

Son found insane, not guilty
Mother's slaying blamed on illness

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Mr. Chiero

WORCESTER — An Uxbridge man charged with murdering his mother was committed to Bridgewater State Hospital yesterday after being found not guilty by reason of insanity.

A Worcester Superior Court jury deliberated for about seven hours over two days before returning the verdict yesterday afternoon in the case of 37-year-old Lee F. Chiero. Mr. Chiero was charged with murder in the Jan. 15, 2007, stabbing and beating death of 59-year-old Nancy S. Chiero in the family's home at 17 No Way, Uxbridge.

A videotape made by Mr. Chiero depicting the final moments of his mother's life was played for the jury during the trial. Three mental health experts, including one hired by the prosecution to evaluate Mr. Chiero, testified that he suffered from either schizophrenia or a delusional disorder and lacked criminal responsibility for his actions at the time of the killing.

Judge Peter W. Agnes Jr. committed Mr. Chiero to Bridgewater State Hospital for an initial 40 days of psychiatric observation and continued the case to May 5. During the period of observation, the district attorney's office or the medical director at Bridgewater may petition the court for a six-month commitment.

Such a commitment would then be subject to annual reviews by the courts.

Mr. Chiero's lawyer, Keith S. Halpern, argued to the jury that his client believed his mother was part of a conspiracy against him at the time of the killing and did not appreciate the criminality of his conduct. Assistant District Attorney Eduardo O. Velazquez said the defendant's actions after the killing — washing up, changing his clothing, taking his mother's pocketbook containing more than \$4,000 and driving her car 170 miles to upstate New York — suggested he was aware of what he was doing.

An unusual aspect of the case was the introduction of excerpts of videotapes recorded by Mr. Chiero on a hand-held camera, including the one made on the day of the killing. The three-minute segment showed Mrs. Chiero, her face bloodied, asking her son to get help.

"Call an ambulance. Say someone broke in," she pleaded.

Mr. Chiero had tears in his eyes after the verdict was announced. He hugged Mr. Halpern and turned to look at his sister, Gina Mariona of Southboro, in the back of the courtroom.

"There's definitely no happy ending, but I'm happy that the jury reviewed the evidence and my mother finally got heard. She wanted my brother to get help, and he finally is," Ms. Mariona said.

She said the family had been aware that Mr. Chiero's mental state was deteriorating in the weeks leading up to the killing and twice had him involuntarily committed to a psychiatric hospital, only to see him be released a short time later.

"I'm grateful and relieved that the jury showed more respect for the law than the district attorney," Mr. Halpern said after the verdict. He reiterated his earlier allegation that the decision by District Attorney Joseph D. Early Jr. to seek a first-degree murder conviction in the case was politically motivated.

"There's no voter constituency lining up behind insane individuals who kill people. The case was prosecuted in order to look like this office is tough on crime, without regard for the fact that there was no crime and they knew it. There was just illness," Mr. Halpern said.

“Once they became aware of the psychiatric history and the opinions of the forensic psychiatrists, including the one they hired, the case should have been resolved through a concession that he was insane and should be committed to Bridgewater,” he said.

“The only thing inappropriate about this case was his behavior suggesting that this was politically motivated,” responded Mr. Early.