

# Morning



Mt. Pleasant, Mich.

## Wilson pleads guilty to manslaughter

### Burdick recommends probation for woman who killed husband

By TOM GROMAK  
Sun City Editor

Geraldine Wilson pleaded guilty Thursday to manslaughter, exactly two years after she shot and killed her husband in their Coldwater Township home.

Wilson, 69, made the guilty plea in exchange for dismissal of charges of open murder and felony use of a firearm.

Her jury trial on the charges was scheduled to start Tuesday.

The murder charge carries a life term in prison. The maximum penal-

ty for manslaughter is 15 years, though Isabella County Prosecutor Larry Burdick has recommended probation only.

Circuit Judge Paul O'Connell accepted the plea, but delayed sentencing Wilson until Sept. 22 when a pre-sentence investigation report is expected.

When questioned by O'Connell about the Sept. 3, 1990, shooting, an emotional Wilson related that her husband of 49 years Donald, then 69, repeatedly threatened to kill her during the months before his death and

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Sun photograph by TOM GROMAK

Geraldine Wilson pleaded guilty to manslaughter Thursday in Isabella County Circuit Court.

## Wilson

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that the threats became more intense during the last weekend.

"This had been going on for a few months, but the last weekend was nothing but death threats," she said. "He said he was either going to hang me, or chain me to a John Deere tractor tire and run over me, or he was going to shoot me."

"Fifteen minutes before I shot him, he said he was going to put two bullets in me ... one behind each ear," she said.

Wilson told O'Connell that, when her husband fell asleep, she shot twice, missing with one shot from a double-barreled shotgun and hitting him in the chest with another.

Burdick said the action of shooting her husband while he was asleep deprived Wilson of any right to claim self-defense. But he said the reduced charge and probation recommendation reflected "the facts beyond the shooting."

"The investigation that was conducted after the shooting continued right up through today and provided information substantiating that this defendant was an abused woman," Burdick said. "On the other hand, we have always felt from the beginning that there is no legal self-defense

claim available in a situation where someone kills another person while that person is sleeping."

Burdick said he had "personal conflicts" with prosecuting her for murder while his office promotes awareness and tough action in spouse abuse cases. He said those concerns had to be "offset by the sanctity of life."

"There has been a lot of discussion of the events that led up to this, but ultimately Donald Wilson was deprived of his life," Burdick said. "Every case has to be looked at individually. I made the determination for this particular defendant that incarceration would serve no benefit."

Wilson's defense attorney, Dan O'Neil, of Mt. Pleasant, said the guilty plea was the best decision, despite having a winnable self-defense case.

"There's no question she acted in self-defense. I strongly believe she would have been acquitted ... but what more would we have gained?" O'Neil said, noting Burdick's recommendation against jail time. "I think he realized it would have served no purpose whatsoever to put her in jail."

"When you're facing three weeks of trial — which would have been horrible for her and her five children — this was more acceptable," he said.