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Saturday, March 29, 2014

Hedvall guilty of second-degree murder

He faces life in prison; sentencing date not yet scheduled

BY ADAM LINHARDT Citizen Staff

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"I walked anyway yesterday saying that I put an innocent man in jail."

Those are the words of a female juror who asked not to be identified after she and 11 others found Peter Erik Hedvall guilty of second-degree murder at 11 p.m. Thursday in the Oct. 28, 2011, death of Jonathan Alvarado Perez.

Perez, a popular La Trattoria Oceanside server, was found strangled and bludgeoned to death at 1019 Grinnell St. near Dons' Place, where Hedvall and Perez had been drinking earlier that morning.

It took the jury close to eight hours to return with the guilty verdict.

The juror who spoke to The Citizen said she and two others believed Hedvall's defense lawyers planted seeds of reasonable doubt, and that led to some tense jury deliberations with the other nine jurors who favored a first-degree murder verdict.

"It was my first jury," the woman said. "I cried when I got home last night. I feel this kid should never go to jail. I was upset and I felt manhandled after deliberations. It was hostile in there. They were very adamant. One woman was yelling at me."

The juror said two points bothered her during deliberations: the fact that the murder weapons -- a 20-pound coral rock and a wire from a pair of costume fairy wings -- were not tested for other people's DNA, and that the blood found on the borrowed costume pants and a boot Hedvall was wearing was so miniscule that it could have gotten there at another time.

She mentioned that the costume suit Hedvall was wearing belonged to Irish Kevin's musician Jared Hobgood, who has since committed suicide. Witnesses, including Hedvall, testified that Perez was a regular at Irish Kevin's. Perhaps the blood got on Hobgood's suit during one of those visits, the juror said.

She also called into question the glitter that prosecutors said was on the clothes Hedvall was wearing, as well as on his hands. That glitter came from the fairy wings Hedvall used to strangle Perez, prosecutors said.

"But we know Mr. Hedvall went to Bare Assets that night and there's glitter on strippers, plus it was Fantasy Fest and lots of people wear glitter," the juror said. "I said we have to discount this whole glitter thing."

The juror said she also discounted the testimony of Hector Hernandez, a former cellmate of Hedvall's at Monroe County Detention Center on Stock Island, who claimed Hedvall confessed. Hernandez is a convicted child molester. The juror called his testimony "a joke."

She also dismissed the testimony of Honus Hicks, a resident of Truman Avenue who lives across from Dons' Place where Hedvall and Perez had been drinking the night of Perez's death.

Hicks testified seeing Perez and a man wearing clothes similar to those Hedvall was wearing leaving Dons' Place together on Grinnell Street about 4 a.m. at closing.

"Hicks couldn't remember the color of shirts people were wearing," the juror said. "He was unreliable."

By 11 p.m. the female juror and one other were the sole two individuals pushing for a not guilty or a hung jury.

"I said I would concede, but I'm not convicting him of first-degree murder," the juror said.

Meanwhile, another juror went on U.S. 1 Radio's Morning Magazine show Friday and described a different mood in the deliberation room. That juror, who also wished to remain anonymous, said there was a lot of "discussion and deliberation," but ultimately the right verdict was agreed upon.

It was the DNA that convinced the jury, the woman told Morning Magazine host Bill Becker.

"The prosecution did an excellent job," that juror on the radio said. "They took us through a series of events in a very orderly fashion. The preponderance of the evidence was really the DNA."

She added, "The majority of us felt the defendant was guilty, but there were a couple of people very concerned, as all of us really were, that we didn't send an innocent man to prison."

Jurors did ask county Judge Wayne Miller for the shirt, pants and boots Hedvall was wearing, as well as the rock used to kill Perez.

The state failed to prove the murder was premeditated based on the evidence, the juror said when asked why a second-degree murder verdict and not first-degree.

"I'm very satisfied with the time and long hours that the jury put to reach the verdict they did," said Assistant State Attorney Val Winter, who prosecuted the case alongside Assistant State Attorney Christine Poist.

Defense attorneys Alan Fowler, Julio Margalli and Jason Smith did not return messages seeking comment.

Hedvall faces a potential maximum sentence of life in prison, but could receive less than that depending on a presentence investigation report completed by the Florida Department of Corrections. That report details Hedvall's criminal history and other factors when suggesting a prison term to Judge Miller.

The sentencing date has not been scheduled.

Hedvall was previously convicted in Miller's court on Sept. 28 on charges of driving without a valid license and carrying a concealed weapon. He remains at Monroe County Detention Center on Stock Island under no bail as his previous \$500,000 bail pending trial was revoked upon his conviction.

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