

✓ CAPITOLA MALL MURDER

Portrait of a troubled youth

Witnesses in hearing describe McCarthy as depressed, suicidal

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SANTA CRUZ — To his schoolmates and teachers, Christopher McCarthy appeared to be a troubled kid with a bad home life. Little did they know that the dark secret he hinted at was the brutal killing of a woman and not just the pain of a broken home.

"He seemed very gentle and caring," said Susan Bellsey, a Soquel High School English teacher. "I know that might sound strange now with what happened. ... But this is a kid with a heart."

Bellsey testified Monday in a fitness hearing which will decide whether McCarthy, 17, will be tried as a juvenile or adult for the killing of 78-year-old Emily Shaw. McCarthy has admitted to the killing.

Shaw was killed and robbed on Aug. 27 in the Capitola Mall parking structure by an assailant who crushed her skull with a single blow from a heavy piece of firewood. The killing sparked a large-scale manhunt, but despite several tips that led straight to McCarthy, he was not arrested until November, nearly three months later.

During that time McCarthy bounced between the homes of his divorced parents and tried to attend high school. School officials testified that it was obvious McCarthy was in a crisis. One testified that he was emitting a "silent scream" for help.

"He was very cooperative, very gentle and kind of quiet, but he seemed depressed and kind of suicidal," said Be-

lsey, who taught a poetry class attended by McCarthy.

After McCarthy wrote of suicidal thoughts, Bellsey notified counselors and administrators.

"I never take suicidal passages lightly," she said. "I once had a student commit suicide and never let the signs go by me."

During this time school officials were meeting with McCarthy and his father over his attendance — without much success. McCarthy told his teachers that he had no place to live, that no one wanted him and that he didn't think he'd be able to stay in school.

"Many students have promise and then something happens and you see their grades go down," testified Joan Davissou, Soquel assistant principal. "If you read his file you'd say 'What happened here?'"

In poetry McCarthy spoke of the bitter breakup of his parents, remorse, suicide and rage.

"I wish I didn't do it. I wish I didn't screw it up so bad that now I have only one option. And that's to run and when I'm done. I'm sure they'll regret it," he wrote.

Bellsey said that neither she nor the other students suspected that McCarthy might be the killer sought in Capitola.

"It was a big shock to me and the class," she said. "We had no way to deal with it," she said.

The class, which puts together an anthology of student poetry, voted to include several of McCarthy's poems. Bellsey said the students wrote lengthy

messages of support to McCarthy and delivered a copy of the anthology to him at Juvenile Hall.

Signs of McCarthy's problems began to appear long before the killing. Family friends of McCarthy's testified they became aware of the problems during a boating trip to the Sacramento Delta a few months before the killing.

Patricia Carrillo, who was on the trip, testified that she became deeply concerned after finding a drawing by McCarthy which pictured him at the edge of a cliff surrounded by stick figures yelling, "jump."

"If was pretty upsetting to me," Carrillo testified. "It was drawn by somebody in a lot of pain. Now looking back it's very hard to talk about."

Courtney Goff, the father of one of McCarthy's friends, testified that in a few years McCarthy went from being a happy, normal kid, to deeply withdrawn and troubled.

"He was not a happy kid," Goff said. "He became dejected, lonely, withdrawn when I saw him (in later years). Chris would sit at the kitchen table for long periods of time staring at the floor."

Goff and others pointed to the bitter divorce of McCarthy's parents as the turning point.

Prosecutors, while agreeing that McCarthy is a youth with problems, said that the nature of the killing and the death of Shaw should not be forgotten.

"A lot of kids parents get divorced, but they don't go out and kill people," District Attorney Art Danner said.