

Trial for suspected serial killer begins - Witnesses testify they saw accused on bridge, body in river

Detroit News, The (MI) - Wednesday, February 28, 2001

Author: The Detroit News ; Shawn D. Lewis

DETROIT -- Two sisters of a slain prostitute sat in court, wiping tears, as prosecutor Elizabeth Walker graphically described Wendy Jordan's strangulation during opening arguments Tuesday at a Wayne Circuit Court murder **trial** .

Accused **serial killer** and former sailor John Eric Armstrong whispered to his lawyer, Robert Mitchell, during the statements. He is charged with first-degree murder in the death of Jordan, 39, of Dearborn Heights in January 2000.

His mother and stepfather, Linda and Ron Pringle of New Bern, S.C., held hands and remained stoic.

Armstrong, who told police in a written statement last April that he was "guilty, sorry and angry" **for** strangling Jordan, also is charged with strangling four other prostitutes and assaulting three others.

"They keep saying our sister was a prostitute, but she had three children and was working at a Subway restaurant in St. Clair Shores and at a gas station in Royal Oak," said Judy Jordan, 36, of Detroit. "If she was a prostitute, we didn't know."

Judy and Bonnie Jordan, 39, have been at every court appearance by the defendant and plan to attend the full **trial** . "Our mother died when we were young, and my father is too devastated to come to court," Bonnie Jordan said.

Eight men and four women were seated as jurors, and three witnesses were called Tuesday.

In her opening remarks, Walker told the jury: "John Eric Armstrong is a husband, father, veteran, sailor and **killer** . The evidence will show that in addition to positive things, he has another side."

Walker described in detail how Armstrong solicited Jordan **for** sex, strangled her and then dumped her body into the Rouge River near a Dearborn Heights bridge. "You will find out that after he did that, he went home to his wife, took a shower and got into bed," she said.

The Jordan sisters sat in a back row, quietly sobbing as Walker held her hands in a grasping motion, telling the jury that it was a deliberate and premeditated murder.

"Do you know how long it takes to manually strangle another person?" she asked. "You'll find that it's not as easy as it sounds. When he had his hands around her throat, he could have stopped and let her live. The fact that he did not means that he meant to kill her."

Defense attorney Robert Mitchell painted a picture of Armstrong as a young man from South Carolina who lacked street smarts and who was browbeaten by police. "This was a disturbed person, so they kept working on him," Mitchell said.

Three witnesses testified that they saw Armstrong on the bridge.

"I was driving my girlfriend home, and he flagged us down and asked me to call 911 because there was a dead body in the river," said Alan Barry, who lives nearby.

Though Armstrong had told the witnesses that he stopped to vomit when he looked over and discovered the body, none of the witnesses saw evidence that he had been sick.

Caption: Accused **serialkiller** John Eric Armstrong is on **trial** for the strangulation death of Wendy Jordan.

Edition: No Dot

Section: Metro

Page: 03C

Index Terms: MURDER ; TRIALS

Dateline: DETROIT

Record Number: det9378127

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