicknamed the "Sunday Morning Slasher."

A controversial 1982 plea bargain gave the 51-year-old **Watts** immunity and a 60-year prison sentence in exchange for confessing to killing 12 women in Texas and former Detroit News reporter Jeanne Clyne on Oct. 31, 1979, in Grosse Pointe Farms.

A higher court ruling and good-time credits cut the sentence by more than half, outraging law enforcement nationwide and sparking an effort in Michigan to investigate unsolved murders from the 1970s that **Watts** may have committed.

Watts is now on trial before Oakland Judge Richard Kuhn for the Dec. 1, 1979, stabbing death of Helen Dutcher, 36, in Ferndale. He was extradited from Texas earlier this year when a witness, Joseph Foy, resurfaced.

Foy was scheduled to testify today in a case that has the elements of a dime novel: a brazen murderer who's reportedly vowed to kill again if he's released; a flawed legal system; and a network of victims' relatives from Massachusetts to California that never forgot, and never gave up hope.

Donna Pendergast, an assistant attorney general, played up the "true Halloween horror" theme during her opening argument Tuesday to the jury of eight women and six men.

She called **Watts** a "brutal and sadistic murderer" who left a "blood-soaked pattern of death and destruction" because he thought women had "evil eyes."

"This was no nightmare. This was real," Pendergast told the jury. "This will terrify you, horrify you and haunt your dreams, maybe for a lifetime."

Jurors saw photos of Dutcher and the woman **Watts** confessed to killing. They were shown because of a decision by Kuhn to allow jurors to hear about **Watts** ' other crimes. But they will not hear that he might be freed from prison.

Pendergast said **Watts** "slashed, sliced and eviscerated" Dutcher.

Her death fit his pattern, Pendergast argued: She was killed after getting a cup of coffee at a diner on Woodward near Eight Mile, stabbed 12 times in an alley on a snowy night by a black man driving a brown car.

Watts ' attorney, Kaplovitz, argued the prosecution's case boils down to the recollections of Foy, who has acknowledged taking painkillers that day.

Police found none of **Watts** -- or anyone else's -- blood near Dutcher. Ferndale police admitted on the stand that most of the original police file is lost; and a surviving report didn't say Foy actually saw the stabbing.

Foy called police that night, again when **Watts** was arrested in Houston, and a third time when Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox appeared on a cable television show about the **Watts** case.

"The issue isn't that Helen Dutcher died. The issue is who killed her, and the prosecution can't establish beyond a reasonable doubt who killed her," Kaplovitz said, adding that "if someone else did this crime, they would have done it the exact same way."

Evidence was often difficult to watch Tuesday. Six of Dutcher's relatives traveled from out of state. Some had left by the time prosecutors displayed naked autopsy photos that showed multiple wounds to Dutcher's back and chest.

She died of stab wounds to her neck, chest, back, lungs and heart.

"It's very hard, but it will be nice to have it over with," said Betty Rankin of Imlay City, Dutcher's sister.

Dutcher's career was uncertain at the time of the death. Kaplovitz claimed she was a rumored prostitute.

For the second day in a row, **Watts** wore a blue shirt and black sweater vest given to him by his family, who still live in the area. None attended the trial.

Kaplovitz said **Watts** is a cooperative client. He occasionally cracked his knuckles, whispered to Kaplovitz and consulted his notes.

Relatives of **Watts** ' victims have kept the pressure up for years, keeping in touch by e-mail and organizing a rally in Houston in 2002 when word spread about his possible release.

About 15 of them lined courtroom benches, including Michael Clyne, who was initially a suspect in his wife's murder. The former newspaper reporter was stabbed 11 times while on Kercheval between Lothrop and Merriweather, as she waited for a bus.

Clyne and others said they remain cautiously optimistic.

"We wouldn't have gotten this far without divine intervention," said Andy Kahan, a deputy mayor in Houston who has helped lead the campaign to keep **Watts** incarcerated.

The trial is expected to last into next week. Two victims who survived **Watts** ' attacks in Houston, Lori Lister and Julie Sanchez, are expected to testify Monday.

Kalamazoo authorities are believed to be ready to file new charges against **Watts** if he's acquitted. **Watts** has long been a suspect in the 1974 stabbing death of Western Michigan University student Gloria Steele, 19.

Police reopened the case and forwarded it to prosecutors earlier this year.

Scott Brower, the county's assistant prosecutor, is watching the Dutcher case daily but only would say they've made no decision on whether to bring new charges against him.

Caption: Old photos of murder victims are displayed during the trial of **CoralEugeneWatts** . A controversial 1982 plea bargain gave **Watts** immunity and a 60-year prison sentence in exchange for confessing to killing 12 women in Texas and former Detroit News reporter Jeanne Clyne in Grosse Pointe Farms. **CoralEugeneWatts** ' lawyer, Ronald Kaplovitz, left, says **Watts** is a cooperative client. **Watts** occasionally cracked his knuckles, whispered to Kaplovitz and consulted his notes during the trial Tuesday. **Watts** is now on trial before Oakland Judge Richard Kuhn, flanked by Prosecutor Donna Pendergast, left, and defense attorney Ronald Kaplovitz, for the Dec. 1, 1979, stabbing death of Helen Dutcher, 36, in Ferndale. He was extradited from Texas earlier this year when a witness resurfaced.

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