

## ATTORNEY: CLIENT'S TESTIMONY 'DETRIMENTAL'

Newsday - Long Island, N.Y.

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Date: Feb 9, 2006

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Before putting his client on the witness stand in his murder trial yesterday, Christopher Reynart's attorney emphasized in court that he felt Reynart's testimony could be "extremely detrimental" to his case.

But Reynart insisted and, moments later, Michael Brown said he was proven right.

"He basically defeated all of the work that I've done," a flustered Brown, of Central Islip, said outside the Riverhead courtroom. "But it's par for the course. He hasn't listened to my advice from day one."

In rambling testimony that included talk of the presidential electoral process and his love of the "hot tropics," Reynart tried to defend himself against charges that he murdered his wife and mother-in-law in their North Bay Shore home on Easter morning of 2004.

All Brown did was ask Reynart whether there was anything he wanted to say. A soft-spoken Reynart began by saying he was "sorry for everything that's taken place."

"I'd like to say I'm a repentant sinner ... I'm not an evil person," Reynart said.

Several times, Reynart spoke of his love for his two sons, Christopher and Kevin, who listened from their rooms as Reynart broke into their home on April 11, 2004, and stabbed Karina Reyna, 30, and her mother, Azucena Villegas, 63, to death.

Brown has argued that Reynart - afraid that Reyna's new boyfriend was endangering his children - suffered an extreme emotional disturbance that night, and is therefore guilty of manslaughter instead of first-degree murder.

Reynart supported the defense in his testimony, saying he felt he "was possessed by supernatural forces" when he killed the two women.

In a theory that Brown has not pursued, however, Reynart accused police of doctoring several crime scene photos, and said he could tell because he is a "certified photographer."

From the witness stand, Reynart spoke directly to Shirley Rivera, the sister of his slain wife, who sat in court.

“Please take care of the kids,” Reynart said to Rivera, who covered her face with her hands. “And don’t hesitate to talk to me in court, because I’m always willing to provide.”

Outside court, Rivera said she was “hurt” and bothered by Reynart’s testimony. “If he loved my sister so much, then why did he do what he did?” she said. “And if he loved the children so much, then why did he take away their mother?”

In her cross-examination, Assistant District Attorney Nancy Clifford posed a similar question, asking Reynart why he regularly beat Reyna in front of the children.

“It didn’t happen that frequently,” Reynart answered.

Brown said that more harmful than what Reynart said to jurors was the impression he made on them. “In this case, I don’t think I wanted the jury to get a feeling for who he is,” Brown said.