

3rd woman tried to pass as the wife of Holmes

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The strange love triangle of Greg Holmes — the former assistant attorney general charged with bigamy for being married to two women — took on a fourth leg yesterday with the emergence of yet another woman who tried to pass herself off as his wife.

A Sellersburg woman admitted yesterday in Jefferson Circuit Court that she used Holmes' credit card on six occasions to rent rooms at a Motel 6 and that once she signed in as "Judy Holmes."

The woman, Judith Bratcher, who works as a computer operator at the University of Louisville, denied that she was anything more than Holmes' friend and client. And she said she never slept with him at the budget motel chain in Jeffersonville. But an investigator for the attorney general's office said that Bratcher previously admitted the relationship was "more than platonic."

Closing his case after seven days of testimony, prosecutor Wes Faulkner depicted Holmes, who is blind, as a Casanova.

Holmes is charged with bribery for taking money and trips from Dr. Diane Shafer, a Paducah surgeon he supposedly secretly married in 1989, shortly before recommending the dismissal of disciplinary charges against her. Shafer is also charged with bribery, and Holmes with theft, for taking his state pay when he was supposedly traveling with her. Holmes is charged with bigamy for later marrying his longtime assistant, Kathryn Harmon, who also is charged with theft for turning in many of his time slips.

Testifying for four hours yesterday, Holmes insisted that Bratcher — the supposed third woman in his life — was merely a former client to whom he had lent his credit card as reimbursement for overpayment on a legal matter.

Holmes flatly denied he was ever wed to Shafer. He said he'd never been to Sevierville, Tenn., even though a photograph appears to show the couple in the bed alone where they allegedly tied the knot. "That's the last place I'd go to get married," he said.

Offering his first public explanation for why Shafer might have fabricated the marriage, Holmes speculated that she may have intended to use it against him if he raised against her in the action before the Kentucky Board of Medical Licensure.

He cited a tape-recorded call that she made to his pager last June in which she "apologized" for using his name in the ceremony and said she had done so as "insurance."

Recounting his service as hearing officer in Shafer's disciplinary case — in which she was charged with over-prescribing narcotics and other violations — Holmes told the jury that from the outset he had told lawyers that the evidence against her was weak.

He said he thought the matter would be settled when she first called him at home in August 1989. Nevertheless, he said he advised her "within five seconds" that it would be improper for them to talk about the case.

Instead, in the first of what would be more than 100 calls, he said they chatted about other matters, such as employment opportunities for her blind patients.

Holmes admitted they often spoke late at night but said it was because he suffered from insomnia. He disputed a phone record that showed one call lasting more than five hours.

Holmes also disputed that he traveled with Shafer or had stayed at her Lexington apartment.

Testifying without notes and with little assistance from his defense lawyer, Holmes also said that on many of the dates the commonwealth records he was in places such as French Lick, Ind., or Bermuda with Shafer, he was instead consulting clients, meeting with state boards, buying groceries, celebrating his mother's birthday or cruising on the Mediterranean with Harmon.

Holmes insisted that Shafer forged calls and meals to his credit cards at various locations, including a seafood restaurant in Orlando, Fla., where he allegedly dined with Shafer. "That is ridiculous," he said. "I hate seafood."

Holmes said he failed to catch the fraudulent billings because of his disability.

Holmes is expected to continue to testify today, when he will be cross-examined by Faulkner.

Shafer hasn't begun her case yet, but in an opening statement, her lawyer said he will prove that she fell for Holmes because she loved him, not because she wanted to bribe him. Grover Cox said the medical licensure case against Shafer already had been "shut down" when she and Holmes "started talking and just hit it off."