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Rage and control at heart of Polk trial

[Oakland Tribune, Oct 12, 2005](#) by [Jason Dearen, STAFF WRITER](#)

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MARTINEZ -- Susan Polk is either a callous killer or a victim who stabbed her husband as he attacked her in a rage, jurors in her murder trial heard Tuesday during opening statements.

No matter which theory the 12 men and women of the jury believe, the Polk family's tragic

story always has the same, bloody ending: Fifteen-year-old Gabriel Polk finding his father, Frank "Felix" Polk, on Oct. 14, 2002, lying dead in a puddle of blood in the pool house of the family's Orinda home.

"Gabriel found his father's motionless body ... and he knew immediately who was responsible," prosecutor Tom O'Connor said.

O'Connor, barrel-chested and wearing a gray suit and red tie, said Susan Polk took her husband's life because she was losing a nasty divorce. Just before Felix Polk's death, he said, she had lost custody of her son, and her support payments had been cut dramatically.

Susan Polk furrowed her brow and wriggled in her seat as O'Connor described his murder theory. She is being held in Con-

tra Costa County jail and was led into the courtroom in handcuffs, wearing a gray tweed suit.

O'Connor's case rests largely on Gabriel Polk's testimony. The youngest of three Polk boys, Gabriel is expected to testify against his mother, saying she had threatened his father's life repeatedly.

"She had openly talked to (Gabriel) about killing his father ... and about how she'd do it," O'Connor said.

The oldest Polk son, 22-year-old Adam, is also expected to testify against his mother. He and Gabriel have also filed a wrongful death lawsuit against their mother.

The third brother, Eli, 20, is standing with his mother. He appeared in court briefly Tuesday but had to leave because he is a witness.

O'Connor said Susan Polk has acted guilty since her husband's death, and changed her story. At first, he said, she denied any involvement in the death of her husband, who was a widely known psychologist.

When arrested the night Felix Polk's body was discovered, O'Connor said Susan Polk offered to police that "she had nothing to do with it."

O'Connor said she later changed her tune because physical evidence placed her inside the pool house. Her bloody footprint was found at the scene, and Felix Polk had a handful of her hair in his hand.

Susan Polk disposed of the clothes she wore that night, O'Connor said. No murder weapon has been found, he said, further charging she moved her husband's car to a nearby BART station to mislead police.

Felix Polk had knife wounds on his arms and feet, and blunt-force trauma to his head and back, O'Connor said.

Susan and Felix Polk's life together began when she was his therapy patient as a young teenager. Susan Polk says they started having sex when she was 17.

Defense attorney Daniel Horowitz, his hair slicked back and wearing large eyeglasses, displayed whimsical pictures his client drew as a young girl.

He said that before she met Felix Polk, Susan was a gregarious young girl. But Felix Polk was a married psychologist with a thriving practice who was looking for someone he could control, Horowitz said.

"When Felix Polk was done with her, she didn't socialize. She stayed in the world of Felix Polk," he said.

Horowitz said medical records will show Felix Polk suffered from anxiety and a narcissistic mental disorder that sent him into a rage whenever he lost control of Susan Polk. It was one of these rages that spurred him to attack her that October night, Horowitz said.

"He surrounded himself with people he could control. If he didn't get what he wanted, he was terrifying," Horowitz said.

"In the cult of Felix ... the kids had an important role to keep their mother in line," he said, adding the Polk sons also verbally and physically abused their mother. Horowitz said Eli Polk will testify his father once rewarded him for hitting Susan Polk in the face.

Grabbing a laptop computer, Horowitz walked to the jury box and played a sound bite taken from a presentation Felix Polk gave in 1988, when he and Susan believed their son Adam had been molested by a Satanic cult.

"My rage is omnipresent, I wake up with it every morning," the dead man's voice crackled from the speakers.

"My fantasy, of course, is to kill them, and I'm a rather moral person, and I want to kill them," Felix Polk said, referring to his son's alleged molesters. According to news reports at the time, the alleged molestation was investigated and never confirmed.

Horowitz said the speech showed Felix Polk was delusional, and he manipulated his wife into going along with him.

"That is the world Susan Polk lived in 1988," he said.

Horowitz said the night Felix Polk died, he realized he could no longer control her, and he lost control.

After opening statements concluded, jurors were taken to the Polks' Orinda house in the afternoon to see the small pool house where Felix Polk was killed. Testimony resumes today.

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