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Judge Boots Juror in Murder Trial; Panelist in D.C. Case Invoked Numerology, Peers Said

BY HENRI E. CAUVIN

The jury was trying to decide a high-profile murder case when the trouble began. One of the jurors brought numerology into the debate -- a mystical system said to divine truths from a person's birth date and from the sum of the letters in a person's name.

But numerology is nowhere in the jury instructions at D.C. Superior Court. And yesterday, after hearing from the woman's frustrated fellow jurors, Judge Wendell P. Gardner Jr. kicked her off the panel.

An alternate juror was summoned back to the courthouse and is expected to join the jury to begin deliberations anew today in the trial of two men accused of killing 14-year-old Jahkema "Princess" Hansen.

It was the strangest twist yet in a trial that has had more than its share since it began almost a month ago -- almost three years after Hansen was fatally shot in the Sursum Corda housing complex, allegedly because she was a witness to a killing. In addition to talking about numbers, the juror had declared that she was the Savior, there to force a mistrial.

From a prosecution witness's apparently testifying while high on marijuana to a juror finding herself followed home by a key figure in the case, the trial has not lacked the unexpected.

Leaving the courtroom after she was dismissed, the juror -- whose name has not been released -- said she could not say anything because of "the judge's order."

Judges rarely take such steps but can do so when jurors refuse to deliberate or, as in this case, insist on introducing information that wasn't part of the evidence.

A couple of years ago, the judge in a drug-gang murder case in U.S. District Court ousted a juror

who refused to deliberate. An alternate was called in. The jury then promptly came back with guilty verdicts.

But what happened in the trial of Franklin Thompson and Marquette Ward was more bizarre.

From the outset, it appeared that the jury's discussions took an acrimonious turn. "How do you have a juror changed," the foreman said in a note to the judge on Monday, a couple of hours into the deliberations.

And then late Wednesday, after the jury had twice reported that it could not reach an agreement, the judge got a note explaining the reason: "One of the jurors refuses to comply with your instructions. Being insulting and argumentative. Will not base statement on fact pertaining to evidence. Making statements of their hidden agenda."

The note led to yesterday's unusual inquiry.

Interviewed by the judge one by one in open court, the jurors said the woman spoke of the significance of everything from dates of birth to the pronunciation of names and the color schemes of people's clothing.

"She was always straying from whatever we were talking about," one juror told the judge.

"It was all made up. It was all a fabrication," another juror said.

When the judge called the juror in question, identified only as Juror No. 15, she spoke so softly that the court stenographer a few feet away had trouble hearing her. Wearing eyeglasses and a maroon Harvard T-shirt, she sat on a chair in the jury box looking anxious as the judge peppered her with questions.

She was not asked what she had said, and she did not volunteer having said much of anything. Asked whether numerology had come up, she said some jurors had been reading the horoscopes that morning. And asked whether birth dates had been discussed, she suggested that they were part of a bona fide discussion of the evidence, contradicting the accounts of almost all of the other jurors.

After he had finished questioning the jurors, Gardner scoffed at the woman's statements.

"I don't believe one whit of what she's telling me," he said.

Now, with that juror gone, the jury is supposed to start deliberations from scratch, looking anew at the testimony and other evidence laid out over three weeks by the prosecutors, Assistant U.S. Attorneys Deborah Sines and Michelle Jackson.

Hansen was killed after seeing Ward kill a drug dealer, prosecutors alleged. Ward feared that

Hansen -- his sometime sex interest -- would tell police what she had seen, so he hired his friend Thompson to kill Hansen for \$8,000, prosecutors said.

Just after 11 p.m. on Jan. 23, 2004, Thompson allegedly burst into a rowhouse in the 1100 block of First Terrace NW and shot Hansen in the back of the head.

Ward's and Thompson's were familiar faces in the insular environs of Sursum Corda, where Ward was known as Corleone, after the Mafia family portrayed in the "Godfather" films, and Thompson was known as Frank Nitti, after the feared real-life accomplice to Al Capone.

Prosecutors played up the gangland nicknames to the jury, while Ward's attorney, **Steven D. Kupferberg**, and Thompson's attorney, Rudolph Acree, dismissed the labels as hype.

What was undisputed was that a 14-year-old, living a very adult life, was killed in harrowing fashion that night. ■

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