

# The Times-Picayune

## Murder victim's daughter offers prayers, forgiveness

### Getaway car driver gets a life sentence

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By Gwen Filosa

Presenting him with a Bible signed by the family of the woman he helped kill three years ago in Lake Vista, the victim's daughter in court Friday told a convicted murderer that she forgives him.

After all, the daughter said, that's what her mother, the slain 70-year-old Myra Centanni Mehrtens, taught her.

"Mr. Foreman, this is for you," Sharon Giambrone said to Nathan Foreman from the witness stand, holding up a brand-new copy of the Bible, with a personal message to him from the family. "Jesus said, 'I am the way.' It says to Nathan, keep your eye focused on Jesus. Seek him. Our prayers are with you."

Foreman was 18 when he drove the getaway car after his friend Jonathan Bailey, then 19, fired a single fatal gunshot into Mehrtens' neck.

On Friday at Orleans Parish Criminal District Court, 21-year-old Foreman was sentenced to the state's mandatory punishment for second-degree murder: life without the chance of parole. But first, he heard a statement from the victim's family and received their gift.

Assistant District Attorney Tanya Faia passed the Bible to the defense attorneys, who placed it on the table in front of Foreman.

"I pray for you every Sunday," said Giambrone, who three years ago rode in the ambulance as medical technicians worked on her bleeding mother as a priest sat watch. "And my family prays for you each time we think of you, because, Nathan, you have a choice."

Faia and prosecutor Mary Glass had helped secure the guilty-as-charged murder verdict last month even though Foreman never touched the gun used to kill Mehrtens. Louisiana law provides that anyone who participates in a murder may be charged with the same crime as the one who pulls the trigger.

### Triggerman testifies

Jonathan Bailey, who robbed the widow at gunpoint as she had just arrived home the evening of March 6, 2005, pleaded guilty last year to first-degree murder and is serving life in prison. Prosecutors offered him this as a plea bargain: Plead to life and escape the lethal injection needle.

Faia and Glass, veteran prosecutors who returned to Orleans Parish last year as part of the newly formed Violent Offenders Unit, asked Bailey to testify for the state just days before Foreman's trial opened. He agreed, saying he wanted to clear his conscience.

In exchange for a sentence of probation and his testimony at trial, a third man, Christopher Cavalier, admitted to supplying Bailey and Foreman with the gun used to kill Mehrtens.

On Friday, defense attorney Robert Jenkins said that Cavalier had a felony indictment for theft out of Texas - - for which he had received probation -- and that since the Foreman jury didn't hear of this at trial, his testimony was flawed and grounds for a new trial.

But Buras denied the request. Cavalier wasn't the state's key witness; that title belonged to the gunman who owned up to the crime in open court, fingering Foreman as his driver that night.

Bailey told jurors that he and Foreman had decided to borrow a gun and drive around New Orleans in search of someone to rob.

The only car they saw was the Lincoln Continental that Mehtens was driving home that evening, after having supper at a daughter's home. Mehtens, who raised five children in Lakeview and Lake Vista and attended daily Mass at nearby St. Pius, begged Bailey not to hurt her, Bailey recalled.

Bailey said the gun went off as he flinched when his victim set off her car alarm to alert her neighbors. She died hours later at Charity Hospital, having bled to death from the wound to her neck. Her relatives waited outside the operating room, praying on their knees that she would survive the trauma, Giambrone testified.

'We prayed for you'

On Friday, Giambrone addressed a packed courtroom where the audience included Foreman's parents, the Mehtens family and District Attorney Keva Landrum-Johnson, among other inmates awaiting their turn before Buras.

The night before the jury returned to hear closing arguments and then begin deliberations over Foreman's fate, Giambrone said she spent the entire night weeping and praying to God to spare Foreman from prison if he were indeed not guilty of murder.

"We prayed for you," she told Foreman, who was silent during the hearing and appeared in jail-issued clothes and handcuffs. "God, don't let it come back guilty unless you know this man is guilty." Giambrone, a local dentist, said that her family forgives Foreman and Bailey, and prays for their parents, who have also lost a loved one now.

Buras, who handed down the life sentence to Foreman after denying several motions by Jenkins for a new trial, also made a statement to the convict. Buras didn't buy the testimony from Bailey that Mehtens' murder was a completely random act.

"This court feels Ms. Mehtens was targeted because she was elderly and alone and it was night," Buras said. "It was a carefully planned and executed crime."

**Police arrested all three men after an anonymous tip came in to Crimestoppers.** The caller reported that Bailey and Foreman were bragging about having killed the woman, and laughing about their deed.

\$10, crawfish bisque

As they sped away in Foreman's mother's car that night, the pair fished through Mehtens' purse, tossing items they deemed useless out the car's windows. Detectives later walked along the neutral ground of Robert E. Lee Boulevard, following a trail of the widow's belongings, which included an Elmwood Fitness Center membership card.

Bailey and Foreman had only made off with \$10 in cash and some leftover crawfish bisque, which Mehtens had carried home in a plastic bag from her daughter's house.

Mehtens, known for her gardening talents, was a member of local garden clubs and personally delivered many floral arrangements to weddings across New Orleans.

But Bailey and Foreman denied Mehtens the pleasure of watching her first granddaughter get married, Giambrone said.

"My mother was a woman of dignity, of strength and compassion," Giambrone said. "Nathan, my mother showed us how to forgive."

Foreman nodded politely when Giambrone addressed him by name. She spoke for at least 15 minutes, without notes, in a statement that Buras called "most eloquent."

Giambrone said that the violence plaguing New Orleans cannot be blamed solely on the city's historically failed public school system and other neglected institutions.

"You drove the car," she told Foreman. "We all have a choice between good and evil."

Giambrone told Foreman's parents that they too know sorrow and that she believes they tried the best they could to raise their son right. She then told the entire courtroom, including those awaiting trial for crimes, that violence will not go unpunished.

"They will get caught," Giambrone said. "God is watching."

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