

FLAGLER DOUBLE MURDER

Jury asks for death penalty

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DAYTONA BEACH — William Gregory sat still in a courtroom Wednesday as he heard the jury's first recommendation: that he be put to death for the shotgun slaying of his ex-girlfriend.

Then the jury recommended Gregory be put to death for also fatally shooting his ex-girlfriend's boyfriend. Gregory lowered his head and looked at the table before him.

The jury recommended by two separate votes of 7 to 5 that Gregory be executed for taking a 12-gauge shotgun and shooting his ex-girlfriend Skyler Meekins, 17, and her boyfriend, Daniel Dyer, 22, as they slept together. Gregory shot each one in the head with a shotgun slug on Aug. 21, 2007, in Meekins' grandparents' house near Flagler Beach.

Meekins and Dyer's last night alive was also the first they were spending alone together.

Gregory slipped into the house, took a semi-automatic shotgun from a hall closet and loaded it with a couple of slugs and shot the couple shortly after 1 a.m. The shotgun — with Gregory's fingerprints — was left near the bodies. Meekins and Gregory's daughter, Kyla, who is now 4, was sleeping in another part of the house.

Some of Meekins' and Dyer's family and friends wept as the jury's recommendations were announced. Dyer's sister clapped once before catching herself. Outside the courtroom they embraced and dabbed at teary eyes.

Circuit Judge William A. Parsons is not bound by the jury's death recommendations, but must give it great weight. Gregory, 28, will get one last chance to plead for his life at a April 1 when the defense will again argue against the death penalty. Parsons won't immediately sentence Gregory, who is being held in the Flagler County Inmate Facility, but will likely set a date for sentencing.

Gregory fell one vote shy of a 6 to 6 tie for each of the deaths, which would have resulted in a life recommendation from the jury of 10 women and two men. They deliberated for 90 minutes. While Gregory's family has been present at various times during the trial, none was in the courtroom at the S. James Foxman Justice Center for the death recommendations. A woman who said she was a friend of Gregory's cried. She declined comment.

Charles "Hap" Meekins, whose daughter was slain by Gregory, also cried but for different reasons.

"I really had no preference one way or the other," Meekins said. "The verdict last week was what I was looking for. And this is what it is. And I'm happy with it."

Dyer's sister, Jennifer Dyer-Auriemma, said that on behalf of her entire family she wanted to thank the jurors.

"We know it wasn't easy for them and we are just glad that justice is served," Dyer-Auriemma said.

"And this was the best outcome and we are happy. Just thank you to the jury. It meant a lot that they sat through all that and were able to have enough compassion for Dan and Skyler to recommend death on someone else. That's a hard thing to do."

Prosecutor Jacquelyn Roys argued that Gregory deserved the death penalty.

Roys reminded jurors of testimony that months before the murders Gregory had threatened to kill Skyler Meekins and any man she was with.

"William Gregory had a plan," Roys said. "He had a plan long before Daniel Dyer came in the picture. William Gregory said if Skyler ever left me I'm going to blow her head off. If she's cheating on me, I'm going to blow her head off." Gregory realized that Skyler Meekins had fallen for Dyer and carried out his plan, Roys said. Gregory had lived with Skyler Meekins at her grandparents' home for nearly a year after Kyla was born. Gregory was aware that the shotgun was kept in a hall closet along with ammunition.

The killings were cold, calculated and premeditated, Roys said.

"He goes into the closet," Roys said. "He gets the shotgun. He reaches up and grabs the ammunition. Do you not know by the evidence that he intended to kill both of them when he grabbed two bullets to put in that shotgun? He loaded one before he loaded the other.

"He walked across the house, bypassing everybody else in that house, every other room. He walked directly into Skyler Meekins' room where her and Dan were sleeping.

"There was no provocation. There was no scuffle. There was no argument. There were two people soundly sleeping, not knowing that Billie Gregory came over to kill them."

Gregory's defense attorney, Garry Wood, argued that Meekins had not even invited Daniel Dyer over until 10 p.m. on Aug. 20, so there was no evidence of premeditation.

Wood said Gregory had been doing drugs the day before the killings and had not talked of hurting or harming anyone.

Wood called Gregory's mother, Lynda Probert, who testified that Gregory had fathered another daughter while living in Montana about 10 years ago. Probert said the girl and her mother now live in California but Gregory has not been in contact.

Probert said Gregory had suffered two head injuries while growing up, one when he was just 17 days old. She said Gregory's father, Ray Gregory, had not been part of his son's life and had not given her child support. She said it was only a year ago that Ray Gregory made contact with the family.

Wood told the jurors that recommending Gregory be sentenced to life in prison without parole was punishment enough.

“To put it bluntly, what we are talking about is how he’s going to die as punishment for these two charges,” Wood said. “Is he going to be put to death or is he going to spend the rest of his life and die in prison?”

Skyler Meekins’ brother, Colton Meekins, 20, said justice was served.

“It’s not in my hands to decide it,” he said. “I’m not going to say I’m not happy with it. We’ll see what the judge ultimately does. I love my sister and you can’t just go kill people. It’s inexcusable.”