

ACCUSED SAYS HE'LL BEAT RAP AGAIN AUTHORITIES SAY FRIENDLY COOK IS A MOBSTER, TOO

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They say he's a gangster, the leader of a mob of Arab immigrants who traffics millions of dollars in cocaine.

They say he's a ruthless killer, too. They say this time, after beating earlier charges, that Louis Akrawi is going to jail for the rest of his life.

But Akrawi has vowed to beat the latest in a long line of accusations -- that in 1993 he ordered a revenge shooting on a rival that ended with an innocent bystander's death.

The first-degree murder trial resumes today in Detroit Recorder's Court in a case that has elements of an underworld drama: turf battles, reluctant witnesses, a family tree that extends from the jailhouse to the graveyard, and a dogged cop that defense attorneys insist coerced witnesses and the defendant calls another Mark Fuhrman.

Almost lost in the trial is the victim, Michael Cogborn, 34, of Detroit who was at the Fiesta Market on McNichols Road when it was sprayed with automatic gunfire. Akrawi faces life in prison if convicted in Cogborn's killing.

Though police and prosecutors describe Akrawi as the godfather of a Chaldean drug syndicate, he says he is a cook -- a misunderstood one at that.

On Thursday afternoon, after the first week of the trial that featured mostly technical witnesses, Akrawi was back at the restaurant on 8 Mile Road that bears his initials, slipping out of his double-breasted suit and into a cook's uniform to prepare a sandwich for a regular customer.

He is free on \$100,000 bond, made possible on a first-degree murder charge only because the case did not get to trial within six months.

Compliment him on the spicy sauce smothered over a rack of ribs at L.A. Ribs and Chicken and he smiles proudly.

He is a storyteller, a macho man with slicked back hair that runs to his shoulders, with powerful arms and a keg-barrel chest. He is a rare defendant who will discuss the case for hours and spin tales without his lawyer at his side, all while he is on trial for his life. He insists he will beat the murder rap.

But mention these three words -- Sgt. Charles Flanagan -- and Akrawi's smile disappears.

"I will not sleep until I get him fired and put him in jail for the things he is doing to my family," Akrawi said of the sergeant with Detroit's 5th (Jefferson) Precinct.

Flanagan, who has informants in the tightly knit Chaldean community clustered along 7 Mile Road around Woodward and John R, has also busted Akrawi's brother, Basil, on a charge of receiving and concealing over \$100. Basil Akrawi was paroled from prison last month and wears an electronic tether. A nephew, Rageed Akrawi, is serving a mandatory life sentence for a 1991 drug conviction.

Another nephew, Tommy **Kalasho**, has an upcoming first-degree murder trial for the same shooting death for which Louis Akrawi is standing trial. **Kalasho**'s brother, **Harry**, was shot dead in 1989, a victim of warring drug factions, according to authorities.

Federal authorities said **Harry Kalasho** was the reputed leader of a drug ring that moved more than \$200 million a year in cocaine through the Detroit area. Akrawi and his friends have scoffed at the characterization.

Flanagan also has raided several Chaldean-owned coffeehouses along 7 Mile suspected of being fronts for high-stakes gambling. One of those raids resulted in felony gambling charges against Akrawi. That trial is pending.

Like Akrawi, Flanagan has made a vow: Louis Akrawi is going down.

Akrawi beat drug conspiracy charges in a 1991 trial in Oakland County.

He later did a short stint in 1992 in the Wayne County Jail after pleading guilty to misdemeanor tax evasion.

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service is planning a deportation hearing stemming from bar fights in the late 1970s.

When all that is over -- and if he avoids conviction -- Louis Akrawi is getting married.

"The jury's going to find me not guilty," he said at his restaurant as his fiancée served him soup. "An innocent man is dead, but I don't have anything to do with it. They don't have anyone to blame, so they're blaming me."

Akrawi blames Flanagan for much of his time spent in court battles, comparing him to the Los Angeles police detective revealed as a racist by the O.J. Simpson defense team.

"He hates Arabs. He's another Mark Fuhrman," Akrawi said.

Flanagan, who denies he targets Arabs for arrest or is racist in any way, is not one to bite his tongue, either.

"I have arrested far more white people and black people than I have Arabs," he said Friday.

He concedes he pulled a gun on a key witness, Heather Brown, but only because he had to bring an unwilling woman into custody. Brown, who initially told police she heard Akrawi and others plan the shooting, has recanted. She is expected to be called as a hostile witness by the prosecution sometime this week.

Last week, Flanagan was threatened with contempt of court when he refused to reveal his role in a grand jury convened in the matter. He has since been released of his order of secrecy and likely will testify.

"He's the most feared guy in the Chaldean community," Flanagan said of Akrawi. "Even if he beats the murder case, I'm going to get him on the gambling counts.

"And if he gets one felony, he gets deported."

Caption: Photo MARY SCHROEDER/Detroit Free Press

Louis Akrawi, at his restaurant Friday, is charged in a 1993 slaying. "They don't have anyone to blame, so they're blaming me," he says.

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