

Walunga Gets Life Sentence

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KTVF/KFRB

Allen Riley Walunga was sentenced to life in prison Thursday, for the slaying of University of Alaska coed Jody Rae Stambaugh of Juneau.

Fairbanks Superior Court Judge Gerald Van Hoomissen also sentenced Walunga, 21, of Gambell, to 15 years for the attempted murder of Stambaugh's roommate, Deborah Dimond of Anchorage.

Van Hoomissen ordered that Walunga serve the two sentences concurrently.

He left open the possibility of parole after 15 years, if Walunga's mental health is vastly improved.

Walunga was convicted on June 25 of the strangulation-rape of Jody Stambaugh, while both were students at the University campus in Fairbanks last December.

The defense entered a plea of innocence by reason of insanity.

Van Hoomissen chose to find Walunga of sound enough mind to be held responsible for the

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slaying, but he also recommended immediate psychiatric care for Walunga at whatever institution the state decides to place him in.

The judge noted that he can recommend, but has no power to actually place anyone in a specific jail or obtain psychiatric care.

The judge said there was evidence of incipient schizophrenia and severe personality defects in the young man.

The defense had asked that Walunga's sentence be severe but not oppressive, and that Walunga be sent to serve his sentence at Nome, so that he could at least see his family.

Defense attorney Dave Backstrum said this would also allow room for rehabilitation, although the opinion of psychiatrists who examined Walunga was that rehabilitation would be difficult, if not impossible.

Much of the defense case was built on shamanism and its place in the personality of the defendant, whose family traces its Eskimo heritage back to Siberia.

Walunga testified in his own behalf that he had inherited the powers of a shaman from his grandfather and that the voice of an evil spirit had commanded him, in Yupik Eskimo, to take the life of the girl.

Van Hoomissen discounted

all that testimony and other testimony related to shamanism, as not having direct bearing on the case.

For nearly an hour during the sentencing proceedings, Walunga sat quietly near his attorney, as he had for most of the trial.

He heard the defense plea for a sentence that was not oppressive and he heard a probation officer, Larry Baird, call him "a full-blown sociopath" who knew the difference between right and wrong.

Finally, the court asked Walunga if he had anything to say. There was silence in the court and the judge repeated the question. Walunga began to sob openly.

The court was recessed for a few minutes, as the defendant's mother, Nancy Walunga, went to his side to comfort him.

Then the court reconvened.

The question was repeated.

This time he replied.

"As you have said, the girl doesn't have any more chance," Walunga said. "She's dead. I don't mind getting life in prison. That's all I have to say."

"Is there anything else, Mr. Walunga," the judge asked.

"No."

"Well," the judge said finally, "There are many cases I haven't particularly enjoyed and this has got to be the top one."

Then he sentenced Walunga to life in prison.