

Teen testifies: 'I didn't shoot anyone'
By CONSWELLA BENNETT/Starkville Daily News

The moment jurors in Tyler Edmonds' capital murder trial had awaited finally arrived Thursday afternoon -- to hear firsthand from the Edmonds himself.

Edmonds, took the stand Thursday afternoon to tell the jurors in his own words what happened during the May 2003 weekend when Joey Fulgham, 28, of 2163 Buckner St. -- his half-sister's husband -- was killed. Edmonds is charged in Fulgham's shooting death.

The defense would present their case Thursday morning after the state rested its case once court began.

Edmonds managed to keep his composure throughout his hour and 45 minutes of testimony with his attorney, Jim Waide, and an intense cross examination by Assistant District Attorney Patricia Faver.

Edmonds described his close relationship with his half-sister, Kristi Fulgham, who is also charged with capital murder in Joey Fulgham's death.

"We were very close," Edmonds said, noting that whenever he had problems with school he would talk to Kristi.

In an earlier testimony Thursday morning, not in the presence of the jury, Edmonds' reading and English teacher for gifted students, Linda Lowes, testified about a reading test she had given. Lowes said the book was about a young boy's survival and one of the questions on the test read, 'One's most valuable asset is himself. Do you agree with the statement. Why or why not.' Lowes testified that Edmonds answered, "No. I love my sister more than I love myself."

Waide asked Edmonds if Kristi had ever spoke to him about getting a gun to kill a stray dog. Edmonds said that Kristi had e-mailed him about a dog. A printed copy of the e-mail -- dated April 16, 2003 -- was marked into evidence.

Edmonds, reading the e-mail to the jury, said that Kristi could pick him up from school Friday, and that she could call and "they could discuss the damn dog."

The fateful

weekend

Edmonds testified that the weekend of Mother's Day he was supposed to spend it with his father, Danny Edmonds. Kristi was supposed to pick Edmonds up from school Thursday, but never arrived. Friday morning, Edmonds said he began calling his father to see if he could pick him up. Edmonds said his father did not pick him up because he did not want to start "a big deal with his mother."

Edmonds' sister had been taking him to see his father without his mother's knowledge.

Danny Edmonds and Sharon Clay, Tyler's mother, divorced in 1993 and Clay had not allowed Tyler to see his father.

Danny Edmonds was also called as a witness on Thursday.

Edmonds testified that when Kristi Fulgham arrived on Friday, he thought he was going to his

father's house.

Edmonds said he took an old .22-caliber rifle from the house.

"Last time I tried to use it, (the rifle) it didn't work," Edmonds testified.

At the time he attempted to use the gun with his cousins and brother, Edmonds said the gun would not do anything.

"I tried to cock it, but I couldn't. It was too hard to cock," Edmonds said of the time he tried to shoot the gun when he was 12 years old.

Once arriving at Kristi and Joey Fulgham's home Friday night, Edmonds testified that after eating Subway for dinner he fell asleep on the floor near Kristi, who was using the computer. Edmonds said he was awakened around 4 a.m. Saturday by an alarm clock and found Kristi Fulgham on the computer. Edmonds said after getting dressed and packed, he took his bags to the car and put Kristi's youngest daughter in the car.

"I sat down and started the car and started fidgeting with the radio. There wasn't nothing good on so I turned it off and waited for Kristi," Edmonds said.

A short time later, Edmonds said he heard a pop sound, which he described as sounding like a dropped book. Edmonds said the trunk of the car was open, and recalled Kristi telling him she was going to put the computer in the car and give it Kyle Harvey, her boyfriend in Jackson, and also had a small box.

Edmonds said there was brown wallet in the car, which Kristi told him to put in the glove compartment. Edmonds said he thought the wallet belonged to Harvey since Kristi had been with him on Thursday.

Edmonds said when they left that morning, he thought he was going to his father's home. Edmonds said Kristi did not drive the usual route to their father's home, and he asked why she was not taking him to his father's.

"She said she had talked to Dad, and he said to take me to Gulfport with her," Edmonds said.

Edmonds said they went to David Noels' home to pick up the other two children and went to Jackson. Sometime after that, Edmonds said he became ill.

Edmonds said they arrived at Harvey's home between 9 and 10 a.m. and that Harvey was not home at the time. They left for Gulfport after Harvey arrived home from work.

Edmonds said they left Gulfport between 2 and 3 p.m. the following day. When they returned to Jackson Sunday evening, Edmonds testified that they then found out that something was wrong after Kristi received a phone call.

After receiving a phone call from Kristi's stepfather, they went to her mother and stepfather's home. Edmonds said he went into a room to see Kristi.

"She was on her knees on the floor crying. I knelt beside her and wrapped my arms around her -- trying to comfort her, and I asked what's wrong, and she said: I done it."

"She started talking about how they were going to kill her. We were both crying. She said they would take her kids away, and that I wouldn't get to see her again," Edmonds testified. "The only way that wouldn't happen is if I said I did it. I kind of looked at her like she was crazy. She said they wouldn't do anything to me because I was a minor."

At that time, Edmonds said Kristi said they were to say they did not know anything about Joey Fulgham's death.

"If that didn't work, then she'd give me a cue, and then I was supposed to say I did it not out of hatred, but it was an accident," Edmonds testified.

Interviews with authorities

Once arriving home to West Point Monday afternoon, Edmonds spoke of his arrival at the Oktibbeha County Sheriffs Department and the first statement he gave.

"I said I didn't know anything about it. I said we got up at 4 a.m., went to David Noels and Wal-Mart," Edmonds testified about his first videotaped confession.

Edmonds testified that Kristi had told him to say if questioned, "Four o'clock, woke up, Wal-Mart, David Noel, Jackson, Gulfport," of the events of the weekend.

Edmonds said that Oktibbeha County Sheriff's Deputy James Lindsey, informed him then that Kristi had given a statement that Edmonds shot Joey.

Edmonds said he met with Kristi in Lindsey's office briefly and was told by her to "tell them, and I knew what she meant."

Taken immediately from the office into another office, Edmonds testified that he told the deputies that he and Kristi did the shooting together. "My sister told me to tell them I'd done it by myself but not out of hatred but an accident," Edmonds testified. "I chickened out on it and decided I'd say we did it together."

Edmonds testified that when he gave his statement he did not think anything would happen because Kristi had told him that nothing would happen because he was a minor.

Edmonds said he called for his mother but did not get to see her. He spoke with her in the early morning hours when he called her.

"I was crying and telling her I really didn't do it. I told her Kristi had said to say I'd done it," Edmonds testified.

Edmonds said that after he was booked he was put in a holding cell near Kristi and the two began talking to each other from underneath the door.

Through their communication, Edmonds testified that Kristi told him to tell the deputies that they both did it and it was an accident.

"I said 'no.' I know what I have to do. She started crying and passed a note," Edmonds testified.

Edmonds testified that four or five letters were exchanged between the two while they were both being held in the jail.

Faver, during cross-examination, questioned Edmonds about his statements.

"None of them are the same are they?" Faver questioned. Edmonds responded that he knew the first three were not the same.

Faver questioned Edmonds about the timing of Kristi's request for his assistance in killing the dog. Under continued questioning by Faver, Edmonds responded, "Ma'am, I didn't kill Joey."

Faver questioned Edmonds about computer Internet usage, his correspondence with Kristi, his e-mail accounts and their code words contained in the e-mail.

Edmonds testified that the language used in the e-mails were not "our language, it's common

Internet language."

In a letter written to Kristi secretly in the jail, Edmonds wrote 'Kitty' instead of Kristi.

On May 16, 2003, Edmonds wrote a letter requesting to speak with Sheriff Dolph Bryan so he could tell what really happened. The confession with Bryan was videotaped. Faver questioned why Edmonds did not follow the plan or say it was an accident as Kristi had advised.

"I did incorporate some of the details... Mrs. Faver, I didn't know. I'd never been in trouble before, I didn't know anything about the law," Edmonds testified. "I did not do what she said, I chickened out and made up my own little story."

Faver read from the letter written to Bryan: "I want to tell the truth. I know the only way I can get out of here is to tell the truth... She (Kristi Fulgham) messed with my emotions. I love her, but I will never feel the same."

The third statement, the one given to Bryan, was videotaped. The video was played for the jury and showed Edmonds in an orange prison suit, and the video confession matched the testimony given by Edmonds on Thursday.

Edmonds said in the video that Kristi messed with his emotions.

In the video, Edmonds who constantly twists a rubber band on his wrist said, "I realized you know, if she really cared about me, she wouldn't have me in this situation. I can't save her from this one. I'm not gone sit here or live my life trying to help her with something bad."

Bryan questioned Edmonds if everything he had said in the video was the truth, and Edmonds responded that it was to the best of his knowledge.

Bryan had Edmonds look into the camera and explain that the statement he had just given was his idea.

"This was my idea. I wrote a letter saying I had something I wanted to get off my chest," Edmonds said in the video. "The only way I could have a regular life was to come up here and tell what happened, so I could feel better about myself, and I wouldn't have a guilty conscience."

Continuing her questioning after the video was played for the jury, Faver asked Edmonds about his second statement that was also videotaped in which he confessed not only to the deputies but his mother who had come into the room.

"It wasn't the chicken that made you sick was it? It was the fact that you'd just shot someone in the back of the head, and you puked your guts out," Faver said.

Edmonds continued to stick to a statement he'd made on the stand to Faver, "Mrs. Faver, I didn't shoot anyone."

Other witnesses testify

Prior to Edmonds' testimony, the jury heard from his mother, Clay, who testified to taking her son to the Sheriff's Department to give a statement.

Clay insisted that she told deputies that her son could give a statement as long as she was present, but they would be separated. Clay testified that after Edmonds confessed she was not allowed to see her son and did not speak to him until May 13, 2003, at 1 a.m. As she recalled the conversation, Clay began to fight back the tears.

"He was crying," Clay testified as she responded to questioning by Waide that her son now lived at the Oktibbeha County Jail and of visits once a week.

Waide asked why Clay insisted on being present during the statements that Monday afternoon at the sheriff's department.

"He's a minor. He's my child and it's my job to protect him," Clay said. Clay said Edmonds did not handle stress well.

Under cross examination by Faver, Clay testified that when Edmonds arrived home Monday afternoon they did not discuss Joey's death. When Clay took him to the Sheriff's Department she testified that she knew Kristi had been arrested.

Although Clay testified that she and Edmonds had signed his waiver of his Miranda rights, Faver asked during cross examination if Clay was saying Edmonds did not understand the document.

Faver informed the jury that Edmonds' IQ was 119, above intelligence, reading skills above average and comprehension above average.

Waide called Edmonds' teachers, neighbors and acquaintances and Oktibbeha County employees to testify to his good character and history of nonviolence.

Shannon Thrasher, whose husband worked with Joey, testified that she saw Joey in Wal-Mart May 10, 2003, Saturday between 3:30 and 4 p.m. Despite intense questioning by Faver, Thrasher said she saw Joey Fulgham.

What's ahead today

Today, the defense will continue with its witnesses. A pathologist from Alabama will testify to dispute statements by State Pathologist Steven Hayne, who testified for the state Wednesday testimony on the time of death of Joey Fulgham.

The trial continues today at 8:30 a.m. in Circuit Court. Judge Jim Kitchens is presiding.