

Victim's widow ordered to testify

Murder KING, Ernie

By MARK BERGSTROM
Sentinel staff writer

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SANTA CRUZ — The widow of murder victim Ernie King was ordered to testify for the defense Wednesday at a preliminary hearing for the man accused of murdering her husband.

Municipal Court Judge Tom Kelly required Nancy King to testify at the request of the defense following a heated debate between Assistant District Attorney Christine McGuire and defense attorney Mitchell Page.

McGuire argued that Mrs. King's testimony was not necessary and accused Page of engaging in a fishing expedition.

"We're dealing with a widow who is still grieving. To put her through a lengthy examination could be a very emotionally trying experience," McGuire said.

Kelly ordered the testimony, but only after making Page reveal the purpose of the questioning.

Page said he wanted to ask questions about Ernie King's physical condition and disabilities. And he said he wanted to inquire as to King's forgiving nature.

"I think that will explain why he got into the truck," Page said.

Why King got into the back of a pickup truck with killing suspect Robert Spedding after Spedding had already beaten him is a key question in the case. King later either was forced out of the truck, fell from it or jumped.

One of the questions Page asked the widow was whether King participated in any gymnastics or acrobatic activity. Friends and relatives in the courtroom sighed in disgust at the question as Mrs. King answered, "No."

Witnesses testified that King got into the back of the truck under his own power after having been beaten by Spedding and a co-defendant, Gregory Kern.

Mrs. King offered no possible expla-

nation. She said only that she was surprised that her husband would do such a thing.

She testified that her husband suffered from what is commonly called "tunnel vision" and that he had 60 percent hearing loss in both ears.

Page appeared to be trying to establish that King acted in a peculiar way because of his disability when he approached Spedding and two other men at a turnout on Summit Road near Highway 17.

During a conversation with King, Spedding suddenly lashed out and punched King in the face, according to testimony at the preliminary hearing.

At that point, Brett Erickson and Kern pulled up in pickup truck and Kern jumped out and joined in the beating, according to witnesses.

After the fighting stopped, Spedding and King got into the back of the truck and the truck drove off.

A short time later, King went out of the back of the truck to his death.

McGuire has charged Spedding with murder for allegedly forcing or ordering King out of the truck after trying to rob King.

Mrs. King testified that her husband died after the third of four pre-summer graduate classes he had been attending at San Jose State University.

She said he rode to and from the campus with a classmate who lived at the summit.

She said her husband either would get a ride the rest of the way to their home in Live Oak from someone at that commuter parking lot or he would call her to pick him up.

"My husband was very careful with whom he accepted a ride home," she said.

A host of friends and relatives accompanied the tall, dark-haired woman to court.