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Jury acquits man of rape at wife's birthday party

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MEDIA COURTHOUSE — Jack Harlan Douglass was willing to admit he was a cheating husband, but a jury yesterday found that he didn't rape a woman following his then-wife's 50th birthday bash two years ago.

The jury of eight men and four women acquitted the lanky 55-year-old California business executive of charges including rape and indecent assault on the 36-year-old friend of his ex-wife, Rhonda, following her July 9, 1999, birthday party. Another pal hosted the party for about 80 guests at her Main Line mansion.

Testifying in his own defense, the bespectacled Douglass told the jury during the trial that began Nov. 7 that sex with the woman was consensual.

Witnesses said the party included a dance by a fully clothed Rhonda on a table as she displayed a furry G-string she was presented as a gag gift, as well as skinny-dipping in the pool.

Douglass admitted that he and his wife went for a naked dip in the pool, and he said the woman also splashed in, wearing a bra and panties. He said it was cold and the three didn't remain in the water long.

After his wife went to bed and

he was left alone with the younger woman, he said they kissed, fondled and engaged in intercourse on a stone deck surrounding a Jacuzzi at the Radnor home. "I removed my towel and the robe she had on she pushed off her shoulders," he said.

He originally denied to police that he engaged in intercourse and was not arrested until after a DNA match was made with semen found in the woman. He and his wife have since divorced.

A juror who called the *Daily Times* following the verdict said the panel felt there was reasonable doubt. "Based on the information we had, there wasn't enough to convict him," the juror said.

"Most of the people felt he was guilty, but it's hard to put somebody in jail when you have doubt," he said.

Another juror, as he was leaving the courthouse, also stated that the prosecution didn't prove their case.

Defense attorney Michael Malloy in his closing hammered away that there was reasonable

doubt. He told the jury that the "one thing we can all agree on is that Mr. Douglass cheated on his wife that night. That was the worst decision he ever made in his life."

About a dozen character witnesses, who traveled from California and took the stand on behalf of Douglass, described him as a law-abiding and moral man. Several said the fact he had sex with a woman while his wife was asleep wouldn't change their opinion about his morality.

The dark-haired woman was surrounded by friends and relatives in the courtroom yesterday. She kept her head bowed. Testifying earlier, she said she felt as if she were dragged and remembered being "awakened in the middle of being raped, in intense pain." She denied she agreed to sex and until that night she said she was a virgin.

When the not-guilty verdicts were announced, Douglass looked relieved and lowered his head onto the defense table in front of him. The jury deliberated more than two hours Wednesday and

more than four hours yesterday taking a break for Thanksgiving in between. "He (Douglass) is ecstatic that it's over," said Malloy, the defense attorney.

The woman has filed a civil suit against Douglass, and Malloy said the acquittal in the criminal case "puts us in a stronger position and it raises the possibility that we could counter-sue, charging that the allegations (in the civil complaint) are false."

"The best thing we always had going for us were the injuries on her back and elbows. The injuries are consistent with his (Douglass') account that it occurred on the stone deck rather than on a bed, as she said."

Assistant District Attorney Michael Galantino said he didn't feel that because the jury was predominantly male that it factored into the acquittal. "I don't believe the makeup of the jury had any thing to do with the not-guilty verdicts," the prosecutor said.

"This jury spent a lot of time listening to the evidence in this case. Obviously, they felt some thing was missing."

Inmate hangs self at Delco jail

MIDDLETOWN — A male inmate at the county prison hanged himself at the Concord facility, according to the Delaware County Medical Examiner's office.

Thomas Arlington Kook, 35, tied a sheet attached to the bed

rail around his neck and died Nov. 22, about 1:50 p.m.

An autopsy was done the following morning by Medical Examiner Dr. Fredric Hellman, who ruled the manner of death suicide.

— ROSE QUINN