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Woman cleared in slaying of drug pedlar

By Yorke Vickers

A woman who recanted a murder confession was acquitted Monday by an Assize Court jury after four hours deliberation.

Connie Myrna Chartrand was charged with the slaying of drug pedlar Art Garceau, a crime described by Crown counsel John Rowan as "so bizarre it is unlikely that the motive will ever be ascertained."

Garceau died in his Powell Street rooming house one year ago after suffering 186 stab wounds, only one of which could have caused his death.

Defence Counsel A.P. Serka said that the number of wounds "implies Garceau was tortured," and he said that was consistent with a statement of Louise Lewicki, a woman previously charged with the slaying.

Mrs. Lewicki committed suicide in Oakalla while awaiting trial and in a conversation she had with her husband that was overheard by police, admitted stabbing Garceau.

There were 69 wounds in Garceau's head and neck area and 117 in the trunk and extremities, most of them shallow.

However, one wound pierced the chest and severed the aorta. Miss Chartrand, who was arrested in Prince Albert, Sask., last October, told police there that she had killed a man in Vancouver and later made a statement admitting the stabbing of Garceau.

However, she went into the witness box in Assize Court in her own defence and told the jury of six men and six women that she confessed because she was tired of her life and her excessive consumption of alcohol and drugs and the "horrible degradation."

Is it improbable someone in these circumstances would confess to a murder they didn't commit?" asked Serka.

He said the pressure on a young girl who knowingly confessed to a major crime was very great.

He said she was suffering from lack of sleep and while he was not suggesting the police did anything improper they asked her 598 questions.

"I submit Connie was trying to fill in the blanks - so the officers would believe she murdered Art Garceau and that she did it alone.

"You must decide if there is an motive here - the Louise Lewicki statement has motive - there's plenty of motive there."

In the witness box in her own defence, Miss Chartrand admitted being in Garceau's room and that he had given her several Tuinol tablets (sleeping pills) which she had washed down with a large quantity of rum.

She said she went to sleep and woke up to find Garceau dead beside her.

Serka said Miss Chartrand was asking the jury to believe what she said in the witness box - that she had no bad feelings toward Garceau and didn't stab him.

He said that only an innocent girl could have withstood the cross-examination by an experienced prosecutor.

Rowan said it was the Crown's position that Chartrand killed Garceau but didn't exclude the possibility he may have been killed by the accused and another person.

Regarding Chartrand's confession to Prince Albert police, he said that when a person is involved in a heinous crime the compulsion to confess at a certain period of time must be strong.

Mr. Justice Hutcheon told the jury in his charge that the question was whether Connie Chartrand inflicted the fatal wound that caused Garceau's death.

He told the jury that if they were not so satisfied that was the end of the matter and they must acquit her of murder.