

Mich. witness is key to slaying trial - A Westland man testifies to having seen Coral Eugene Watts after the suspect allegedly stabbed a woman in 1979.

Detroit News, The (MI) - Thursday, November 11, 2004

Author: The Detroit News ; Joel Kurth

PONTIAC -- Twenty-five years have passed. Joseph Foy has divorced, moved and married again. One memory, he says, is constant: the eyes of a killer.

"It was cold. It was dark. No emotion. Evil," Foy testified.

Eyes remained a constant theme Wednesday during the Oakland County trial of **Coral Eugene Watts**. The Inkster native has confessed to slaying 13 women between 1979 and 1982, and faces murder charges for the Dec. 1, 1979, stabbing of Helen Dutcher, 36, in Ferndale.

Watts supposedly believes his victims had evil eyes. Foy testified he's forever haunted by a split-second glance at the man who stabbed Dutcher 12 times with a butcher knife. In court Wednesday, Foy said he has no doubt the man he saw behind his house in 1979 was **Watts**.

"It was his eyes. I could tell it was him. ... They'll stay with me for forever," said Foy, 47, a former Ferndale resident who now lives in Westland. Foy's testimony could go a long way in determining if **Watts** ever again sees freedom.

Watts is scheduled to walk from a Texas prison in April 2006 because of a controversial 1982 plea bargain. He received a 60-year sentence in exchange for confessions to 12 Texas murders and the Oct. 31, 1979, stabbing of former Detroit News reporter Jeanne Clyne.

Good-behavior credits cut the sentence in half, sparking an effort to find new cases against **Watts** that culminated when Foy phoned the Attorney General's Office in January. He also phoned police in 1982 when **Watts**' photo was on the news after his arrest in Houston.

Despite aggressive cross-examination, Foy stuck to his story. His dog began barking violently. He saw a man and a woman in an alley outside his house. The woman fell, the man walked away with a knife and locked eyes with Foy.

"This man was in no hurry," Foy said. "It was like he'd just dropped off his laundry ... very casual, as though nothing had happened."

During his 90-minute testimony, Foy often sparred with **Watts**' attorney, Ron Kaplovitz; turned his neck as if to crack it and drank at least three cups of water. Kaplovitz argued Foy's memories are far better now than they were 25 years ago.

Surviving police reports from the murder don't indicate Foy saw the stabbing. Foy's descriptions of light conditions and the duration of the glance also have varied somewhat.

At an earlier hearing, he said he got a "glance" at **Watts** . Wednesday he said their eyes "locked." He also said Wednesday that he was certain that a back porch light was on, when he earlier couldn't say for sure.

The Dutcher murder came during a bad period in Foy's life, soon after his father's death.

Foy maintained "100 percent" that he took no drugs that night, an insinuation Kaplovitz had made during his opening arguments. Foy acknowledged taking a Valium the next day.

Foy called the police and was questioned that night, but police were unable to make a case.

"If the case is just Foy, the jury would have a hard time convicting," Kaplovitz said. "Unfortunately, the prosecution is going to present a lot of other stuff."

That "stuff" is vivid descriptions of **Watts** ' other crimes, which prosecutors contend show a pattern of randomly targeting slight women like Dutcher, killing them and fleeing in a tan Pontiac Grand Prix.

Circuit Judge Richard Kuhn allowed the jurors to hear the so-called "bad acts" evidence, but not that **Watts** could be freed from prison.

Retired Ferndale detective Robert Geary testified the Dutcher murder was "identical" to the stabbing death of Clyne a month earlier, in Grosse Pointe Farms.

Two women who survived **Watts** ' attacks in Texas are expected to testify Monday, as well as detectives from that state, who investigated him.

The trial breaks today for Veterans Day. It resumes Friday with testimony from Foy's current and former wives, as well as a police sketch artist who drew a composite of the person Foy said attacked Dutcher.

Prosecutors will contend it's the spitting image of **Watts** . Kaplovitz will argue it looks like a lot of other black men.

"This never gets any easier, but we're hanging in there," said Jane Montgomery, who lives near Boston and whose daughter, Jane Montgomery, **Watts** admitted killing in 1981.

"You know what's going to help is taking a killer off the street so he can never taste freedom or touch another women again."

Caption: Joseph Foy of Westland, the prosecution's key witness, testified that he saw **CoralEugeneWatts** kill Helen Dutcher, 36, of Ferndale in 1979.

Edition: No Dot

Section: Metro

Page: 01B

Company Name: #keywords2#

Index Terms: Murder-Serial, Trials

Dateline: PONTIAC

Record Number: det20193141

Copyright (c) The Detroit News. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Gannett Co., Inc. by NewsBank, inc.