

WOMAN SHOT FOR CAR WAS ON A DRUG BUY FRIEND TESTIFIES THEY DIDN'T GO TO THE FAIR

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A Macomb County **woman was** buying marijuana in Detroit, not going to the Michigan State Fair, the night she **was** killed in an attack by armed **car** thieves, her best friend told **a** Detroit judge Tuesday.

Arleen Harris, testifying before Detroit 36th District Judge Rufus Griffin Jr., said that she, her sister and another friend had accompanied Ruth Wahl, 22, into Detroit in Wahl's new Jeep-style white Suzuki.

They did not leave Macomb County until about 10 p.m. the night of Aug. 27 -- the fair closed at 11 -- so "we went and bought some weed," Harris testified.

Heading about midnight to **a** school playground **a** few miles west of the State Fairgrounds to smoke the dope, their journey ended in **a** chase, gunfire and **a** blaze of publicity **as a** deadly example of metro Detroit's spree of gunpoint auto thefts.

Media accounts of the incident were cited by State Fair General Manager Richard Allen **as a** possible cause of **a** decline in fair attendance.

In testimony Tuesday, the victims said they were attacked and the three defendants, in sometimes conflicting statements, said the shooting **was** an accident or else **a** failed rip-off to help repay an \$18,000 **drug** debt.

Griffin ordered the three held **for** trial in Detroit Recorder's Court **on** first-degree murder and assault charges. If convicted, the young men face life in prison without parole.

Harris testified that before she and her friends had **a** chance to smoke the **drugs** , **a** station wagon filled with four shouting young men pulled up directly in front of them.

Wahl, 22, threw the Suzuki into reverse and tried to escape.

Wahl **was** "backing away . . . we drove off the lot and still couldn't get away," Harris said. "The station wagon kept flashing its brights and driving toward us. . . . We just kept saying 'Get away - go faster!' "

Wahl, backing up at high rate of speed, ran into **a** parked **car** at Schaefer and Chippewa, Harris said.

A man with a pistol leaped from the station wagon and sprinted to the **women 's car** , shouting, "Bitch, I want your truck!" she testified.

"He started firing right away," Harris said, weeping. "We told her to drive. She couldn't, she **was shot** ."

The gunman fired one series of **shots** while standing next to the driver's window and then went to the rear of the vehicle and fired more **shots** .

Wahl **was** killed by two **shots** to the back. Harris' sister, Jeroma, 17, **was** wounded. Harris and an unidentified male friend were unhurt.

Codefendant Kelly Ford, in a statement defense attorney Cornelius Pitts charged **was** coerced, admitted the shooting but claimed it **was** accidental.

Ford, 17, said he and some friends were driving when they spotted the white Suzuki and started yelling at the occupants.

The **women** in the truck were too "stuck-up" to talk to him and were scared, he told police. He said he ran out with the gun to frighten them even more, telling his friends, "Hand me the gun, I'm about to play with her."

Waving the gun, he said, "geeked them up even more." The Suzuki lurched backward and forward, he said, and it "just hit my hand and the gun just went off -- blam, blam, blam."

Defendant James Bryant, 21, said in his statement that the youths were hunting **for** "just anything . . . whatever came up first" to rob when they saw the **car** in schoolyard. He said they needed to raise money to help repay an \$18,000 **drug** debt.

In a surprising turn of testimony, Harris identified defendant Marvin Shepard **as** the gunman. Shepard, however, is thought to be the driver of the station wagon. An unidentified fourth suspect is still being sought.

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