

Judge slaps Grange with 63 years

Cunningham and Williams each get a year for criminal assistance

Statesman Examiner, By Jodi Miller

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Convicted double-murderer John Douglas Grange, 26, was sentenced Friday to 760 months in prison by Superior Court Judge Rebecca Baker. Jeffrey Stephan Cunningham, 25, and Dane Matthew Williams, 28, each earned a year in jail for helping Grange load, move and burn the bodies in one of the victim's trucks. Cunningham received a year of community supervision on top of the jail time, and Williams received two years of community supervision.

Victims Joshua Thomas Schaefer and Nicholas Dewayne Kaiser, both 21, were both shot in the head on June 11. The remains of Kaiser's burned-out vehicle were not discovered until Sept. 24, when a hunter came upon it on a remote logging road near Crown Creek, southwest of Northport.

Maija Soucie, a friend of Cunningham's, eventually came forward with the story a distressed and drunken Cunningham had confessed to her on the night of the murders. Cunningham and Williams were later apprehended, and agreed to testify against Grange in return for the comparatively light charge of Criminal Assistance in the First Degree.

The stories Williams and Grange* [*Cunningham] shared were identical in places, but not in others. The testimony of the two, along with Soucie's recounting of Cunningham's confession, in which he named Grange, was enough to convince the jury of Grange's guilt.

The victims were killed because Kaiser had "rolled over" on other involved in a high-level LSD ring. Kaiser had apparently had a \$100,000 "hit" placed on him to keep him from turning others in. The origin of the hit has not been traced.

Schaefer, from near San Diego, was simply visiting Kaiser, and knew nothing of the defendants until the Northport Barter Faire on June 10, the last place the victims were heard from. Cunningham and Kaiser were old friends, and Cunningham and Grange shared the cabin where the murders occurred. Williams lived nearby.

Photos bring defendants to tears

The parents of both of the victims spoke at each of the three sentencings. Pat Schaefer brought each of the defendants to tears, showing them three pictures of her late son with family. In each he was holding his infant son. Letters from Schaefer's sister and wife were read by the parents, and Judy Kaiser spoke on behalf of her two remaining sons, ages 13 and eight. Grange's father spoke on his son's behalf, calling him a "gentle boy." Mr. Grange requested a stay and an order of continuance, claiming that his son's defense attorney, Robert Simeone, was inadequate, and that he had repeatedly failed to request a new attorney for his client. Mr. Grange also objected to being kept outside the court room for the entirety of the trial. He

was expected to testify for both the defense and the prosecution, but the defense never called him. He claims to have evidence that would prove his son's innocence.

Even Prosecutor Jerry Wetle was surprised when fellow defendant Jeff Cunningham was called to speak on Grange's behalf.

"I've been friends with John for quite a few years, and I've never known him to be violent in anyway," Cunningham told the judge. "I really don't know why all this happened, but I never thought John would do anything like this."

During his own statement, Simeone attributed part of the families' pain to the guilt of knowing their son's had been involved in dangerous activities.

'It was fated'

"I wonder if part of the pain is from the guilt people are feeling here," he said as Tom Schaefer stormed out of the courtroom. "The shooting...was the culmination of a force that was already set in motion. Their deaths were pre-cast. It was fated to happen."

Grange sobbed as he maintained his innocence.

"I cry over them every day," he said, "because they were people of my family, the Rainbow Family, of which I am a member."

Grange also said that he was a Rastafarian, a religion that stresses forgiveness. He pled with the judge to understand the "the pure terror of the soul that comes from being banished from all congress with mankind."

Judge Baker told Grange that it was both common and easy for convicted criminals to blame their attorneys.

"I don't think that anything but the facts themselves are to blame," she said. "My conclusion was that the evidence is overwhelming. I think you, in your heart of hearts, know what you did...you're still trying not to have the total consequences of your actions come upon you."

Judge Baker gave Grange the maximum sentence of 63 years, not just to deter him from reoffending, she said, but also "to send a message to others who might choose this road, who might decide to follow through with an action of this kind.

"This was a cold-blooded, very senseless act, money and status-oriented," Baker continued.

"The choices you've made since may also be some indication as to your lack of insight into how to make it right, rather than how to make it worse. Yes, they were involved in dangerous activity. This does not take away from the fact that they were members of families, they were 21 year olds. The devastation to the families, the permanent loss, can't be ignored."

Reimbursement for urn, headstone

In addition to his sentence, Grange must also pay restitution, along with Cunningham and Williams, to the victim's families. The Schaefer's requested reimbursement for counseling and for an urn to hold the few remains of their son.

Although none of its members were present at the trial, the November Coalition has declared it a "monkey trial" and is fighting for Grange. They believe Williams was the shooter.

"The honorable Rebecca Baker said that mainstream society calls what Jeff Cunningham did in coming forward a good thing," Coalition director Nora Callahan said in a written statement.

"Jeff never came forward, he fled and was arrested in Florida and only when facing a capital murder indictment, he talked. But the court calls that coming forward and there aren't really many so-called mainstream folks that will say that these so-called investigative tactics are good. Mainstream America knows this isn't justice. Jeff Cunningham and Dane Williams both had nothing to lose by saying John Grange committed these murders, and everything to gain.

There is no justice in the war on drugs."

Much of the Coalition's objection appears to focus on the "snitching" process, in which a person often receives a lighter sentence in return for naming a criminal.

Sentencing guidelines 'ridiculously low'

When Jeffrey Cunningham spoke, he apologized to the families and recognized that his sentence was, as Judge Baker said, "ridiculously low." Sentencing guidelines allowed a six-to-12-month sentence.

"I probably deserve a lot more," he said. "I'm so sorry. Nick wouldn't have done this to me, definitely not...there's no justification for it. I can never say anything that will change it. I'm guilty."

Baker recognized Cunningham's bravery in coming forward—he and his mother have both received multiple death threats since his arrest—but also scolded him.

"You did leave the bodies of these two young men to the dogs, to the coyotes, and you did wait a significant amount of time before you came forward," she said. "But I think I also have to recognize that you and Mr. Williams both were figuring that you were the next ones to get a bullet in the back of the head."

Cunningham has remained in jail since his Nov. 3 arrest, and has already served much of his one-year sentence.

Williams, who posted bail after charges were filed, got a new girlfriend and fathered a baby before the trial. He requested work release so that he could continue his job and attend the birth of his child.

"You shouldn't be allowed to be a daddy," Judy Kaiser wept. "This is so ridiculous. You have a girlfriend with a baby on the way. Nicholas didn't have the chance to do that."

Williams was the only defendant who didn't address the families of the victims. He simply told the judge, "Of course, I'd like to see my baby born. I've only tried to change things... since that day."

"You got involved, and made a choice to father a child," Judge Baker responded. "I think that will be some small punishment for you."

Williams, who walked into both the trial and the sentencing a free man, was visibly shocked when Baker told him he would report to jail immediately.

The restitution hearing for all three men will be held on June 29.