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Woman faces trial in spouse's slaying

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A Soledad correctional officer told police she accidentally stabbed her husband in the heart during a New Year's Day altercation that started with an argument over tacos. According to testimony at a preliminary hearing Friday, 23-year-old Emma Jaime said the bickering elevated to a physical confrontation, prompting her to pick up a butcher knife, hold it under her chin and tell her husband to "go ahead and kill me." Six-foot, 230-pound Ramon Jaime Jr. was face to face with his 5-foot-tall wife when he stepped toward her and was impaled on the knife, the woman told district attorney's investigator Allen Rowe.

The victim and the suspect were guards at Salinas Valley State Prison. The fight took place in the couple's new five-bedroom home in Greenfield in front of Ramon Jaime's two children from a previous marriage. He collapsed on the kitchen floor and died en route to Mee Memorial Hospital in King City. Rowe said an autopsy revealed the knife plunged 4 to 5 inches into Jaime's chest, puncturing his heart. Rowe testified that Dr. John Hain, the forensic pathologist, said the wound required "considerable force" and the defendant's account of what happened was "unreasonable and unlikely."

Judge Larry Hayes agreed. He rejected defense attorney Tom Worthington's argument that the defendant's actions amounted to involuntary manslaughter and Friday ordered her to stand trial for murder with use of a knife. If convicted, she could face a maximum sentence of 35 years to life in prison. While there was testimony regarding prior domestic violence between the couple, Hayes said he did not "find any evidence to support a self-defense at this time."

Argument over tacos

In a videotaped interview with Rowe, portions of which were shown Friday, Emma Jaime said the argument with her husband began with a disagreement over tacos. The couple hosted a New Year's Eve party at the house and she came downstairs the next day about 11 a.m., she said.

Her husband was preparing tacos and asked if she wanted one, she said. She said no, but after he sat down to eat with his 4-year-old daughter and 2-year-old son, she changed her mind and asked for one. He refused, calling her a brat, she said.

An argument ensued and Emma Jaime poured a soda over her husband's food, she said. She said she ran upstairs crying, "Don't hit me. Don't hit me." He pursued her into the bedroom, pushed her on the bed and started to choke her, she said.

Rowe testified the woman had no injuries and prosecutor Elaine McCleaf said the 27-year-old man was doing what he always did when his wife started an altercation: He restrained her, then walked away.

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Ramon Jaime returned to the kitchen and was washing dishes. His wife followed him and continued yelling, she said. She said he grabbed her and starting "smashing" or "pushing" her head onto the counter. When he stopped, she said, she grabbed a butcher knife out of a nearby drawer.

"Why don't you go ahead and kill me," she said she cried while holding the knife under her chin. "You're always trying to hurt me, just go ahead and do it."

She said her husband turned to face her. They were inches apart when he stepped forward.

"He stepped towards her and the knife hit him," Rowe quoted the woman as saying. "She thought he was going to grab her arms, but the knife stopped him."

She said at first she thought the 1 1/4-inch-wide blade merely ripped his T-shirt, but when they lifted it, blood started pouring from the wound and he told her to call 911.

Replays 911 tape

In an effort to show his client had no intent to harm her husband, Worthington played the dramatic 911 call for Hayes. The victim's family sobbed as they heard Ramon Jaime moaning in the background as Emma Jaime pleads with the operator to summon help, telling her 28 times during four minutes to "Hurry, please hurry."

"Jaime, Jaime, please," she cries, telling the operator his eyes were rolling back. "Baby, baby." She told the operator they were "fighting with a knife and one of us got hurt," then said her husband was smashing her head into the counter so she grabbed a knife and "hit him with it."

Emma Jaime did not learn that her husband was dead until after her taped interview with Rowe. In the interview, she described five other physical confrontations, several of which started with her husband calling her profane names and then her resorting to throwing objects or slapping him. One incident happened in a Las Vegas hotel the night before the couple was married in July 2008.

The victim's brother, Tony Jaime, told police the defendant is "crazy" and "always hitting on my brother."

Greenfield police officer Jesus Alvarez testified that when he arrived at the Vasquez Avenue home, he found the victim's two children sitting together by the Christmas tree. The little girl looked frightened, her eyes wide open, he said. He took them into a bedroom so they could not see the bloody scene.

She asked if her daddy was OK. Alvarez asked her what happened. She said her father and Emma were "fighting but not hitting" and then, "Emma poked my daddy with a knife and his tummy was bleeding." Worthington argued that the child's description showed his client did not forcefully stab her husband and the 911 call showed she had no intent to harm him.

But McCleaf said intent is not erased by after-the-fact remorse. Even if the judge believed the defendant's story about her husband's attack, it stopped when Emma Jaime picked up a knife and thrust it with enough force to pierce his heart. She acted out of anger, not fear, she said.

"She doesn't want to be talked to that way and she used lethal force to make sure he never talked to her that way again."

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Seeks bail reduction

After the all-day hearing, co-counsel Brian Worthington argued Jaime's \$1 million bail was unreasonable and asked Hayes to reduce it to \$100,000. Tony Jaime and ex-wife Francis Rebecca Jaime begged Hayes not to release the defendant because they fear for their family's safety.

Francis Jaime cried as she told Hayes she feared the defendant would come after her children, "the only witnesses to their father's murder."

"I cannot begin to express how scared I am for my babies," she said.

As a correctional officer, McCleaf said, Emma Jaime has more reason than anyone to fear prison, a fear that makes her a danger to the community and a flight risk.

Citing the defendant's spotless record, numerous letters of support from community members and her work history, Hayes reduced her bail to \$750,000 but ordered that she live with a member of her family and have no contact with the victim's family should she post bail. Last week he rejected her bid for a pass from jail to allow her to attend the victim's funeral.

Her arraignment was set for Jan. 28, at which time a trial date may be set. Her attorneys have invoked her right to a speedy trial.

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