

Man convicted of murder on birthday of his victim

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He is sentenced to life in 2004 slaying of woman.

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NEW PORT RICHEY - Tammy Lee Bowles would have celebrated her 48th birthday Thursday.

Instead, her family gathered for a somber event - the conviction and sentencing of the man who killed her.

A jury needed only 90 minutes of deliberations to find Lawrence Tener guilty of first-degree murder in Bowles' October 2004 death. Tener, 27, was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

"And it fell right on her birthday," said Bowles' brother, Johnny. "What a blessing."

The sentence will be tacked on to the end of the 15 years Tener is serving for the 2004 beating of a New York woman. Investigators were looking into that beating when they discovered Bowles' remains buried on the property of Tener's Moon Lake mobile home in December 2004.

The discovery came more than 40 days after Bowles met Tener at The Edge Bar.

The pair returned to Tener's home that October night, but things turned deadly when Bowles refused to have sex with him. Assistant State Attorney Mike Halkitis said Bowles was trying to escape when Tener picked up a fiberglass ax handle and struck her in the head.

Tener dragged Bowles down a hallway and back to his bedroom, where he struck her in the head a second time, Halkitis said. He then wrapped her in a bedsheet, put a bag over her head and buried her in a shallow grave near a dirt road leading to the mobile home. Bowles' body was naked from the waist down.

A medical examiner testified that Bowles might have been buried alive. Detectives found her blood smeared on a wall of Tener's home. Some of her belongings also were found in Tener's home and in his mother's nearby mobile home.

In convicting Tener of premeditated murder, jurors rejected the defense contention that he killed Bowles because she tried to steal 10 pounds of marijuana from him. Assistant Public Defenders Mick Tewell and Dean Livermore argued that their client was guilty of the lesser crime of manslaughter because he didn't plan the killing.

"He wasn't thinking about the consequences of his actions," Tewell said in his closing argument.

"He was just thinking about the rage and the pot."

A manslaughter conviction carries a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison.

One problem for the defense was that a killer doesn't have to plan a slaying to be convicted of premeditated murder. The law requires only reflection, even if it's for the slightest amount of time.

"You can take [the jury instructions], look at the instruction for murder in the first degree and try to pick out the word 'plan,'" Halkitis said, holding up the jury instructions during his closing argument. "But you can't because that's not an element."

Bowles' three daughters and son were everyday spectators at the four-day trial, as were her brother, Johnny, and sister, Cathy Ritter.

Ritter was the only family member to address Circuit Judge Shawn Crane before Tener was sentenced.

"He's ruined our lives," she said. "He not only ruined our lives, but her grandkids will never know her and I will not have a sister to grow old with because of him."

On the courthouse steps, Johnny Bowles described his sister as a big-hearted woman with "four of the most wonderful children."

Bowles, a local musician, said Tammy would drum up fans to come see him perform.

"My sister was one of my biggest fans," he said. "When we lost her, we lost a lot."

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