

Weeklong trial ends Mother acquitted of murders, arson

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

A Rochester woman accused of murdering her two young children by setting fire to the house in which they died has been found innocent.

Oakland County Circuit Judge John N. O'Brien handed down that verdict Thursday after hearing final testimony in the bench trial of Regina Sue Park Jones, 26.

Sue Jones was charged with two

counts of felony murder and one count of arson of a dwelling in the deaths of her children, Brenda, 4, and James, 18 months.

The children died in a house fire that broke out sometime between 4:30 and 4:45 a.m. July 9, 1981, at 187 Winny in northern Avon Township, just outside of Rochester.

In dismissing the charges, O'Brien said there was the same 20-percent chance that either the defendant, her husband, James M. Jones, or her sister,

Diane Fountaine, started the fire.

But, he said, while Fountaine had "less opportunity" because she was asked to leave the house one or two days before the fire, and Sue Jones could possibly have set it as a reaction to alleged flashbacks to drugs and satanism, there appeared to be a "greater chance" that the child Brenda started it.

Crying as O'Brien handed down the verdict, Sue Jones later said she believed she would be found innocent because "I didn't do it."

"I DON'T always have to agree with the judge's decision," said Jerome Fenton, assistant prosecuting attorney.

"In my mind, I know she did it," Fenton said. "But I'm not the trier of fact."

Forty-two witnesses testified for the prosecution in the six-day trial. Defense attorney Donald Brown did not present any witnesses.

But Brown argued that the prosecution, who attempted to show Sue Jones intentionally set the fire that killed her children, "has not made a case of first-degree murder."

"It seems as though the prosecution is trying to imply that this was a premeditated murder," Brown said, indicating Fenton tried to show that Sue Jones "wanted to get rid of Brenda."

"Why her?" Brown asked. "The only suggestion is that over some period of time, she said Brenda was ill."

"The defendant's position is that she did not set this fire," Brown said.

While the prosecution's witnesses testified that the fire was "willfully set" in Brenda's bedroom, Brown contended it could have been a smoldering fire that took time to turn to flames, suggesting why the smoke detector apparently did not go off immediately.

Ellen Bailo, co-assistant manager at a Rochester restaurant where Sue Jones worked, said the defendant told her Brenda would "never amount to much" and that she was "really different than the other kids."

At a birthday party given for Brenda, Bailo testified, Sue Jones and Diane Fountaine talked about the child being ill.

"Just that she was really sick," Bailo said. "The way they were talking about

her was that she was really, really sick."

Diane Fountaine, who lived in the Winny residence until a day or two before the fire, testified that Sue Jones told her Brenda didn't have long to live.

Another sister, Martha Fountaine, 21, testified that Sue Jones told her Brenda wouldn't live to be 6 years old because she was a diabetic.

BUT IN the first week of testimony, Dr. Daniel Didocha, Brenda and James' personal physician, testified that Sue Jones did not discuss such health concerns with him.

Didocha testified that he examined Brenda for hyperkinesia, but found that she "was an appropriate acting 3-year-old who might be reacting to changes in the family."

In other testimony, Oakland County Sheriff's Detective Sgt. William O'Brien testified that during an interview with Sue Jones in mid-July 1981, he asked her if she set the fire.

Expert in ESP at Towns Hall

Seems those measly paychecks sometimes aren't worth all the on-the-job aggravation.

But consider George Kreskin's job. The famed mentalist concentrates so hard during his hour-long performances that he loses three pounds. And then he still has to figure out where his paycheck is hidden.

All part of the entertainer's act, the check previously has been stashed in a man's upper dental plate and beneath a concealed trap door. Kreskin, who uses extra sensory perception (ESP) has failed to locate the check only once.

He will try the same feat Oct. 28 in the Hills Theater, 416 Main, as the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce's lead speaker for the 1982-83 Town Hall Series.

"I think he's really going to be neat," said Lois Haack, GRCC executive director. "It's going to be a good program."

Also booked for the series are Helen Miliken speaking on March 31 and Mort Crim appearing on April 28. All three lectures begin at 10:30 a.m. and are followed by luncheons in the Elks Lodge of Rochester, 600 E. University.

Season tickets are \$15 each, but that price lasts only through Sept. 30 when the rate increases to \$18 per seat. Season luncheon tickets are \$21 each.

Asking one audience member to concentrate on the check's location, the Caldwell, N.J. native will use ESP and the power of suggestion — but not hypnosis — to find it.

If he fails, he'll return half the money to the GRCC and send the other half to Big Brothers of America (he's that organization's national entertainment ambassador).

Born George Kresge Jr. in the mid-1930s, Kreskin began exploring magic by imitating his comic strip idol, "Mandrake The Magician." He honed his ESP powers by playing "Huckle Buckle Beansball" with his brother.

In the childhood game, an object is hidden and the player must find it while friends give clues by saying "hot" or "cold."

At age 9, Kreskin had a half-hour magic act. At 11, he was involved with hypnosis. But the avid camper and cross country skier won't use hypnosis in his performances now.

He backs that promise with \$25,000 deposited in an American bank that will be given to the first hypnotist, physician, dentist or psychologist who can scientifically prove the existence of a specific hypnotic trance during the show.

KRESKIN, WHO earned a bachelor's degree in psychology at Seton Hall University in South Orange, N.J., studied to be a classical pianist. The bachelor is a voracious reader with a 3,000-volume library on subjects including magic, telepathy and parapsychology.

He says he can read more than 7,000 words per minute.

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