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Evidence Shows Multimillionaire Anne Bass And Her Companion Were Injected With Gentian Violet During Home Invasion In South Kent

March 16, 2012 | By ALAINE GRIFFIN, agriffin@courant.com, The Hartford Courant

NEW HAVEN — —

Detectives, a Cadillac salesman, a forensics expert and the wife of a beverage mogul took the witness stand Friday on the third day of the trial of Emanuel Nicolescu, the former butler accused of attempting to extort \$8.5 million from wealthy philanthropist Anne Bass during a 2007 home invasion at her Connecticut estate.



The testimony Friday of socialite Jill Bikoff was brief yet it offered a glimpse into the world of the rich and famous that Nicolescu, 31, was a part of while working various jobs in New York City.

Bikoff testified Friday in U.S. District Court that Nicolescu once worked for her as a driver and for her husband, J. Darius Bikoff, founder of Glaceau Vitaminwater. Nicolescu's \$68,000-per-year job with the Bikoffs followed his employment as a butler for Bass, the ex-wife of Texas billionaire Sid Bass, at her South Kent home. Nicolescu was working for the Bikoffs at the time of the home invasion and usually drove a light-colored Cadillac Escalade.

During her testimony, Bikoff pointed out Nicolescu as he sat next to his lawyers at the defense table but she never appeared to make eye contact with him. In 2007, J. Darius Bikoff sold Energy Brands to TheCoca-Cola Co.for \$4.1 billion.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys David E. Novick and Paul H. McConnell used Bikoff's testimony to tie Nicolescu to a Jeep that had been stolen from Bass' home during the home invasion and left abandoned in the parking lot of Home Depot in New Rochelle, N.Y.

Metropolitan Transit Authority records show that an EZ Pass device paid for by the Bikoffs showed that one of their vehicles the day after the home invasion crossed the Whitestone Bridge heading in the direction of New Rochelle at about 7 a.m. Records show the EZ Pass device was used again on the bridge at 7:25 a.m. by a vehicle traveling in the opposite direction toward Queens, N.Y.

Prosecutors say the timing of the Whitestone Bridge crossings is consistent with the time a surveillance camera at the Home Depot in New Rochelle shows occupants of a Jeep being picked up. According to earlier testimony, police found Bass' Jeep at that Home Depot.

Richard Daubney, a Cadillac salesman in Waterbury, told jurors he examined the Home Depot surveillance footage. Though the vehicle activity took place far from the camera, Daubney said based on the vehicle's distinct lights, he determined a Cadillac Escalade was the vehicle shown in the footage picking up the occupants of the Jeep.

In other testimony, Eric Carita, a forensic scientist who processes DNA evidence in criminal investigations for the state, said swab samples taken from the steering wheel and windshield wiper lever of the stolen Jeep contained a DNA mixture.

Authorities took saliva samples from Nicolescu during their investigation. Carita said based on his analysis of the saliva samples and the swabs from the Jeep, Nicolescu could not be excluded from the DNA mixture found on the steering wheel and wiper lever.

Nicolescu could face up to 50 years in prison if convicted of charges of attempting to interfere with commerce by extortion,

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conspiracy to interfere with commerce by extortion and possession of a stolen vehicle.

Earlier this week, Bass' longtime companion, artist Julian Lethbridge testified that he thought he and Bass would be killed when three masked armed men broke into the home, tied them up and demanded money.

Lethbridge testified that both he and Bass were stuck with a needle and told they were getting a deadly virus, and symptoms would appear within 20 hours. The intruders said they would give Lethbridge and Bass an antidote to the virus if they received the \$8.5 million.

Bass never came up with the money. The intruders then gave Bass and Lethbridge a beverage that made them sleepy.

On Friday, testimony showed that tests on the purple-blue liquid Bass and Lethbridge were injected with was actually gentian violet, an antifungal medication. According to mayoclinic.com, topical gentian violet is used to treat fungus infections inside the mouth and on the skin.

Tests on blood taken from Bass and Lethbridge after the home invasion showed they had diphenhydramine in their blood. Diphenhydramine is an antihistamine that is known to cause drowsiness and is an ingredient in Sleepinal.

State police Detective Raymond Insalaco testified that police found capsules of Sleepinal inside an accordion case that also contained a stun gun, knife, zip ties and a laminated card with phone numbers at Bass' multiple homes and of people who worked at the houses.

A New York woman testified Thursday that she found the case lodged in a muddy canal near her home. Under cross-examination Friday by Bruce D. Koffsky, Insalaco said he was not sure whether the woman and her husband, who helped her retrieve the large case, handled the items before they were turned over to investigators.

Nicolescu's two alleged accomplices have not been arrested in connection with the home invasion. A federal grand jury has indicted one of them, Michael N. Kennedy, also known as Nicolae Helerea, on the same charges Nicolescu faces.

Helerea's father, Nicolae Helerea, told The Courant Thursday that he believes his son is in Romania.

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