

Doctor's wife accused of killing their three children goes to trial

WHEATON, Ill. (AP) — The 911 call came from a white suburban Chicago neighborhood: "My three kids dead," the woman said, then said, "I did it."

Two and half years after emergency crews responding to a call found Nicholas, 7, Emily, 6, and Thomas, 3, dead, Marilyn Lemak went on trial Tuesday for their murders.

Prosecutors said in opening statements that Lemak was upset over her crumbling marriage and that her husband was seeing another woman so she drugged then suffocated the children, then tried to kill herself.

The killing of her children was a purposeful act meant to ease her husband pain ... and to bring pity upon herself," DuPage County Assistant State's Attorney Joe Ruggiero said.

Defense attorney Joe Bugos said the prosecution theory was simple. Lemak's actions were those of a distraught woman on medication and "the

culmination of the deep downward spiral of major depression," he said.

In her delusional state, Lemak thought she was helping her children by feeding them her anti-depression medication and then suffocating them, Bugos said. She then took medication and slit her wrists.

"She went to sleep never expecting to wake up again in this world," Bugos said. "She would be with Nicholas, Emily and Thomas, and nobody would be sad anymore."

Lemak did wake up. She called 911, pleading for help and telling the dispatcher she had killed her children.

Lemak, 44, appeared gaunt and pale as she sat in the courtroom Tuesday, brushing back tears at times.

As the prosecution began calling witnesses, her former husband took the stand.

David Lemak described a "wonderful life" shortly after he, a young doctor, married the sur-

gical nurse. Fissures started to appear after they had their first child.

He said they saw counselors over the years, and he described an "icy" relationship with his

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— Joe Ruggiero
DuPage County
assistant state's attorney

wife in the months preceding the killings.

"She didn't speak much to me except to reiterate her despising me," he said.

He testified that he eventually gave up efforts to save the mar-

riage, and with their divorce pending, started to see another woman.

Shortly after his wife found out about that relationship, she killed the children in a fit of rage and jealousy, DuPage County prosecutors say.

The courtroom was packed for the proceedings. David Lemak's father could be seen quietly sobbing, and Marilyn Lemak's mother dabbed at her eyes when the March 1999 deaths of the children were described.

David Lemak was expected to resume testifying Wednesday. Bugos said the evidence would show that Marilyn Lemak's actions "were not the manifestation of evil but the manifestation of mental disease."

Ruggiero called that a "thinly veiled excuse" for a deliberate and horrendous crime.

Prosecutors have said they will seek the death penalty if Lemak is convicted.



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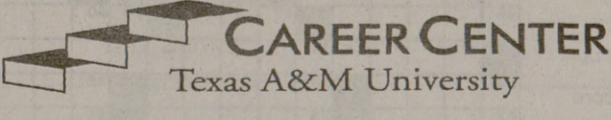
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