

Pierce County

Office of the Prosecuting Attorney

930 Tacoma Avenue South, Room 946
Tacoma, Washington 98402-2171
Administration: (253) 798-7792
FAX: (253) 798-2968

MARK LINDQUIST
Prosecuting Attorney

Main Office: (253) 798-7400
1-800-992-2456
Valid only within Washington State

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JURY CONVICTS FOURTH DEFENDANT IN CRAIGSLIST KILLING

Today a Pierce County jury returned six guilty verdicts against Clabon Berniard, 24, for the home invasion robbery and murder of 43-year-old Edgewood resident James Sanders on April 28, 2010. The jury found him guilty of Murder in the First Degree, Robbery, Assault and Burglary. Additionally, the jury found Berniard's criminal conduct showed "deliberate cruelty." Co-defendants Kiyoshi Higashi, Amanda Knight, and Joshua Reese were previously convicted in separate trials.

During Berniard's trial, his attorney contended he wasn't at the Sanders' home the night of the murder. Evidence against him included testimony from his sister, who told KOMO TV that she overheard Berniard talking about being in the Sanders' home and bringing the boys down from upstairs. Jurors also heard heart-wrenching testimony from Charlene Sanders, who detailed a quiet family evening gone horribly wrong when the violent young perpetrators turned the family's home into a robbery and murder scene.

Knight and Higashi entered the home under the pretext of buying a diamond ring Mr. Sanders had offered for sale on Craigslist. Once inside the home, Higashi pulled out a gun and he and Knight ordered James and Charlene Sanders to the floor, binding their hands and feet with zip ties. Reese and Berniard, who were waiting outside, entered the home and immediately gathered the Sanders' sons, ages 10 and 14 years, from the upstairs family room.

Ms. Sanders referred to Berniard as "the mean one." She testified that he kicked her in the head as she lay on the floor, then put a gun to the back of her head and counted down as though he was going to shoot her. Berniard also pistol whipped the Sanders' 14-year-old son. Throughout the ordeal, James and Charlene Sanders repeatedly told the defendants, "take anything you want – just don't hurt us." Higashi shot Mr. Sanders three times, and the defendants fled the residence with jewelry, a laptop computer, cell phones and other items.

Chief Criminal Deputy Mary Robnett and Deputy Prosecutor Karen Watson prosecuted all four defendants in separate trials. Higashi, Knight and Reese were convicted as charged. Higashi was sentenced to 123 years in prison. Knight and Reese were found to be active accomplices in the crimes and were sentenced to 71 and 100 years in prison, respectively.

"Deputy Prosecutors Mary Robnett and Karen Watson did an outstanding job in four hard-fought trials," Prosecutor Mark Lindquist said. "All four defendants have been held accountable and we hope the just verdicts bring some closure for the Sanders family and their many friends and supporters in the community."

Berniard faces the functional equivalent of life in prison when sentenced on September 9, 2011 at 1:30 p.m. in courtroom 2E.

For more information contact Becky Stover at (253) 798-4910 or rstover@co.pierce.wa.us.

