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Murder suspect Edward Bowman listens to allegation of burglaries in Eureka.

Murder suspect implicated by stepson in burglaries

Says crimes were parents' idea

By NANCY BARR
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The burglary of the residences of two clergymen was a family affair for Edward Lee Bowman, the man accused of killing a Greek Orthodox priest in Santa Cruz, Bowman's stepson said yesterday.

The stepson, Nicholas Arias, 24, said he participated in two such burglaries — both burglaries were the idea of his parents, he said. He said his mother believed clergymen had gotten their wealth by stealing from others so there was nothing wrong with stealing from them.

Arias took the witness stand in Santa Cruz County Superior Court during a hearing to determine whether evidence about the alleged burglaries may be presented before the yet-to-be-selected jury in the murder case.

District Attorney Art Danner charges that Bowman killed Father John Karastamatis in May 1985 during the course of burglarizing the priest's residence at the Prophet Elias Greek Orthodox Church in Santa Cruz. He therefore wants to be able to tell a jury about two similar burglaries Bowman was allegedly involved in when he lived in Eureka.

Public Defender Jerry Christensen is seeking to prevent the earlier burglaries from being mentioned to the jury that will hear the murder charges against Bowman. The issue of burglary is particularly important because Bowman could face the death penalty if it is found that he killed Karastamatis during the course of a burglary.

Christensen admits that Bowman beat the priest to death, but says the attack was in the heat of passion because the priest had allegedly made sexual advances toward

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Bowman's wife, Anna.

Yesterday, Arias, Bowman's stepson, told the story of two burglaries he participated in with his family when they all lived in Eureka about seven years ago. Arias was granted immunity from prosecution on the burglaries in exchange for his testimony.

Arias said that when he was 17, he, his brother John, their mother and their stepfather, Bowman, planned to break into the home of a Rev. Phillips who lived just a few blocks from their home. After they discussed how they'd get into the house and what they'd look for, one member of the family called the minister's residence to make sure nobody was there.

Then the two boys broke into the house, and filled a pillowcase with silverware, jewelry, a gun and ornamental items. Danner asked him why the two boys were chosen to commit the burglary that the entire family had planned.

"It was the most likely choice," he said. "My mother wasn't exactly the most healthy woman, and I don't believe my stepfather wanted to do it."

(Anna Bowman killed herself when police approached her home to talk to her about Karastamatis' death.)

While the Bowmans didn't break into the house themselves, they did assist the boys by either dropping them off at the minister's house or picking them up after the break-in, Arias said.

A few months later, Arias and his parents again planned to burglarize a minister's home. This time, Arias said he and his

mother hid in the car while Bowman drove to the church of Rev. Robert Cannon, also in Eureka. When they got there, Bowman went in and participated in a church service while Arias and his mother broke into the residence, Arias said. Again, they filled up a pillowcase with silver, jewelry and knick-knacks, he said.

Then they went and sat in the car until the church service was over and all three drove home together, he said.

Arias said that during the time they lived in Eureka his mother told him of her theory on clergymen.

"She felt that reverends or priests or preachers or whatever, they would take from people through contributions or flim-flam operations," Arias said.

"She said preachers in general got all of their wealth by stealing from people, and that taking from them, there wasn't a great wrong in it."

Arias said he participated in the burglaries to help out his family.

"At the time of all of this, we weren't very well off," Arias said. "I think we were on welfare."

"I think that I thought by doing this I could help out and gain a little for us."

Arias said he and his family didn't take any weapons with them when they broke into the two ministers' homes, and that they did their best to keep from running into anyone. They were scared away from both homes when they thought someone was near, Arias said — they gathered up the things they wanted as quickly as possible and left.

The hearing is continuing today.