

Jurors recommend death for West Palm Beach killer

By Missy Diaz | South Florida Sun-Sentinel
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By a vote of 9-to-3, a jury on Wednesday recommended that Rhonda Norman be put to death for the slaying of Jane Tackaberry in 2006.

Norman cried softly as the decision was read. The final decision on her sentence lies with the trial judge.

Tackaberry's son, John, also sobbed. Outside the courtroom, John Tackaberry clutched a stuffed whale with a pin bearing his mother's picture.

"It's a great day for our family, my mom, our son," he said. "It's a great day for justice. My mom didn't do anything to them, my son didn't do anything to them and I didn't do anything to them to make them kill my mom."

Norman, 36, told police she killed Tackaberry to get revenge on John Tackaberry because Norman believed he had been unfaithful. Norman, according to trial testimony, enlisted the help of a drug-dealing hustler and the two brutally beat and stabbed 53-year-old Jane Tackaberry and then turned the knife on John Tackaberry's 6-year-old son, who miraculously survived.

In July, she was convicted of murdering her boyfriend's mother — Jane Tackaberry — and attempting to murder Tackaberry's 6-year-old grandson, Elijah Tackaberry, in 2006.

Norman was born to a single, teenage mother with a drug and alcohol problem in a crime-ridden Los Angeles neighborhood. For her first several years, she was raised by her grandmother, who laced her baby bottles with whiskey to get the baby to be passive and sleep, Lerman said.

At age 4, Norman and her siblings went to live with Norman's mother, who spent her public-assistance checks on crack cocaine and alcohol and left her children for days at a time while she binged.

The children wandered their neighborhood begging residents for food and clothing. A man in the neighborhood raped and impregnated Norman when she was 12, and she delivered a stillborn son when she was 13.

To help carry out her plan, Norman enlisted the assistance of alleged crack addict and hustler Wes McGee, whom she met on the night of the crimes, according to trial testimony. They went to Jane Tackaberry's West Palm Beach home, where Norman and McGee allegedly beat, stabbed and robbed Tackaberry before turning on Elijah.

The first-grader survived repeated stabbings. After the attack, the child crawled to his bed, where his father found him when he came home.

McGee's trial is scheduled to begin next week.

Prosecutor Craig Williams told the jury that Norman deserves to die because of the extreme violence of her acts, her cold and calculated premeditation and the "heinous, atrocious and cruel" nature of the killing.

Lerman said that because of Norman's hard-knocks upbringing, she should be spared the death penalty. He told jurors that Norman "was born into the depths of society" and never had a chance to develop normally.

Forensic psychologist Harry Krop testified that the effects of alcohol in the womb and as a child affected Norman's cognitive development.

An 11th-grade dropout, Norman has problems with impulse control, suffers from depression and has attempted suicide a few times, Krop said. Her relationships regularly involved domestic violence.

Jurors heard from Jane Tackaberry's family and friends, who recalled a compassionate, vivacious woman whose greatest joys were the three grandchildren who still ask for their Nana.

The cosmetologist loved cooking, music, gardening and the Minnesota Vikings.

She never missed an opportunity to help someone in need, tending the lawn of a neighbor with disabilities and sending roses to a longtime client two weeks before her death.

Testimony is to continue today.