

Pierce County

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BERNIARD SENTENCED TO 124 YEARS FOR CRAIGSLIST MURDER

Today 24-year-old Clabon Berniard was sentenced to nearly 124 years in prison for his role in the home invasion robbery and murder of 43-year-old Edgewood resident James Sanders last year. On August 29 a jury found Berniard guilty of Murder in the First Degree, Robbery, Assault and Burglary. The jury's findings that Berniard's criminal conduct showed "deliberate cruelty" and that his actions showed a high degree of planning allowed prosecutors to ask for an exceptional sentence outside of the standard range.

Berniard was the last of four defendants prosecuted for the crime. Kiyoshi Higashi, Amanda Knight, and Joshua Reese were previously convicted in separate trials.

Knight contacted James Sanders after he posted a ring for sale on Craigslist. Posing as buyers, Knight and Higashi went to the Sanders home around 9:00 p.m. on April 28, 2010, as the family was enjoying a quiet evening and preparing to go on vacation. Once inside the home, Higashi pulled out a gun and 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 gathered the Sanders' sons, ages 10 and 14, from the upstairs family room. Minutes later James Sanders lay fatally wounded on his living room floor after being shot three times by Higashi. The criminals then fled the residence with jewelry, a laptop computer and other items.

During the trial, Charlene Sanders testified that Berniard kicked her in the head as she lay bound on the floor, then put a gun to her head and counted down as if to shoot her. Berniard also pistol whipped 14-year-old Jimmy Sanders. The defendants demanded to know where the family's safe was located as the Sanders pleaded for them to "take anything you want – just don't hurt us." Several family members spoke during the sentencing hearing. James Sanders' cousin described him as the "ideal figure of a good man." Charlene Sanders told the defendant, "Jim gave his life for his family. He didn't have to die that night. He didn't have to die for you to take our stuff."

Prosecutor Mark Lindquist said, "The Sanders family and their friends demonstrated admirable grace throughout this ordeal. All of us in the Prosecutor's Office join them in thanking the jurors for the four just verdicts."

Chief Criminal Deputy Mary Robnett and Deputy Prosecutor Karen Watson prosecuted all four defendants in separate trials. All 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.

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