

MURDER TRIAL ORDERED IN DEATHS OF 2 PATIENTS

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WALKER -- Catherine Wood acted as a lookout while a nursing-home co-worker suffocated elderly and incapacitated patients with a pillow or washcloth just to relieve stress, "if she was having a bad day," according to a witness' testimony at Wood's preliminary examination on murder charges Wednesday.

Wood, 26, of Grand Rapids was ordered Wednesday to stand trial in the alleged suffocation murders of two female patients at the 208-bed Alpine Manor Nursing Home, where Wood once worked as a nurse's aide supervisor.

The co-worker, **Gwendolyn Graham**, 25, a former nurse's aide at the home, has been charged with one count of murder and is fighting extradition from Texas.

Assistant Kent County Prosecutor David Scheiber said the victims were chosen "because they couldn't fight back" and that Wood and **Graham**, who were lovers at the time, killed for fun and kept souvenirs from each of their victims.

Wood's defense lawyer, Christine Yared, said the prosecution "failed totally" to show that the two women's deaths were the result of foul play. She said the testimony of three people who claimed that Wood spoke to them of her involvement in the murders was inconsistent and inconclusive.

There was no physical evidence presented at Wednesday's hearing linking **Graham** or Wood to the deaths. The bodies of the two women have been exhumed and examined.

The two dead women, Marguerite Chambers, 60, and Edith Cook, 97, are among eight patients at the home whose deaths during a six-month period in 1987 have been under investigation since October.

Witnesses at the hearing Wednesday said Wood told them the alleged victims were selected by their initials, which would spell murder.

The witnesses also said, however, that the names of the eight patients who died in the first part of 1987 don't come close to spelling murder. One said that Wood "liked to play mind games with people," and fabricated stories, "the more farfetched the better."

Pathologist Stephen Cohle, who examined the exhumed bodies, said the deaths of Cook and Chambers could be attributed to natural causes, although none was obvious. It would not be unusual for there to be no firm evidence of suffocation in a victim who was incapacitated, he said.

Walker 59th District Judge Sherwin Venema said: "The testimony was clear and concise that the deaths were criminal . . . horrible, but clear."

Most of the testimony against Wood came from her ex- husband, Kenneth Wood, whose tip reportedly started the police investigation, and two of Catherine Wood's friends. Each said they had been told of the murders of a series of patients, and each portrayed Catherine Wood as a somewhat unwilling accomplice who had been drawn into the plot because she was **Graham** 's lover.

Russell Thatcher, a former co-worker of Wood's and **Graham** 's, said Catherine Wood told him **Graham** killed the patients "just to relieve Gwen's stress, if she was having a bad day."

Dawn Male, another former co-worker, said Catherine Wood and **Graham** discussed the killings with her and showed her a variety of souvenirs.

"I didn't believe them," Male said. "I thought it was a sick joke . . . a head game."

Graham has been in jail in Tyler, Tex., since early December in lieu of \$1 million bond as she fights extradition. Scheiber said he was uncertain when the extradition case would be argued.

CUTLINE

Catherine Wood

Caption: Photo

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