

Mandel tells of taking 40 pills a day

By Karen E. Warmkessel

Gary Mandel admitted to a federal jury yesterday that he became severely addicted to the painkiller Dilaudid in 1982 and 1983, sometimes taking as many as 40 pills a day to ease severe neck and back pain, but he denied ever selling the drug.

The 41-year-old Towson lawyer testified that the drug became so precious to him that he would not even give it away, except on one occasion to his then-girlfriend, Katherine Harris Olszewski.

"Every pill that I had was the most important thing to me. My whole life at that point revolved around those pills," he told the jury during his daylong testimony before the defense rested its case. "The pills meant too much to me to let any of them go."

Mr. Mandel denied the government's contention that he forged prescriptions to obtain the drug. He said the doctor who prescribed the drug had given him some blank forms, and he believed he had the

doctor's permission to write prescriptions when he needed emergency refills.

The son of former Gov. Marvin Mandel was indicted in March on three counts of distributing Dilaudid, four counts of obtaining the drug with forged prescriptions and one count of conspiracy to distribute it. The offenses allegedly occurred between August 1982 and September 1984.

The case is expected to go the jury today after closing arguments from prosecutors and defense lawyers.

The prosecution built its case on the testimony of former clients and associates of Mr. Mandel who contended that he and Ms. Olszewski had sold them drugs. Ms. Olszewski, who was indicted with Mr. Mandel, told the jury that she got the drug from Mr. Mandel and then sold it to a friend, Ernest Widener. She said Mr. Mandel did not want to sell the drug, but did it anyway.

Widener's wife, Barbara Grove, testified that Mr. Mandel had traded Dilaudid for sex and permission to

take pictures and a videotape "of a sexual nature" of her. She said she and Widener went to Mr. Mandel's house 20 times from September to December of 1982 to buy the drug. She said Widener gave Ms. Olszewski \$20 for each pill she got from Mr. Mandel.

Mr. Mandel admitted making a videotape of Ms. Grove, but said he made it while high on drugs. He said he didn't remember Ms. Grove coming to his house at all in the fall of 1982.

During vigorous cross-examination by prosecutor John Douglass, Mr. Mandel insisted that he was telling the truth and the government's witnesses were lying. He accused Mr. Douglass of trying to put words "into my mouth" in regard to his financial situation during the time he was allegedly selling drugs.

Mr. Douglass was attempting to show that the lawyer, who was not working very much and was depending on his mother for financial support, needed the money he allegedly got from selling drugs.