

Killer says he wanted to please friend

• Teen testifies suspect
paid for Alliance murder

BY JOHN HIGGINS

Beacon Journal staff writer

CANTON: The state's leading witness in the David Thorne murder-for-hire case told jurors yesterday that Thorne paid him \$200 the morning of Yvonne Layne's funeral.

Joseph Wilkes, 19, testified for about three hours, wearing a khaki, short-sleeved shirt, olive pants and prison-issue orange slippers.

Wilkes told jurors that he had slashed the 26-year-old mother's throat in her Alliance home to please the man he most respected and wanted to emulate.



Wilkes

"I wanted to be No. 1 in David's life, and it was a way to prove myself," he said.

During a break when the jury was out of the courtroom, Wilkes cocked his head and stole sidelong glances at Thorne, 27, who sat alone at the defense table and stared back.

As the jury was returning to hear the defense's cross-examination of Wilkes, Thorne turned to his grandfather sitting in

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the first row of observers and winked.

Wilkes agreed in September to plead guilty to the March 31 murder to avoid a death-penalty trial.

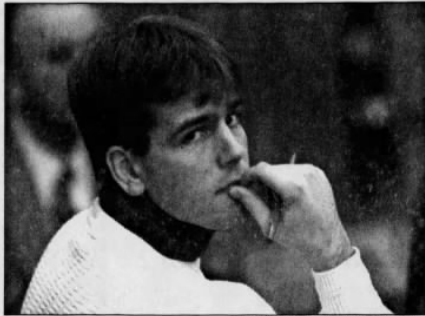
In exchange for a lighter prison sentence — 30 years before the possibility of parole — Wilkes agreed to testify truthfully about how Thorne helped plan, execute and pay for the killing.

The prosecution believes Thorne, of Atwater Township, hired Wilkes to kill Layne, the mother of Thorne's 2-year old son, to avoid paying child support. The child, now 3, is living with Thorne's grandfather.

Wilkes told jurors that he met Thorne about five years ago and they became friends.

Thorne, a low-ranked martial arts student, taught Wilkes some self-defense moves and wrestled with him occasionally on the basement floor of the Atwater home Thorne shared with his grandfather.

"When I first met Thorne, I was pretty much afraid of everyone," Wilkes testified. "He was afraid of nothing and he always got his way. That's the way I wanted to be."



ROBIN TINAY SALLIE/Akron Beacon Journal

David Thorne, 27, is on trial in Stark County Common Pleas Court for allegedly hiring someone to kill Yvonne Layne, the mother of his son.

Wilkes said that Thorne once pressured him to beat up somebody.

"He told me that I should deal with it the way he taught me and if I didn't, he (Thorne) would deal with me."

Thorne wanted Wilkes to help him with another problem, too: his ex-girlfriend and mother of his son.

Starting in March, Thorne had been paying Layne \$82.62 a week, which was deducted from his paycheck at Dale's Cuda Shop in Alliance, a family-run business that made reproductions of vintage Chrysler parts.

"He told me that he wanted Yvonne Layne out of the picture,"

Wilkes testified. "He wanted her dead so he could have his son."

Wilkes said Thorne gave him a \$100 bill on March 31 to pay for a motel room behind the Carnation Mall, where he should buy a knife and a pair of batting gloves.

However, Wilkes was not able to corroborate an important prosecution witness's testimony about what happened in the mall's food court before the killing that night.

Wednesday, a 23-year-old telemarketer at the mall, Rose Mohr, testified that she saw Wilkes staring at her and her boyfriend, Chris Campbell, who recognized Wilkes from their school days in Ravenna.

Campbell asked what Wilkes

was doing in Alliance and he told them he was there to do a job, Mohr testified.

"He said that he was there to kill a girl in Alliance and that somebody paid him," she said.

She said Wilkes showed her and Campbell the knife he had just bought at Kmart and gave Campbell a card with his phone number on the back. Mohr said that she later found the card in Campbell's pants and hid it for a few months before showing it to Alliance police.

Alliance Detective Lloyd "Bud" Sampson, who testified yesterday, said outside the courtroom yesterday that they found Mohr because Campbell reportedly had threatened her, promising she would meet the same end as Layne. Mohr told her grandmother, who told somebody else who told police.

But Wilkes testified that he didn't remember telling Mohr or Campbell about the crime or showing them the knife.

"I don't recall what we spoke about," Wilkes said.

"Why was that?" asked Stark County Assistant Prosecutor Jonathan Baumol.

"Because I was high on cocaine and acid," Wilkes said.

Wilkes said that after running into Mohr and Campbell, he walked the three miles to Yvonne Layne's house, told her Thorne had sent him to check on her and sat down with her on the sofa.

"She tried to turn her head to grab something . . .," Wilkes said, trembling.

"Go on," Baumol urged.

"That's when I grabbed her by the hair and cut her throat," Wilkes said.

She lurched toward the sliding glass doors.

"I could barely hear her, but she said, 'Why?' to me and I said, 'David wanted me to.'"

Wilkes said Thorne paid him \$200 a few days later when Thorne arrived in a pickup with Thorne and Layne's son.

"He gave me the money and then he went to the funeral," Wilkes said.

Wilkes spent the money on a 12-pack of beer, shoes, work boots and in-line skates. He said he asked Thorne to go shopping with him, but Thorne was too busy.

Defense attorney George Keith confronted Wilkes with inconsistencies in his statements to police about the crime and how well he knew the victim.

Wilkes admitted that police told him about many of the details of the killing before he confessed, such as how he pulled Layne's hair before killing her.

Keith finished his cross-examination by asking if Wilkes had made a phone call from jail telling a friend that he wished he hadn't pleaded guilty.

Wilkes said he had.

The trial, in Stark County Court of Common Pleas, resumes today at 9 a.m.

Judge Richard D. Reinbold Jr., who has issued a gag order in the trial, told jurors he expects testimony will conclude Wednesday.