

Woman accused of hiring hitman

HOUSTON (AP) — A Channelview woman ordered the death of the mother of her daughter's cheerleading rival and used diamond earrings as collateral for the hired killing, taped conversations revealed Tuesday.

The recorded conversations were played for jurors in the trial of Wanda Holloway, who is accused of trying to hire a hitman in a scheme prosecutors contend was meant to improve her daughter's chances of becoming cheerleader.

Terry Harper, Holloway's former brother-in-law, took jurors step-by-step Tuesday through six taped conversations in which he and the 37-year-old defendant planned to pay someone to kill or kidnap Verna Heath.

"I would like it done. I'm serious about it, I've just got to come up with the money," she said during one conversation.

Prosecutors allege Holloway

hoped Heath's daughter, Amber, would be so upset over the death she would drop out of the cheerleading competition, giving her 13-year-old daughter, Shanna Harper, a better shot at winning. Defense attorneys claim she was set up by two scheming brothers.

Amber is a freshman cheerleader this year at Channelview High School in suburban Houston. Shanna is not on the team.

Terry Harper wore a hidden tape-recorder at the request of Harris County sheriff's detectives whom he had contacted after he said Holloway first asked him to "get rid of" Heath last fall.

In their last meeting Jan. 28, Holloway gave Harper diamond earrings and promised to pay cash for the hit within a month.

"I can't afford to do both," Holloway said, referring to an earlier plan to kill both Verna and Amber Heath. "The mother's the

one who screwed me around, the mother's done all the damage."

"You want her dead?" Harper asked. She replied: "I don't care what you do with her, you can keep her in Cuba for 15 years. I want her gone."

"Now, Wanda. He (the hitman) said she won't be breathing much longer," Harper continued.

"OK, go for it," Holloway said.

Holloway spoke rapidly on the tapes, and both she and Harper laughed and joked throughout the conversations.

She was concerned about getting caught, saying, "If I ever get tied into this, I know I'd have to move. ... But I know I want to do it."

Holloway and Harper debated several times about whether both or one of the Heaths would be hurt and if they should be injured or killed.

Thieves steal bicycles from Austin police

AUSTIN (AP) — Four of nine bicycles used by Austin police officers to patrol the Sixth Street nightclub district and the University of Texas area were stolen from the department's parking garage.

The \$800 bicycles, two of which were donated to the police department last year, were locked on a bicycle rack with cables and padlocks in the patrol building.

"Nobody hates anything worse than a thief, and a sneak thief is about the lowest form of human being there is," said Lt. Gerald Raines of the police tactical services division.

Officers had last used two of the bikes Saturday night and early Sunday morning and discovered the bicycles were missing Monday.

Dry cleaner employs armed security guards

HOUSTON (AP) — A dry-cleaning company trying to protect customers and employees is hiding armed guards in its stores.

This marks the third time since the late 1960s that Pilgrim Cleaners has utilized such security measures.

Guy Robertson Jr., whose father owns the Houston-area chain, announced the measure Monday with private detective Clyde Wilson, who handles the company's security. There are about 260 Pilgrim stores within 100 miles of Houston.

"There's nothing better than a shotgun," Robertson said. "That kind of equalizes everything out."

Neither Robertson or Wilson would reveal how many robberies the firm has suffered lately, but they said no clerks had been

killed, the Houston Chronicle reported Tuesday.

The two said an undisclosed number of shotgun-armed guards will be rotated as needed. All are off-duty peace officers, but none works for the city of Houston or Harris County.

Shotgun squads were introduced by the store during a wave of robberies in 1967. At the time, Robertson's father said 33 Pilgrims had been robbed from Jan. 1 to May 22. Pilgrim and two other firms, One-Hour Martinizing and Lipp Cleaners and Laundry, hired Wilson to put about 75 off-duty officers in and near their stores.

In 1986, Pilgrim announced it would make use of them again, then decided to use guards with police dogs instead of shotguns.

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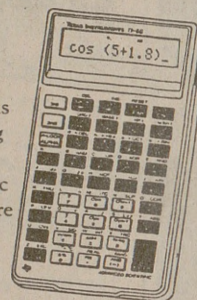
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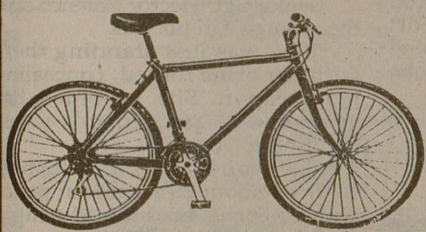
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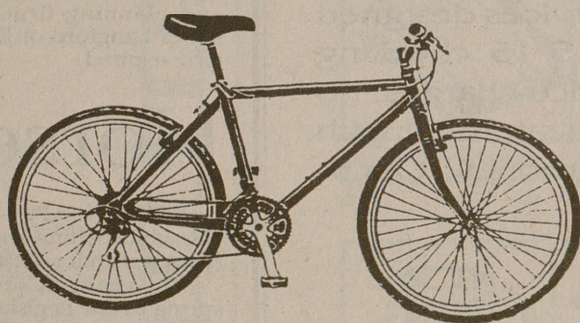
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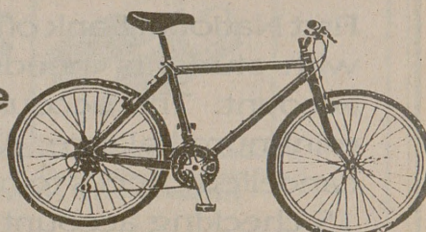
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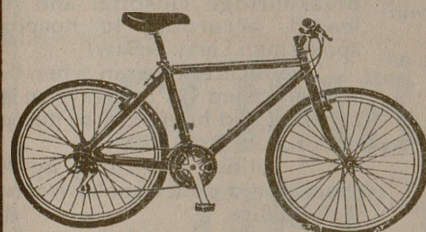
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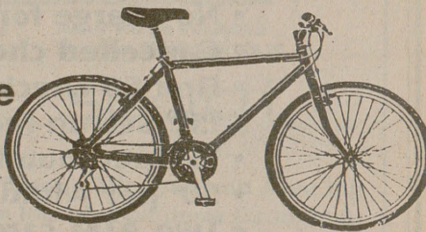
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