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SLAIN COP'S BULLET KEY CLUE IN TRIAL

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Metro-Dade police officer Evelyn Gort may solve her own murder.

A bullet from her .357-magnum revolver is the strongest evidence prosecutors will present in her murder trial, which began Tuesday in Dade Circuit Court.

The slug -- fired by Gort during a robbery -- pierced the stomach of Wilbur Leroy Mitchell, a 23-year-old felon with a long rap sheet.

"Evelyn Gort's parting shot," prosecutor Jamie Campbell called it.

The bullet is crucial. Prosecutors don't have an eyewitness, a murder weapon or fingerprints that place Mitchell at the scene.

Gort was off-duty when she died on Oct. 30, 1993. She had just emerged from a friend's Coconut Grove apartment with her boyfriend when an armed assailant tried to rob them. She squeezed off one round; the robber squeezed off two.

He got away with \$3 and the car keys. Gort died in the parking garage.

A motorcyclist drove Mitchell to the Ryder Trauma Center at Jackson Memorial Hospital, where surgeons saved his life. The doctors also saved the bullet for police.

Mitchell's lawyers, Manny **Casabielle** and Steven Kassner, insist their client did not kill Gort, a 34-year-old mother of two.

Here's how they explain the bullet: Mitchell was near the complex staking out cars to burglarize the night of the murder. He heard shots and accidentally ran full steam into Gort. She shot him by mistake with her service revolver.

"Because Evelyn Gort shot Wilbur Mitchell doesn't mean Wilbur Mitchell shot Evelyn Gort," **Casabielle** said.

He accused investigators of missing crucial evidence because they based their entire case around Mitchell being the shooter. **Casabielle** said investigators did not lift fingerprints from other cars or analyze blood smears where Gort dropped her gun. He said Gort's boyfriend, Antonio Calafell, was impaired by alcohol and is an unreliable witness.

Calafell was first to testify Tuesday. He told jurors he remembered the crime vividly, although he couldn't identify Mitchell.

Calafell said he handed his keys to man wearing Bermuda shorts. He said the robber followed him to the trunk of his car, so he could surrender his wallet.

"I tried to hold his attention," Calafell said. "I was trying to get him not to go after Evelyn."

By then, Gort had reached into her purse and pulled out her gun. She traded shots with Mitchell.

One bullet entered Gort's thigh. The second and fatal shot went through her right hand, chest, lung and stopped in her heart.

"Tony, I've been shot," Gort said, falling into his arms.

He tried to walk her back to their friend's apartment. She collapsed.

Calafell screamed. "I love you. I love you. Please don't die."

On Tuesday morning, Calafell testified that he has tried to suppress memories of the murder and get on with his life. Then prosecutor Jerald Bagley asked him to identify the woman pictured in state's Exhibit 10.

He paused, turned red and began to cry.

"It's Evelyn's body on the ground."

CUTLINE: PETER ANDREW BOSCH / Herald Staff

OFFICER'S FAMILY: Evelyn Gort's relatives, from left, brother Joseph Gonzalez, mother Ofelia Gonzalez, and sisters Ofelia Bridgeford and Mayra Fausett, listen to testimony Tuesday in case against murder suspect Wilbur Leroy Mitchell, above.

Illustration:photo: Evelyn GORT, Evelyn Gort's relatives (a -see outline for names), Wilbur Leroy Mitchell (a).