

Woman not guilty in husband's death

By JOHN ALLARD
Staff Writer

A Lexington County jury decided Thursday that Harley Nettles does not deserve to go to prison for pumping two bullets through the heart of her abusive husband.

The jury found Ms. Nettles, 35, not guilty of murder after deliberating for about 2½ hours.

She testified that she shot her 36-year-old husband, Ronald, in self defense after he threatened to kill her and their young daughter on the night of Aug. 2.

Ms. Nettles hugged her attorneys, Jack B. Swerling and Jennifer Kneece of Columbia, after hearing the jury's verdict.

"Ronald's gone. I can forgive him," Ms. Nettles said. "I'm ready for a new life."

Ms. Nettles nervously rubbed her hands as she left the courtroom to face a crowd of teary-eyed friends and relatives. She held a tissue over her mouth and cried during most of the trial.

"Thank God. I'm still shaking," Ms. Nettles said as she hugged her supporters.

Ms. Nettles testified that the attacks by Nettles, her husband for four years, included being whipped with coat hangers, body-slammed, kicked in the side while pregnant and choked.

She said he frequently stumbled home in a drunken rage and used her as a punching bag to build his sense of power.

The terror ended after Nettles came home drunk Aug. 2 and threatened to kill his wife and their daughter, now 3, Ms. Nettles said. He was upset that she went to see her sister that day.

With her daughter in her left arm, she said she grabbed a .38-caliber revolver and shot her husband twice as he tried to get a knife from a dish

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attorney

drainer in the kitchen of their mobile home at 1728 Fish Hatchery Road.

"Every one of us is capable of taking the life of another person, depending on the circumstances," Swerling told jurors during closing arguments.

Assistant 11th Circuit Solicitor Lisa McPherson maintained that Ms. Nettles was a calculating killer. She said there was no evidence of a fight the night of the shooting.

"It was a stormy marriage," Ms. McPherson said. "This is an unfortunate situation, but Ron didn't have to end up dead on the floor."

Ms. McPherson said Nettles' family was surprised by the verdict.

Swerling told jurors that Nettles' constant abuse paralyzed Ms. Nettles. He said she could not see that she had to end their marriage.

The attorney said that a few kind words of love from her husband were all Ms. Nettles needed to remain with Nettles. But she finally realized there were limits to the amount of abuse that even she was willing to accept, he said.

"There's a basic premise that every person has a right to act in self defense," Swerling said. "No one has the right to inflict pain and torture and psychological trauma like Harley Nettles has suffered."