

Couple cleared of bribe count in Mandel case

By SHERIDAN LYONS

A federal court jury found a Glen Burnie couple innocent yesterday of a charge that they attempted in 1975 to bribe a member of the grand jury that indicted former Gov. Marvin Mandel and five other men.

Donna B. Brown, 35, and her husband Robert Brown, 35, of the 300 block Monticello court, testified that the whole case stemmed from two 3-year-old jokes: an offer of \$1 million in return for information from Mrs. Brown's best friend, the grand juror, and an offer of information by Mr. Brown to a contractor who knew several Mandel co-defendants.

But the grand juror, Diane Lawrence, 36, went to federal prosecutors hours after Mrs. Brown made the \$1 million offer in the restroom of the Golden 40 Club, in Baltimore county, on October 11, 1975. She taped her conversations with her best friend during the next 16 days, until she said federal authorities felt nothing would come of it.

After the verdict yesterday, Mrs. Brown began to cry and hugged the defense lawyers and her smiling husband.

Mrs. Brown still faces sentencing July 2 on her April 16 conviction for perjury in connection with the same case. That trial jury found that she lied last fall to a grand jury investigating the 1975 incident when she claimed to have forgotten the matter.

See BROWN, B2, Col. 4

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BROWN, from B1

The charge is punishable by up to five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine. Mr. Brown was not charged in that case.

Prosecutors in that trial emphasized that the issue was not whether the offer was serious, but whether Mrs. Brown lied to the grand jury. In this case, however, she and her husband were charged with a corrupt attempt to influence a grand juror, which required proof of their intentions.

The jury of eight men and four women had deliberated about nine hours and listened again to some of the tapes before reaching the verdict about 4 P.M.

In their closing arguments, defense lawyers Harold Buchman and P. Paul Corcoros argued that the entire case was based upon jokes that had been perpetuated by Mrs. Lawrence in her excitement at her undercover role for the FBI.

Kurt L. Schmoke, an assistant U.S. attorney, told the jurors in his closing argument that the attempt to influence the grand jury was serious, although unsuccessful. He emphasized not only the tape-recorded conversations, but testimony by Warren C. Eastburn, Sr., a Harford county contractor, and by Harry W. Rodgers 3d, who was indicted with the former governor.

Mr. Eastburn said that he relayed Mr. Brown's offer of information to Mr. Rodgers. He testified under a limited grant of immunity against having his testimony used against him.

Mr. Rodgers testified last week that he was at first interested in the offer, but dropped the matter completely when money was mentioned in a second conversation with Mr. Eastburn.