

Accused murderer takes stand in own defense

By JUDITH BERNÉ

An accused murderer has told a jury he was unaware Donald and Mary Lou Freedman were dead until he heard it on television nearly 12 hours after the stabbings.

Dorchester Harris is pleading self-defense to two counts of first degree murder in the March 13 slayings of the West Bloomfield couple.

Harris, 47, of Detroit, took the stand in his own defense at his jury trial in Oakland County Circuit Court last week.

Harris testified the stabbings took place following a disagreement over a drug transaction. He further testified that both he and Freedman went for a knife during the argument. When Mrs.

Freedman tried to intervene, Harris said he stabbed her.

The Freedmans were later found in the living room by Mrs. Freedman's 5-year-old son. The bodies were bound at the hands and feet with coat hangers.

"I was scared to death. I was trying to stay alive," Harris testified. "I was fighting for my life."

Harris's testimony elaborated on a taped recording of his confession made by West Bloomfield police three days after the killings. The tape was presented earlier by the prosecution.

Harris acknowledged he was a business associate and friend of Freedman. Harris said he sold cocaine sold for Freedman and took a percentage for his own use.

HARRIS SAID he believed Freed-

man had hired men to kill him. He testified he went to the Freedman home on Horseshoe Drive in an attempt to get Freedman to call off the men.

Harris testified he owed Freedman a \$3,500 debt of someone whose credit Harris had guaranteed. He went to the Freedman home prepared to pay \$1,200 and make arrangements to pay the remainder in three or four weeks.

"He didn't agree to it," said Harris. "While he was at the Freedman home, Harris said, the telephone rang and he alleged Freedman said: 'I got the package, you're looking for. It's here. You can get it.'"

"I knew someone was coming for me," Harris said. "We got street language. If it had been drugs, it wouldn't have been 'a package.'"

When he got up to leave, Harris said,

Freedman attempted to detain him. They started to grapple, both went for the knife and Harris got there first, according to Harris's testimony.

"HE'S PUSHING me back. I'm pushing him. I just give in. I beat him to the knife," Harris recounted. "Now I was down. He was halfway on the couch. I hit him with it (the knife)."

"He calls out 'Mary Lou, Mary Lou' and all I know is Mary Lou is all over me," Harris testified. "I tussled her over my shoulder. I hit her in the face. I stuck her."

"He rolled out on the other couch, trying to get away. I hit him and that's where I left him."

Following the stabbings, Harris says he bound the two with coat hanger wire because "I wanted to keep them from opening the door. If the hired killers

come he'll let them in," Harris said. "And I'll still be in the neighborhood." "They wasn't dead," Harris testified. "He was mumbling. He tried to keep me from tying him up."

HIS TESTIMONY contradicts testimony by prosecution witness Oakland County Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Robert Siltery.

Siltery earlier testified bruises left by the coat hangers on the forearms and legs of both bodies show "in my opinion the stab wounds would have occurred after the coat hanger material was used to bind the arms and legs."

Siltery said the coat hangers would not have bruised the couple if they were bound after death because "bruising is a function of life; it doesn't occur after death."

He further testified there were no

"defensive wounds" on either body. He referred to wounds inflicted in the course of a struggle that usually occur around the hands.

THE TRIAL enters its third week when it resumes Monday before Judge William Beer.

Harris is expected to complete his testimony and submit to cross examination.

Attorneys for the two sides have agreed to several facts that the jury will not have to deliberate:

• Mrs. Freedman's 5-year-old son, Brian Glanka, was in the house at the time of the slayings. He peeked into the living room.

• At no time did Brian see Harris in possession of a gun.

• The investigation determined Freedman was a dealer in cocaine.

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