

Repetition follows prisoner

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al in Farmington Hills and then in Pontiac General, he was transferred to the jail infirmary in early February 1986. Since March 1986, he has been detained in a one-man cell.

Inmate status is determined by charge and bond. Regardless of behavior, status cannot be changed until after a prisoner has been tried and sentenced.

"If I'd been sentenced, my classification would have been already downgraded. This is definitely maximum security jail. There are no individual freedoms," he said.

Vermeulen is permitted outside his 5½-by-9-foot cell one hour each day for showering and walking in the 65-foot catwalk extending the length of the nine cells in his block. The inactivity has added 62 pounds to his 6-foot frame.

ONCE A week, he is taken to the jail gymnasium for exercise. When the weather warms, he will be permitted outside one hour weekly.

Three television sets blare in the catwalk, strategically placed so inmates can watch them.

Vermeulen wears ear muffs. "I'm an engineer, used to working in quiet rooms with computers. The noise here is deafening. If I ever get out, I don't want my hearing damaged," he explained.

A clear plastic band on Vermeulen's wrist indicates he receives a special diet, made necessary by the injuries he received from two self-inflicted gunshot wounds. His meals include milk rather than the standard juice and coffee.

"I lost two-thirds of my stomach," he said, lifting his shirt and revealing two large jagged scars on his chest.

On the morning of the shooting, Vermeulen said he laid on the dining room floor of his apartment and shot himself twice in the chest. Amazingly, both bullets missed his heart and other vital organs and major arteries.

nae, his second wife, and their unborn child. The only thing I have to do in here is think about it."

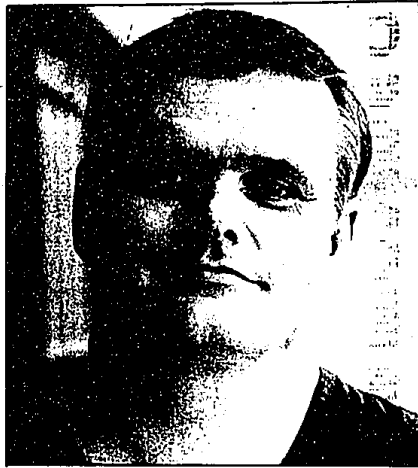
Vermeulen is still classified as potentially suicidal although he has been tested at the Center for Forensic Psychiatry in Ypsilanti on three different occasions and been judged competent.

SEVERAL TIMES A week, Vermeulen is permitted to visit the jail's law library where he researches his case and those of others. "I have helped several of the younger kids in here file court motions."

Vermeulen is hoping that a motion filed by his court-appointed attorney late last week will speed up a date for his trial.

He is charged with one count of first-degree murder. Conviction would bring a maximum penalty of life in prison.

He is also charged with one count of possessing a firearm in the commission of a felony. Conviction carries a mandatory two-year prison term.



Jon Vermeulen

Deception pervades events in 1985 shooting death

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

Jon Vermeulen, charged with killing his second wife, is waiving his right to marital privilege, preventing one spouse from testifying against another, even though the Michigan Supreme Court is scheduled next week to hear oral arguments on whether Vermeulen's ex-wife can testify against him.

The move opens the door to Vermeulen's trial for murder after 27 months of waiting while Michigan courts decide whether Vermeulen's legal wife at the time of the shooting can testify against him.

Vermeulen is being held without bail in the Oakland County jail.

On Dec. 26, 1985, Vermeulen is accused of shooting and killing Urmie "Renee" Lewis, 24, his wife of six weeks, who, he said, was pregnant. The couple had wed Nov. 11 in Las Vegas. Vermeulen was already married to his first wife of 21 years, Sharon Vermeulen of Redford Township. They were not divorced until February 1986.

Larry Kaluzny of Birmingham, Vermeulen's court-appointed attorney, filed a motion late last week asking the marital privilege with Sharon be waived as of the date in November when Vermeulen married Lewis. Sharon's testimony is damaging, according to Vermeulen.

"SHE SAYS I told her I would kill Renee if she ever tried to leave me. What I said was I'd kill myself if Renee left me," Vermeulen said, during a recent interview in the Oakland County jail.

Lewis had separated from Vermeulen one week before the shooting and, unaware her marriage to Vermeulen was illegal, had intended to file for divorce on the day she died.

Sharon's testimony is based on numerous conversations by telephone and in person with Vermeulen during the period he was separated from Lewis.

Vermeulen said he is worn emotionally thin by 27 months of waiting for trial. "I can't continue to live with this. It could take another year. Whatever happened to the right of a speedy trial?"

That right, according to Fred Miller of the Oakland County prosecutor's office, was forfeited when Vermeulen's attorney filed motions barring Sharon Vermeulen's testimony on the basis of the husband-wife privilege.

The question, Miller said, is not whether Vermeulen was legally married to Sharon at the time of the shooting but whether or not the husband-wife privilege is meant to include the kind of relationship Vermeulen and she had at the time.

"The theory of the privilege is to keep people talking in marriage," Miller said.

Vermeulen's trial, set for November 1988 in Oakland County Circuit Court, was postponed when attorney Dana Wilson of Rochester filed a motion to prevent Sharon's testimony. Circuit Judge Fred Mester ruled the testimony admissible. Wilson appealed the decision.

THE STATE Court of Appeals overturned the ruling in August 1987. Oakland County prosecutor L. Brooks Katz, II, said the state's Supreme Court where oral arguments

are scheduled to begin in early April.

"Appellate experts have told me they have absolutely no grasp on how long it might take for a (Supreme Court) decision," Miller said.

Vermeulen does not deny responsibility for Renee's death. He maintains it was a horrible accident during a bungled suicide attempt.

"I have never portrayed I'm innocent. At the very least, I'm guilty of manslaughter or the reckless use of a firearm. But I had no ill feeling against her. I wished her luck and told her I hoped she found someone new."

"Suicide is irrational but I was sane. Insane or not, I had no intention of ever harming her."

Although Renee had moved into an area hotel a week earlier, she spent Christmas night with Vermeulen in their Mulwood apartment in Farmington Hills. The following morning, while she was showering, Vermeulen said he retrieved a .44 magnum from his automobile and returned to the apartment where he shot himself in the chest, barely missing his heart.

The rest, he said, is a timeless blur of bodies, blood, deafening noise and freezing cold.

"The death of my wife was a tragic accident. I was devastated," he said.

THE COUPLE had met the previous August on a business flight from Detroit to Dayton, Ohio. Vermeulen said he fell deeply in love the moment he met Lewis, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Yugoslavia.

She introduced herself as Renee and that was the name by which Vermeulen said he always knew her. She had been married briefly but was divorced when they met.

"We knew we were going to be together. We had the right chemistry. We were very compatible," Vermeulen said, describing Renee as "brilliant, tenacious, articulate and stylish."

Within a month of the meeting, Vermeulen said he filed for divorce from Sharon, whom he had married when he was 17 and she was 15 years old.

In September, he moved into Renee's Farmington Hills apartment and, two months later, during a business trip to San Diego, they flew to Las Vegas on impulse and were married Nov. 11. Upon their return to Michigan, they moved into the Mulwood apartment. "Renee did not know I wasn't legally divorced. We had been living together, and the idea to get married came up out of the blue."

The relationship, however, was not without stress. Vermeulen said he was worried about his job. The company where he worked was being sold to new owners. He was also concerned about a continuing relationship Renee had with an older man.

IN ADDITION, Vermeulen said Renee was upset over what he describes as a stormy relationship with her parents, especially her father.

"She woke up crying nearly every night," worrying about two younger brothers and threatening to return to Yugoslavia, where she thought they might be with their mother, he said.

Lt. Barry Eriksen of the Oakland County Sheriff's Department, duty officer at the jail, said the length of time Vermeulen has spent in county jail waiting trial may have set a record.

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Testimony by spouse central to prosecution

Vermeulen threatened to kill Lewis several weeks before her death, a threat he related to his first wife, Sharon, while they were still married, according to Oakland County Circuit Court records.

"It's very simple, really," Modelski said.

The whole idea of marital privilege is to provide for confidentiality within a marital relationship. We have a man who filed for divorce and married another woman before it was even final. A marital relationship clearly was not present."

The issue, Lazar said, is not whether the relationship between Jon and Sharon Vermeulen was good or bad but whether or not they were legally wed at the time.

"The purpose of the communication privilege is to protect by law any communication made within a marriage. We want to have this openness in marriage without fear of what we say being used later against us."

"The key is, what was the legal marital status at the time of the communication. There are no exceptions to the law."

UNDER SPOUSAL privilege, one spouse cannot testify against another without the consent of both spouses, except in specific instances clearly spelled out in the law.

The section on communications contains no such exclusions. "Nor

shall either during the marriage, without consent of both spouses, be examined on any communications made by one or the other during the marriage," the law reads.

Courts throughout the country are reinterpreting the law, according to Modelski.

"You want as many facts construed (for trial) as possible. Courts are carving out exceptions, permitting more facts. In instances where there is no marital relationship, the whole underpinning of the privilege is gone," he said.

The Michigan Supreme Court has indicated dissatisfaction with current interpretation of the state law by agreeing to review the marital privilege issue less than one year after review of a similar case in which confidentiality between spouses was upheld.

In that earlier case, the Supreme Court overturned the conviction of a Genesee County man charged with molesting his step-daughter. He was convicted on the testimony of his then-wife, who is the mother of the girl.

The decision, Lazar said, is the only one possible under state law as it now stands.

"THE MICHIGAN Legislature made the law. It is for the Legislature to make an exception to the law, not the court. Only the Legislature can amend it. The court would be invading the province of the state Legislature and reversing a longstanding Michigan law."

Lazar said he is not arguing whether or not the law should be amended. "I'm just saying the issue calls for judicial restraint. If the Legislature changes the law, that's

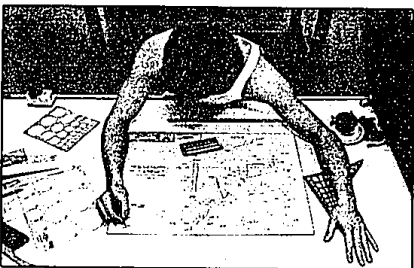
fine, but in the meantime, I feel it's essential the statute be contorted as is."

Oakland County Circuit Judge Fred Mester ruled in 1986 that Sharon Vermeulen's testimony was admissible. The Michigan Court of Appeals overturned that decision the following year.

Neither Lazar or Modelski would predict how long it might take for the Supreme Court to rule on the issue.

Last week, Jon Vermeulen's court-appointed attorney, Larry Kaluzny, filed a motion in Circuit Court waiving Vermeulen's marital privilege as of Nov. 11, 1985, the date he married Lewis.

Vermeulen has been held in the Oakland County jail without bail for over 27 months on murder charges.



Third-place finisher Joseph Johnston, a Farmington High senior from Farmington, touches up his prize-winning drawing at school Friday.



Second-place finisher Mike Neal, a Farmington High senior from Farmington Hills, tackles an engineering problem with the aid of a computer at school Friday.

By Louise Okrusky
staff writer

Perseverance and determination paid off for 12 Farmington-area high school students last week when Farmington Public Schools swept the 34th annual drawing contest awards sponsored by the American Society of Body Engineers (ASBE). The contest, open to students in the tri-county area, drew 164 entries from 24 schools.

Farmington High engineering drawing students submitted 17 entries.

When the winners were announced at Ford Motor Co.'s Dearborn Center in Dearborn March 24, 11 students in John Klenzner's engineering drawing class at Farmington High walked away winners. One Harrison High student also was honored.

The top three winners are students in Klenzner's class. He requires his students enter the contest as part of their class work. If they don't, they don't receive credit for the course.

"Competition builds confidence," said Klenzner, who has taught at Farmington High for 19 years. "Any time you have competition, it brings out the best in an individual."

Each year, the ASBE sends out a particular part to competing schools. This year, the 750 classes in the competition were sent a support bracket for a seat belt retailer.

"Competition builds confidence. Any time you have competition, it brings out the best in an individual."

— John Klenzner, teacher

students nor teachers know exactly what it is.

"They don't want students to find the part print from the auto company. They aren't told what company makes it or what it is," Klenzner said.

Each Farmington student awarded a top spot in the contest knew he wanted to place in the contest. For each senior year brought a new seriousness toward his work.

First-place winner Darin Magera, of Farmington Hills was surprised when he won the top prize, a \$500 U.S. Savings Bond. He plans to become an engineer, as his father and older brother. The son of John and Shirley Magera, he's waiting to hear from the University of Notre Dame or the University of Michigan.

Like the other students, he spent one hour a day each school day for a month on the drawing.

"I really insist they work hard on this piece drawing. I tell them they'll work the hardest they'll ever work again in high school or college," Klenzner said.

IT WAS the realization he wouldn't have another chance to enter the high school competition that made second-place winner Michael Neal even more determined to excel.

The son of Cynthia Neal of Farmington, he spent most of his senior year working on a computer engineering problem he'll submit to the regional contest run by the Michigan Industrial Education Society.

Then the ASBE contest part arrived. "I gave it a shot. I did the best I could," said Neal, who works as a cook in the Sweden Haus in Farmington.

This is the third year he has entered the contest. The first year, he placed 21st out of 25. Last year, he came in 15th.

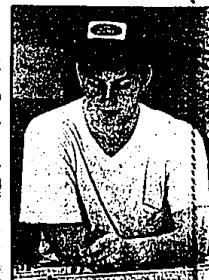
"I just wanted to get to the (awards) banquet," said Neal, active in track and football. He left with the second-place award, a \$300 U.S. Savings Bond.

Perhaps the most surprised was Joe Johnston, third-place winner. "I expected the fifth-place winner (classmate Tom Hunt) to do first and I expected to be 15th. I was surprised," he said.

"It's definitely a good time in my life to do something like that," he added.

THE SON of Anthony and Joanne Madaffer of Farmington, Johnston plans to be a draftsman for his father's business while he plans his next step into higher education.

While his good fortune caught him by surprise, he said he approached



First-place winner Darin Magera, a Farmington Hills senior from Farmington Hills, sketches during free time after class Friday.