

# Ensnaring Thoughts: Part 1, A day in court

By Dennis Rich  
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It is day three of a pre-trial suppression hearing in the case of the State of Missouri Vs. Raymond E. Wood.

Wood is charged with five counts of murder, two counts of first-degree assault and seven counts of armed criminal action stemming from the Feb. 14, 2000 shooting deaths of his wife, Tina, and four of their six children: Jared, 10; Joshua, 8; Hannah, 5; and Emily, 7. Their youngest two children, Moriah, 3, and Kaitlin, 18 months, survived the incident.

The state, represented by Johnson County Prosecuting Attorney Mary Ann Young, has indicated it intends to seek the death penalty.

At issue before the court in hearings that began in April and continued through June 25 and 26 is a defense motion asking that Wood's statements to former Johnson County Sheriff's Deputy Maj. Randy Vick and Dep. Gary Klote be thrown out as evidence.

The defense, led by attorney Cyndy Short, a public defender, contends that Wood was not competent to waive his Miranda rights at the time of the interrogation and that the use of Vick, an elder at Wood's church and friend of the family, amounted to psychological coercion.

Wood, now 36, enters the courtroom accompanied by two Johnson County sheriff's deputies dressed in a gray polo shirt and slacks. As he is being led to the defense table a subdued smile of recognition animates his otherwise stoic face as he notices his parents, Jerry and Carol Wood, sitting on the benches reserved for spectators and interested parties to the case.

"I tried to call last night. The line was busy," Wood says to his mother as she rises from her seat, smiling back at him.

"We had a lot of calls. Will they let you call tonight?" she asks.

Wood nods slightly and takes his seat as Young enters the courtroom and takes her place at the prosecution's table.

As the attorneys make ready I talk with Jerry, Ray's father.

He is anxious to talk about the previous day's testimony.

Vick, who was the first person on the scene after the shooting, testified on Wednesday that he heard the address over the radio and prayed that it wasn't the Wood's home. He also said that Ray clearly knew he was acting in his capacity as a law enforcement officer, not as a member of the church during questioning.

Vick also testified that Wood had complained of "ensnaring thoughts" at the time of the murder, though Vick believed the words had more of a religious than psychological meaning.

"Randy said it himself. He didn't feel comfortable doing this. It wasn't his job. He wasn't someone to do interrogations. Sending him in there was the prosecution's idea," Jerry said.

The elder Wood, who moved with his wife to Warrensburg from Anchorage, Alaska, after retiring from the military, also makes note of Vick's testimony that the interrogation was not videotaped because of prosecution fears that a tape would "provide ammunition for the defense."

"They knew Ray was sick, and they knew what they were doing," he added.

Division One Circuit Court Judge Jacqueline Cook enters from her chambers and court is called to order.

The first witness is Fran Billings, a licensed counselor with Pathways, formerly Western Missouri Mental Health Services, who met with Ray and Tina on Feb. 11, three days before the murders.

After a one-hour consultation, Billings diagnosed Ray with severe depression with psychotic elements, including possible auditory hallucinations.

She said she was watching the couple during the interview and "saw no kind of fear," and considered them a "gentle and loving couple."

She also said Ray complained of "being uneasy within himself" and noted on her diagnosis that Ray's condition was likely deteriorating and that he needed either medication or hospitalization, which the Woods were trying to avoid.

The tension between Short and Young became palpable as Young objected to Short's blocking her view during examination of Billings.

The courtroom bickering between the two would prove a noticeable frustration to Judge Cook throughout the day.

"When Ray and Tina Wood left my office they had a good plan for safety," Billings testified.

Under redirect by Young, Billings told the court that she "saw no signs of a thought disorder," only symptoms of severe depression and did not believe at the time it was necessary to hospitalize Wood.

She then referred the couple to Pamela Sisk, a nurse practitioner in the Pathways medication clinic.

As Billings' testimony comes to an end, Judge Cook calls for a 10-minute recess and counsel, members of the press and Ray's family leave the courtroom.

Short, whose office is in Kansas City, is a public defender with nine years of experience in trying capital murder cases. She recalled her first meeting with Wood on Feb. 15, the day after the murder.

"The first time I met Ray he was catatonic. He didn't even acknowledge my presence. He was disheveled and his mood and expressions were flattened, and in my impression he was hallucinating," Short said.

"Ray was clearly incapacitated at the time the statement was made," she added, referring to Wood's interrogation with Vick and Klote.

After the break, the defense calls Dr. Steven Mandrachia of the Western Missouri Mental Health Center to the stand. Dr. Mandrachia first became involved in the case when he was contacted by Circuit Court Judge Steve Angle to determine if Wood was competent to stand trial.

Young objected to the testimony of Dr. Mandrachia as immaterial, but was overruled by Judge Cook.

"Ms. Young, the mental condition of Ray Wood is at the heart of this suppression hearing," Cook said with growing frustration.

Dr. Mandrachia testified that his immediate impression of Wood during their Feb. 23 meeting at Fulton State Hospital was

that Wood was clearly mentally ill.

"He was depressed, withdrawn, shut down. There was no movement, slowed speech, slow response time, thought blocking. He'd say something then lose it. I don't know any other words for it, he was clearly shut down," Dr. Mandrachia said.

Wood has been confined to Fulton State Hospital in the three years since the murder with court records indicating that the prosecution has asked the court on numerous occasions to reevaluate his condition and fitness for trial.

When asked by defense if Ray could have been competent during his interrogation, Dr. Mandrachia said he found it "highly unlikely."

The prosecution then objected to allowing Dr. Mandrachia to review the deposition of Vick regarding the interrogation because the state had not yet entered it into evidence.

Judge Cook called for a one-hour lunch break and ordered that copies of the deposition be made for the prosecution for review. Ray Wood is led from the court by bailiffs and I join Ray's parents for lunch.

Jerry and Carol Wood are the typical retired couple.

Clearly devout, but not noticeably fanatical, Jerry gets upset when he talks about Ray, his illness and how it relates to their church.

The Woods, along with Maj. Vick, attend the Church of Jesus Christ Restoration Branch in Warrensburg, an offshoot of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which formed after the mainstream church

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