

Woman Testifying At Chance Loftis Trial Says She Heard Man Say: "I'm Not Going To Jail For This"

Thursday, January 22, 2015 - by Hollie Webb

A woman who lived on the Tennessee River said that on the day that Donald Rogers was murdered, she heard a man near the dock in front of her home say, "I'm not going to jail for this."

Brenda Wattenberger, who was standing on her deck at the time, said this scared her. She testified in court on Thursday, "That's when I called 911."

Chance Loftis is currently on trial for the murder of the 46-year-old Rogers. According to the testimony of co-defendant Travis Jenkins, he, Loftis and Rogers had been drinking in Rogers' boat for several hours on April 24, 2012.

Jenkins testified that Loftis became angry when Rogers got them lost. At this point, he said Rogers pulled out a knife. Jenkins said that Loftis began beating Rogers until the knife fell into the water.

He said even after that, Loftis continued his attack. Eventually, he said Loftis strangled Rogers. He also said Loftis killed Rogers' dog, a small Yorkshire terrier named Braxton.

Ms. Wattenberger said, "I thought somebody had broken down and was going to come over here and want some help...I still wasn't concerned, but then I heard more talking and at that time I realized they were right at my dock."

Defense attorney Mary Sullivan Moore noted that while Rogers died from a neck injury, the injury also could have been sustained by falling into the side of the boat while he was intoxicated. When pictures of the body showed that Rogers' belt was unbuckled and his underwear was showing when the body was discovered, attorney Moore suggested he could have fallen while urinating over the side of the boat.

A patrol deputy called out to the area that night because of reports of a suspicious person testifying that he stopped a man who was later identified as Loftis walking down the road.

The deputy said Loftis had blood on his pants and that his hands were bleeding. He said Loftis told him that his girlfriend had kicked him out of the car and that he had wandered through the woods, lost for the past three hours. He said Loftis told him he cut his hands in the brush.

Marcus Fritz, chief of Dallas Bay Fire and Rescue, said he and his team were the first to find the body. The body was hanging over the side of the boat.

Chief Fritz said he searched for a pulse, but that rigor mortis had already set in and that the man was obviously deceased.

He said, "The body was stiff...I knew there was no saving his life."

The trial is scheduled to continue Friday and go into next week.

Jury Deliberating In Chance Loftis Trial

Friday, January 30, 2015

A Criminal Court jury was deliberating on Friday in the case in which Chance Loftis was charged with murder and aggravated cruelty to animals in the April 24, 2012, death of riverman Donald Rogers and his Yorkshire terrier Braxton.

Travis Jenkins, who faces similar charges, was called as the state's chief witness, and he put the blame on Loftis. He said Loftis became enraged after a drunken Rogers could not locate the campsite where they were due to spend the night.

He said Loftis hit the victim numerous times with his fists in the face and head and then killed the dog with a boat paddle.

Loftis did not take the witness stand.

Loftis was 24 at the time and Jenkins was 28. Loftis had been living with Jenkins for a short time prior to the incident.

Rogers stayed down the street with his mother and step-father.

Jenkins said Rogers pulled a knife, but Loftis took it away from him.

The jury started deliberating at 9 a.m. and took a lunch break around noon.

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Chance Loftis Set To Be Freed From Jail After Jury Finds Him Guilty Of Only Misdemeanor Charge

Friday, January 30, 2015

Chance Loftis is set to be freed from jail on Monday after a Criminal Court jury on Friday afternoon found him guilty of only a minor charge.

Instead of murder in the death of 46-year-old Donald Rogers, the jury in the courtroom of Judge Don Poole found him guilty of the lesser charge of reckless endangerment.

He was found not guilty of aggravated animal cruelty in the beating and drowning death of the victim's dog Braxton.

Attorney Mary Sullivan Moore said she will likely ask for an OR bond, and Judge Poole said he will likely grant that bond or something similar.

Loftis, who opted not to take the witness stand, has been in jail since shortly after the April 24, 2012, death on the river near Johnson Road.

His co-defendant, Travis Jenkins, took the stand and blamed both deaths on Loftis.

There will be a later sentencing hearing, but reckless endangerment is a misdemeanor carrying only up to 11 months and 29 days in jail.

The jury of nine women and three men deliberated for almost seven hours.

The mother and step-father of Rogers, who sat through the entire two-week trial, left quickly after the verdict was announced.

No family members for Loftis attended the trial.

The defense called forensics expert Dr. Ronald Keith Wright, who said he did not believe the victim died from repeated blows to the face and head.

He said it was possible that he had fallen in his aluminum fishing boat and struck his neck on the boat.

County Medical Examiner Dr. James Metcalfe said the victim's neck was broken by manual strangulation. Dr. Wright said he disagreed.

The expert from Florida also said it was possible that the victim drowned.

The sister of a former Loftis girlfriend earlier told the jury that Loftis was "well-mannered and very polite," while co-defendant Travis Jenkins was a bully, a drug addict and a woman beater."

Stacy Fields said Loftis stayed at her house for a couple of weeks before going to live with Jenkins just prior to the incident.

She said Jenkins was not welcome at her home and he never came there.

Jenkins said he accepted a standing invitation from Rogers to go out on the river with him, noting he wanted to get away from home after a family ruckus involving him, his mother and his girlfriend.

He said Rogers was intoxicated and began driving the boat recklessly, finally getting it stuck on a tree late in the night.