

# Trial begins for woman accused of killing Selena

■ **COURT:** Fan club president is on trial for murdering the famous Mexican-American singer

HOUSTON (AP) — Jury selection got under way Monday in the murder trial of the Selena fan club president accused of gunning down the beloved singing star, with the defense suggesting the weapon went off accidentally.

"I want jurors who can understand that a weapon can accidentally discharge," defense attorney Douglas Tinker told prospective jurors. "This is not a complicated case. The issue before you is if she did not intentionally do it, she is not guilty of murder."

Yolanda Saldivar, 35, is charged with shooting the Tejano star at a Corpus Christi motel March 31. The 23-year-old Grammy-winning singer had gone there to fire Ms. Saldivar; Selena's family suspected the woman of embezzling \$30,000.

In a statement to police, Ms. Saldivar acknowledged pulling the trigger of the .38-caliber pistol aimed at the singer. As the fatally wounded Selena lay in the motel lobby, Ms. Saldivar kept police at bay in a parking lot with a gun to her head for 9 1/2 hours before surrendering.

Security was tight as jury selection began. A SWAT team and two bomb-sniffing dogs swept the courtroom before the 200 or so prospective jurors arrived, and 10 officers patrolled the floor.

Thronges of Selena fans had been expected but never showed, apparently taking court officials' advice to stay away during jury selection.

Selena, whose full name was Selena Quintanilla Perez, was beloved by fellow Mexican-Americans who listened to Tejano, a bouncy blend of Spanish mariachi music and polka.

More than 30,000 fans trokked to Corpus Christi to pay last respects to the singer who, just before her death, had hoped to break out from the Spanish-language pop charts with her first recordings in English. More than 2.5 million copies of her albums have sold since her death.

The trial was moved to Houston because of pretrial publicity and her popularity in her hometown of Corpus Christi. Of 155 prospective jurors initially questioned, about one-third said they had heard of Selena.

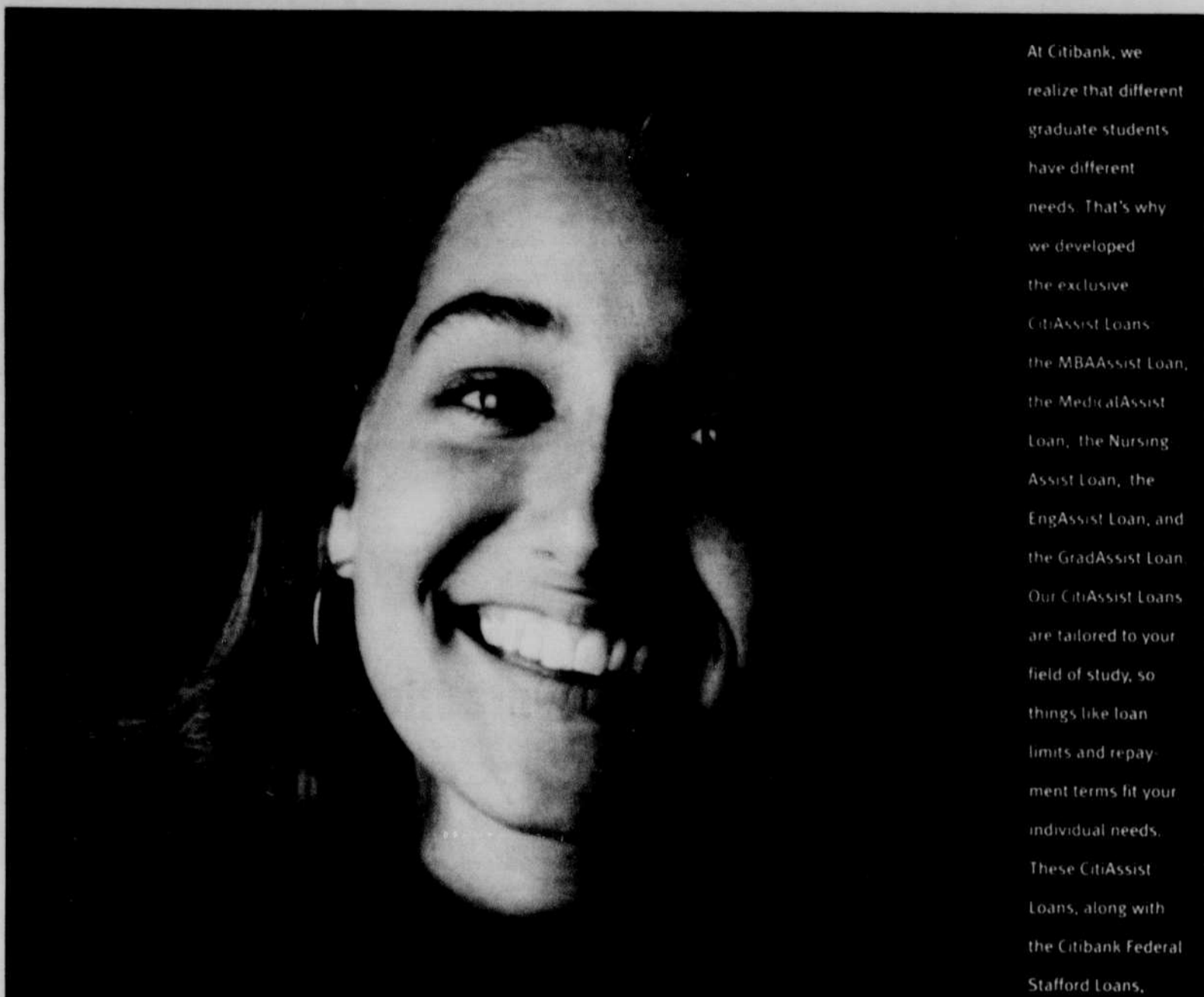
The jury of 12 plus two alternates won't be sequestered. District Judge Mike Westergren told the prospective jurors to "simply block out the news."

"This is commonly characterized today as a high-profile case," said the judge, who has also barred cameras from the courtroom at the request of attorneys who feared the excesses of the O.J. Simpson trial.

If convicted, Ms. Saldivar could get life in prison.

"All we have to prove is it is an intentional act," prosecutor Carlos Valdez told the prospective jurors.

When asked by the defense about the possibility that a revolver could discharge accidentally, 20 of the prospective jurors said they did not think that could happen.



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