

## Yoko Ono's Lawyer Attacks Ex-Assistant's Credibility

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By ROBERT F. WORTH

A former assistant to John Lennon and Yoko Ono denied in a Manhattan courtroom yesterday that he had stolen hundreds of photographs of the couple, saying he took them with his own camera. But a lawyer for Ms. Ono cast doubt on the assistant's credibility, asking him about entries from his own diary in which he wrote of deceiving Mr. Lennon and stealing the couple's stereo equipment.

The former assistant, Frederic Seaman, is being sued in United States District Court in Manhattan by Ms. Ono, who says he violated a confidentiality agreement he signed when he came to work in 1979.

In his first appearance on the stand, Mr. Seaman demonstrated the 35-millimeter camera he used to take the photographs, saying he took them for his own purposes. Although he was sometimes asked to take family photographs, he said the Lennons hired him for other tasks: helping with answering the phones and fan mail, doing the shopping and "helping John cook brown rice and generally keeping him company."

But Ms. Ono's lawyer, Paul V. LiCalsi, pointed out that Mr. Seaman has claimed ownership of a Lennon home videotape, shown in court for the second time yesterday, which was not made on his own camera. Mr. Seaman has used that videotape, along with many of the disputed photographs, in television interviews and magazine articles about the Lennons in the last two decades.

Asked about the videotape, Mr. Seaman said, "I am not really interested in the copyright of the videotape," an apparent retreat from his claim of ownership.

In 1983, Mr. Seaman pleaded guilty to second-degree larceny for taking documents and photographs from the Lennon home in the Dakota on the Upper West Side. He received five years' probation on condition that he return everything. He says he has done so, and maintains that the confidentiality agreement he signed does not apply to the photographs, letters and documents in dispute.

Ms. Ono disagrees, and is alleging a violation of federal copyright law. She wants Mr. Seaman to surrender the rights to 374 photographs and \$75,000 from the sale of Mr. Lennon's letters and documents.

Yesterday, Mr. LiCalsi pointed out several shifts in Mr. Seaman's testimony since the suit was filed in 1999. During depositions, Mr. Seaman said he never sold any Lennon memorabilia, and specifically denied having sold anything to Gary J. Zimet, a collector who testified in court on Tuesday. But Mr. Seaman now acknowledges having sold Mr. Zimet two letters by Mr. Lennon.

When asked yesterday whether he had hidden his plans to write a book about Mr. Lennon from him, Mr. Seaman at first said no, and then said, "I'm not sure that I did."

But Mr. LiCalsi read aloud an excerpt from Mr. Seaman's diary in which he wrote of Mr. Lennon that he was "glad I managed to throw him off track and apparently convince him that I'm not too serious about becoming a writer."

Mr. Seaman also denied that he had begun planning to write a book right after Mr. Lennon was killed in December 1980. But Mr. LiCalsi produced a written agreement signed by Mr. Seaman in January 1981 in which he and a partner planned such a book and related merchandise, like a "John and Yoko doll." He published a memoir in 1991.

**Nota:** [www.nytimes.com/link](http://www.nytimes.com/link)

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