

Coppolino Neighbors Testify He Said Wife Died Naturally

**Doctor Told Them an Autopsy
Had Been Performed, Jury
in Murder Case Hears**

By HOMER BIGART

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NAPLES, Fla., April 11 —

Former neighbors of Dr. Carl A. Coppolino, who is being tried on charges of having murdered his first wife, testified today that he told them she died of a massive coronary occlusion and that an autopsy had proved it. Yet he seemed strangely unwilling, they said, to notify his wife's parents of her death.

They testified that 32-year-old Carmella Anne Coppolino seemed healthy and happy right up to her sudden death Aug. 28, 1965, on Longboat Key, off Sarasota.

The state of Florida is seeking to prove that Dr. Coppolino murdered Carmella with a lethal drug. The defense concedes that no autopsy was ever conducted in Florida.

Actually there was no autopsy until four months later, after the handsome 34-year-old anesthesiologist had fallen under suspicion of murdering not only his wife but Lieut. Col. William E. Farber, a neighbor when the Coppolinos lived in Middletown Township, New Jersey. Then, autopsies were conducted in New York on both Colonel Farber and Mrs. Coppolino, and as a result Dr. Coppolino was indicted for two murders.

Last December Dr. Coppolino was acquitted in New Jersey of the alleged murder in 1963 of Colonel Farber.

Seeks to Bar Helpern

The case against him here could collapse tomorrow if defense counsel, F. Lee Bailey, prevails in his attempt to bar the testimony of Dr. Milton Helpern, the Chief Medical Examiner of New York.

Dr. Helpern's appearance as a witness is crucial. For unless he is permitted to testify that Mrs. Coppolino was killed by an injection of a muscle relaxing drug, succinylcholine, the state cannot charge murder.

Mr. Bailey contends that Dr. Helpern cannot prove with "reasonable medical certainty" that Mrs. Coppolino was murdered.

He is demanding the right to examine Dr. Helpern in the absence of the jury. He says he will show that the veteran New York Medical examiner, who has 20,000 autopsies behind him, used methods that were not "medically acceptable" in reaching his conclusion that



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Mrs. Patricia Dunn leaves courthouse. She said Mrs. Carmela Coppolino appeared healthy and cheerful on night before her death.

abnormally large quantities of succinic acid and choline, the main components of succinylcholine were found in the liver and brain of Mrs. Coppolino.

Today's witnesses against Dr. Coppolino included Mr. and Mrs. George Thomson, who lived across the street from the Coppolinos on Longboat Key. George Thomson, a large, ruddy man with a livid sunburn, said Dr. Coppolino used to come to his house frequently for a predinner cocktail. He said he knew Carl suffered a heart condition, but that there had never been any mention of Mrs. Coppolino having a heart ailment. On the contrary, both he and his wife believed her to be in perfect health, he testified.

So when Dr. Juliette Karow called him from the Coppolino house early on the morning of Aug. 28, 1965, and told him that Mrs. Coppolino was dead, he had blurted out: "You mean Mr. Coppolino."

Mr. Thomson said he found Dr. Coppolino sitting in the kitchen of the Coppolino home.

Q. Did Carl make a statement?

A. Yes. He had gotten home around 11 P.M. the night before. Carmela told him that she would like a drink. So he made her a Black Russian (coffee liqueur and vodka). He said they had a nice conversation and went to bed.

Q. Did he tell you what time he found her dead?

A. Yes. He just said he woke up at 5 A.M. and found her dead.