

After 27 months in jail, he wants a trial

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

Jon Vermeulen, charged with killing his second wife, is waiving his defense right to "marital privilege." He wants to allow his first wife to testify against him.

That could mean Vermeulen, 42, of Farmington Hills, could finally go on trial for murder after 27 months of waiting.

Nevertheless, the Michigan Supreme Court this week is scheduled to hear oral arguments on whether Sharon Vermeulen of Redford Township, his first and legal wife at the time of the shooting, can testify against him.

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

ON DEC. 26, 1985, the prosecution says, Vermeulen shot and killed Urline "Renee" Lewis, 24, his wife of six weeks who, he said, was five or six weeks pregnant. The couple had wed in Las Vegas although Vermeulen's first marriage of 21 years wasn't ended until a February 1986 divorce.

Larry Kaluzny of Birmingham, Vermeulen's court-appointed attorney, filed a motion asking the marital privilege with Sharon be waived as of Nov. 11, 1985, the date of the Las Vegas wedding.

In a recent interview in his jail cell, Vermeulen said, "She (Sharon) 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."

Lewis had separated from Vermeulen one week before the shooting. Unaware her marriage to Vermeulen was illegal, she 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,



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Accused killer Jon Vermeulen (left) is willing to give up one of his defense rights just to stop "vegetating" in Oakland County jail. But lawyers will argue the point before the state Supreme Court this week.

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 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.

John Lazar, arguing the defense case on appeal, said Sharon's testimony should be barred because "the law is very clear. You can't carve holes in it just to get testimony that is badly wanted."

BUT MICHAEL Modelski of the prosecutor's staff said the privilege isn't applicable if the marriage has broken down and no marital relationship exists.

"We're arguing it doesn't make sense and is not reasonable if there is no viable relationship," Modelski said.

Vermeulen's trial was first set for November 1986 in Oakland Circuit Court. It was postponed when attorney Dana Wilson of Rochester filed a motion to prevent Sharon's testimony.

Circuit Judge Fred Mester ruled the testimony admissible. The state Court of Appeals reversed Mester in August 1987.

Oakland Prosecutor L. Brooks

Patterson appealed to the Supreme Court.

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

VERMEULEN DOESN'T deny responsibility for Renee's death. He said 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," he said.

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

Renee had moved into an area hotel a week earlier, but spent Christmas night with Vermeulen in their Muirwood apartment in Farmington Hills.

The following morning, while she was showering, Vermeulen said he retrieved a .44 magnum pistol from his automobile. It was a pistol issued to him in the 1960s when he served in the U.S. Army in Vietnam and earned the distinguished service cross, the bronze star and two purple hearts.

He returned to the apartment where he shot himself in the chest, barely missing his heart.

Renee was killed with the same pistol.

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

Vermeulen is charged with one count of first-degree murder with a maximum penalty of life in prison. He's also charged with one count of possessing a firearm in the commission of a felony. Conviction carries a

maximum two-year prison term.

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, the name by which Vermeulen said he always knew her. She was divorced after a brief marriage.

"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 Vermeulen said he filed for divorce from Sharon, whom he had married when he was 17 and she 15.

In September, he moved into Renee's Farmington Hills apartment.

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 Muirwood 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."

"But the relationship was under stress. Vermeulen said he was worried about his job because the company 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, day officer at the jail, said the length of time Vermeulen has spent in county jail waiting trial may have set a record.

The prisoner spends 23 hours a day in a cell of 50 square feet. Vermeulen calls it "a numbing hell."

"We are European!"

specializing in complete mechanical repair for British and German automobiles.

- Electric & computer work
- Automatic & Manual transmission
- Fuel-injection and diagnostics
- Factory scheduled maintenance
- Flat bed towing

JAGUAR • PORSCHE • BMW • AUDI • MERCEDES

THE AUTO DOCTOR

Two Locations to Serve You!

35181 Drexel
North of 14 Mile • TROY
585-1890

25151 Telegraph
North of 9 Mile • SOUTHFIELD
355-1505

METELOG, INC.
PROFESSIONAL ELECTRONIC SERVICE

TV's, PROJECTION TV's, VCR's & Camcorders
Factory Authorized Service for Most Brands

\$9.95 VCR HEAD CLEANING

\$15.95 Camcorders
10% OFF Carry In or In-Home Service

Dearborn METELOG #1 22067 W. Outer Dr. 278-4900	Garden City METELOG #2 6254 Middlebelt 421-0344	Pontiac METELOG #3 1058 W. Huron 881-5020
---	---	---

HOURS: Mon.-Fri. 9-5:30, Sat. 9-1:00

Boat Wells Available
15x40 ft., 30 and 50 amp
electrical, fresh water and
telephone access.

Markley Marine
469-6000

The Latest Styles
are Blooming at

Palm Beach
Patio Furniture

3350 Highland Rd. (M-5)
3 Miles W. of Telegraph
near Pontiac Airport
845-2580

ALL Umbrella's in Stock
30% Off for a limited time only!
The largest umbrella
selection in the state

INNOVA

Easter
Color Print Film Developing

AS LOW AS **\$1.48** 12 EXP. ROLL

15 EXP. DISC \$2.59 24 EXP. ROLL \$3.59
36 EXP. ROLL \$4.99
Single set of standard size prints.

EXTRA SAVINGS

Get a 2nd Set of Prints for only **99¢** AT TIME OF DEVELOPING

Buy one set of standard size prints at our low everyday price and receive the 2nd Set for Only 99¢! Good on developing orders from 35mm, Disc, 110 or 126 color print film (C-41 process).

Hurry! Offer good April 3-11, 1988.

Service MERCHANDISE

Call 1-800-251-1212 for the store nearest you.

All typographical and printing errors subject to correction. © Service Merchandise Company, Inc., 1988 N148

"Why My Mom's the Best" Contest
HEY KIDS!

Here's your chance to tell everyone why your mom's the best mom ever and you could win a fabulous Mother's Day gift especially for her! Just enter the "Why My Mom's The Best" essay contest.

FIRST PRIZE A 20 carat oval amethyst pendant on a 20" gold chain from BEDAZZLED Jewelers - a \$1,200 retail value.

Contest Rules

Theme: In 25 words or less describe the reasons you think your mother is the best person in the world!

Age: Any child up to 13 years old is eligible to enter, but entries must be in child's own words and handwriting. Parental assistance is allowed for children under five; parents are encouraged to fill out the entry application. Young children may attach a second page to the official entry form to continue their essays, but Oakland Mall cannot be responsible for lost second pages.

Judging: Essays will be judged for creativity, originality and appropriate reflection of theme. All entries will be judged as a group; there will be no distinction on the basis of age.

Prizes: The first prize writer will receive a \$50 Oakland Mall Gift Certificate, redeemable at ANV store at Oakland Mall. The writer's mother will receive a 20 carat oval shaped amethyst pendant on a 20" gold chain, commemorating Oakland Mall's 20th year serving the community. Second place writer will receive a \$30 Oakland Mall Gift Certificate; mother will receive \$20 worth of merchandise from Credentials at Oakland Mall. Third place writer and mother will both receive \$20 Oakland Mall Gift Certificates.

Where to Submit Entries: Official entry forms, including newspaper forms, may be delivered to any of the following Oakland Mall stores during mall hours:

Rivlin's Bedazzled Jewelry Credentials Gantos Hadley Arden

Other Rules

1. All entries must be submitted on this official entry form or official forms in the Detroit News and Observer/Eccentric newspapers. All entries become the property of Oakland Mall and will not be returned.
2. Entries must be received no later than 5 p.m., Sunday, April 24, 1988. Entries will only be accepted at stores listed above.
3. Entries will be on display at Oakland Mall from Tuesday, May 3 - Sunday, May 8, 1988. Due to limited space, all entries may not be exhibited.
4. Decision of the judges will be final. Oakland Mall will be the sole judge of eligibility.
5. No purchase is necessary. You need not be present to win.
6. Prizes may not be exchanged for cash.

OFFICIAL ENTRY FORM

Child's Name _____ School _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Age _____

Home Phone _____ Mom's Work Phone: _____

Mom's Name _____

In 25 words or less, describe "Why My Mom's The Best!"

OAKLAND MALL

14 Mile at I-75 • Hours: Mon.-Sat. 10 a.m.-9 p.m.; Sun. Noon-5 p.m.
Hudson's, JCPenney, Sears and over 130 great stores and services
Mall gift certificates available in mall office 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday-Friday