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Jurors in Henning trial see boxes and bullets - and a lone pink button

By Joline Gutierrez Krueger
Tribune Reporter

A pink button and blue art sand are among the plethora of seemingly unconnected pieces of evidence a jury will have to sift through to determine whether they add up to a mess or to murder.

Prosecutors in the death penalty trial of Linda Henning spent much of Tuesday introducing evidence, including the entire living room carpet pulled from the apartment of Girly Chew Hossencofft, the 36-year-old woman Henning is accused of kidnapping and killing Sept. 9, 1999, along with her boyfriend and the woman's estranged husband, Diazien Hossencofft.

But the most important piece of evidence - Girly Hossencofft's body - has never been found. And that will make it nearly impossible for anyone to determine how the petite bank teller died and what was used to kill her.

"We do not know the instrument that caused her death, assuming that she's dead," Henning attorney Gary Mitchell asked Albuquerque police Detective Mike Fox, lead investigator, during cross-examination Tuesday.

Prosecutors have speculated that Girly Hossencofft may have been killed with a samurai sword or a gun owned by Henning. They say she was attacked in her apartment and then killed elsewhere.

One element of evidence introduced was a small pink button found under the driver's seat of Henning's brown Honda Accord. Prosecutors told jurors the button could have come from a pair of Girly Hossencofft's pink and orange shorts found along a remote stretch of U.S. 60 west of Magdalena the day after her disappearance.

But Mitchell today asked Fox to demonstrate how the two-hole pink button could match the four-hole white buttons found on the pockets and the front of the shorts.

"No, it does not match the white exterior buttons," Fox said.

The apparent discrepancy in buttons brought a wink and a smile to Henning's face as she glanced at her defense team and later turned toward a lone supporter in the courtroom with a thumbs-up signal, the first strong reaction Henning has shown during the trial.

Other items introduced Tuesday included:

A Jan. 17, 2000, jailhouse letter from Henning to Diazien Hossencofft, whom she addresses as "Dearest Mate." In the letter is a long-winded and poorly punctuated sentence about the pink button that appears to declare "in reality it was Girly's." Mitchell objected to the sentence, saying the poor punctuation was not typical of his well-read client and that the meaning was misconstrued.

Three crates and a large bag filled with containers of colored sand and glitter found in Henning's garage. Similar crystals were found on Girly Hossencofft's carpet, clothes, on a bloody tarp found along U.S. 60, in Henning's car and in a steam cleaner found at Diazien Hossencofft's home in South Carolina, where he had gone after his wife's disappearance.

A 9mm Taurus handgun owned by Henning that she told a grand jury she gave to Diazien Hossencofft "for protection" when he left Sept. 10, 1999. The weapon was seized in a search warrant at a South Carolina location. But jurors were told about an Aug. 27, 1999, Albuquerque police report indicating that a similar gun along with a

20-gauge shotgun, also believed to be Henning's, were found at Diazien Hossencofft's home and given to a neighbor. The shotgun, seized from Henning's bedroom closet, was also introduced into evidence.

Two rounds from a 9mm handgun found in Henning's Honda.

The audiotape of a Sept. 30, 1999, phone conversation between Henning and co-defendant Bill Miller taped at his attorney's office. On the tape the two discuss their respective interrogations before the grand jury. Miller says he is concerned that they will find out that he bought one of the guns for Henning.

A box of artist charcoal found at Diazien Hossencofft's South Carolina location. Prosecutors contend he used the charcoal to blacken his face and appendages during the attack on his wife. A neighbor and her friend testified that about 7:15 p.m. Sept. 9, 1999, they saw a blackened Hossencofft quickly rush into his home at 3900 Moon N.E. and then drive away.

The 12-by-16-foot camel brown carpeting from Girly Hossencofft's living room. Three bleach stains and markers showing where the carpet appeared to be steam cleaned or vacuumed are visible.

A Kwan Yin pendant and address book belonging to Girly Hossencofft found at Diazien Hossencofft's South Carolina location. Girly Hossencofft had worn the pendant within the last week of her life, Fox testified.

Henning is charged with 20 counts, including first-degree murder and kidnapping. If convicted, she could become the first woman to be executed in New Mexico since its statehood.

Diazien Hossencofft pleaded guilty in January to first-degree murder and 27 other charges and is serving a life plus 60 years plus 364 days sentence in a Wyoming prison.