

Judge weighed many factors before pronouncing Flagler man's death sentence

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Skyler Meekins and Daniel Dyer (Photo provided by family)



William Gregory returns to his seat after talking to Judge William Parsons during his penalty phase hearing in Daytona Beach. (N-J | Peter Bauer)

DAYTONA BEACH -- William Gregory was sentenced to death this morning for killing his ex-girlfriend and her boyfriend by shooting each in the head with a shotgun.

Gregory, 28, was convicted last month of two counts of first-degree murder for the slayings of Daniel Dyer, 22, and his girlfriend, Skyler Meekins, 17, as the couple slept Aug. 21, 2007 near Flagler Beach. Meekins and Gregory had a daughter, Kyla, now 4. Meekins had broken up with Gregory and had started dating Dyer.

Circuit Judge William A. Parsons sentenced Gregory this morning during a hearing at the S. James Foxman Justice Center in Daytona Beach.

A jury had voted 7 to 5 to recommend that Gregory be put to death. Parsons was not bound by the jury's recommendation but he was required to give it great weight. The jury of 10 women and two men found Gregory guilty of the two murders.

Circuit Judge William A. Parsons legally weighed aggravating and mitigating factors before deciding to sentence Gregory to death.

Parsons gave "very substantial weight" to the fact that Gregory killed two people. Parsons also gave "great weight" to the aggravator Gregory committed the murders in a "cold, calculated and premeditated manner without any pretense of moral or legal justification."

Parsons gave "moderate weight" to the aggravator that Gregory committed the killings while engaged in a burglary, since the judge said he has already sentenced Gregory to life on that charge.

Parsons gave "moderate weight" to the aggravator that Gregory was on felony probation for attempted possession of cocaine at the time of the murders.

Then Parsons went through the mitigating factors in his order.

Parsons gave "slight weight" to the mitigator that the crime was done by someone "under the influence of extreme mental or emotional disturbance."

Parsons said there was no evidence to establish the mitigator that Gregory's capacity "to appreciate the criminality of his conduct or to conform his conduct to the requirements of law was substantially impaired."

Parsons gave "slight weight" to evidence that Gregory had a longstanding drug and alcohol problem.

Parsons also gave "slight weight" to the assertion that Gregory had "at least some impairment" due to taking drugs and alcohol the day before the murders. But Parsons noted that Gregory called 9-1-1 about 4:15 a.m. on the day of the murders asking to be arrested by his probation officer for using drugs.

"That can be construed as a clear-thinking effort to try to manufacture an alibi or aberrant behavior consistent with his ingestion of intoxicants," Parsons said.

The judge gave "slight weight" to the mitigating factor that Gregory grew up without a father, who spent a lot of time in jail or prison, and was raised by his mother.

The judge also gave "slight weight" to the mitigator that Gregory had a dysfunctional childhood. The judge noted that Gregory's mother, Lynda Probert, had other relationships with men, "none of which appeared to be positive for the defendant." The judge noted that Gregory began using drugs and alcohol before he was even a teenager. But the judge also said that Gregory participated in lots of other childhood activities, including camping, hunting and Scouting.

Parsons found that Gregory had not been able to establish the mitigator that he has substantial family support. The judge said Lynda Probert "did not appear to have a particularly close relationship" with Gregory. Parsons noted that Gregory's sister testified that she loved her

brother. Parsons said that Gregory's grandmother "made a feeble attempt to provide him an alibi at trial."

According to testimony during a previous hearing, Gregory has been in trouble with the law since he was about nine years old growing up in Montana.

Prosecutor Jacquelyn Roys had argued that Gregory deserved to die. She said during the trial and hearings that Gregory had threatened to kill Meekins and any man she was with months before he carried out that threat.

"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 during the trial. "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?"