

Woman is awarded \$125,000 for HIV disclosure

By KIM WESSEL
The Courier-Journal

Traci Walls tested positive for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, in early 1992. Yesterday she said she's never felt better — she feels as if she finally got justice.

A Jefferson Circuit Court jury found that an employee at Jewish Hospital had disclosed the result of Walls' HIV test to someone outside, and it awarded Walls \$125,000, which the hospital must pay.

"Justice is real," Walls said. "It really is."

The jury deliberated for more than three hours. It could have given Walls up to \$300,000.

"It wasn't the money, though,"

Walls said. "Once I got to tell what happened, that was it. I was satisfied, even if I didn't get anything."

After the verdict was read, Walls turned to her lawyer, William F. McMurry, and hugged him. Later she said: "It was him. God sent him."

When the trial started last Thursday, Walls was prepared to represent herself. Her lawyers, Laura L. Spaulding and Patricia L. Larkin, had dropped her case late last year. Walls said she couldn't afford to pay them and couldn't have afforded to pay another lawyer.

But Thursday morning McMurry read about the case in The Courier-Journal and decided to represent Walls for free.

Walls, 31, sued Jewish Hospital in

"God sent him."

Traci Walls, about William F. McMurry, who served as her lawyer for no fee after reading that she couldn't afford one

May 1995, claiming that someone working in its lab knew the result of her HIV test and told someone else, who then told one of Walls' neighbors. Eventually, one of her close friends found out, too.

McMurry tried to show that Annie Sanders, who worked in the lab, phoned a friend of hers, Gloria

Grimes Bailey, asked her if she knew who lived at 3429 Vermont Ave. — Walls' address — and told her that whoever lived there had tested positive for HIV.

According to testimony, Bailey then told her sister, Johnetta Thurman, who lived down the street.

Sanders — who lived on Vermont Avenue herself — testified yesterday that she'd been working in the lab at Jewish Hospital for 10 years. She said she did not discuss the results of Walls' HIV test with Bailey or anyone else.

On Monday, Bailey testified that she had once worked at Jewish and

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Traci Walls

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