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Judge hears forensic evidence in Camas woman's murder trial

Case resumes Monday; woman claims self-defense in fatal shooting of husband

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Stephanie "Sam" Westby, right, is seated next to her attorneys during the opening of her murder trial Monday morning at the Clark County Courthouse. She's accused of killing her husband during a confrontation over him having an affair. (Amanda Cowan/The Columbian files)

[Photo Gallery](#)

A forensic scientist testified Thursday the gun Stephanie “Sam” Westby used to fatally shoot her husband at their Camas home was likely within 6 feet of him when she fired.

Westby’s murder trial concluded for the week Thursday afternoon. The Clark County Superior Court bench trial is set to resume Monday with state’s witnesses.

Westby, 51, is charged with second-degree domestic violence murder and first-degree domestic violence assault. She is claiming self-defense in the shooting; defense attorney Steve Thayer said Westby’s husband attacked her during a confrontation over his extramarital affair.

On Thursday afternoon, Judge Nancy Retsinas examined the shirt Joe Westby was wearing the evening of Sept. 15, 2019. Johan Schoeman, with the Washington State Patrol Crime Lab, had analyzed the shirt for gun powder residue.

Clark County Medical Examiner Martha Burt previously testified she ruled Joe Westby’s cause of death to be multiple gunshot wounds to the torso.

When Schoeman removed the shirt from the evidence bag, Thayer noted one of Sam Westby’s blonde hairs was still affixed to it. Schoeman showed the judge a separate package containing multiple hairs he removed from the shirt in the lab. Officers previously testified about finding additional hairs near Joe Westby’s hand, which were later determined to be forcibly removed from Sam Westby’s head.

Schoeman also testified the bullet holes in Joe Westby’s shirt did not show evidence the gun had contact with or was near the shirt when it was fired.

However, the forensic scientist said he did not package the evidence at the scene, so there’s no way for him to know whether any residual particles fell off the shirt during the incident or when it was sent to the crime lab.

Chest pains

Earlier in the trial, Thayer showed the judge video of Sam Westby in an interview room at the Clark County Sheriff’s Office after the shooting.

In the video, she could be seen intermittently sobbing while alone in the room and checking her body for injuries. While detectives took photos of Sam Westby and her clothing, she told them she couldn't stand up on her own and she felt light-headed. Her shirt appeared to be stretched out and could be seen falling down her shoulder; when an investigator asked her whether her shirt was normally like that, she said no.

She declined to answer detectives' questions and said she wanted an attorney.

At one point, Sam Westby could be seen putting her hand to her chest before calling for help. She said her chest hurt and she needed to go to a hospital. Paramedics arrived and took her by ambulance to a hospital.

An emergency department nurse from PeaceHealth Southwest Medical Center testified Thursday he noted that Sam Westby did not show signs of distress, and her vitals were within a normal range. She was diagnosed with chronic anemia and unspecified chest pains and released.

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