



Polk jury finds Tommy Lee Jones guilty of fatally stabbing his wife

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BARTOW — Tommy Lee Jones of Haines City will spend the rest of his life in prison after a Polk County jury found him guilty Wednesday of fatally stabbing his wife in 2013.

Moments after Circuit Judge Donald Jacobsen released the jury of five women and seven men, he brought Jones, 53, forward and sentenced him to life imprisonment, which is the only option for a first-degree murder conviction when prosecutors aren't seeking the death penalty.

Jones remained stoic as Jacobsen announced the jury's decision and imposed the life sentence. He then was fingerprinted before returning to the Polk County Jail.

Earlier Wednesday, Juanita Jackson Jones' son, Floyd O'Hara, 28, testified that he witnessed Jones stabbing his mother in their Haines City home that July night in 2013.

He told jurors he was playing a video game on the television when Jones stepped out from the bedroom and walked into the kitchen, where his wife was cooking dinner.

"I thought he was going to the refrigerator," O'Hara said.

Instead, he said, Jones grabbed a knife with a 12-inch blade and began repeatedly stabbing his 59-year-old wife in the chest and head.

"I heard her make a sound she had never made before," O'Hara said. "She was walking backward, like she was trying to get away."

O'Hara said he tried to stop Jones, only to be stabbed in the upper arm. His brother, Joaquin Jackson, came out from another bedroom and they wrestled Jones to the floor.

"I put him in a headlock," O'Hara said, "and he was still swinging the knife. He and my brother were fighting for the knife."

As Jones continued fighting to break away, O'Hara said he clamped down harder.

"I told him 'If you don't stop moving, I'm going to snap your neck,' and he stopped moving," O'Hara told jurors.

Jones was taken into custody moments later when police arrived.

During her closing argument to jurors Wednesday, Assistant State Attorney Kristie Ducharme reminded jurors that Juanita Jones died of nine stab wounds, including one that pierced her heart. "While she lay dying on the floor, bleeding to death with nine stab wounds inflicted on her by this man, Tommy Jones, her sons were fighting Tommy Jones to the ground, trying desperately to get that 12-inch knife from his hand so he couldn't harm anyone else in the house," she said.

"A person doesn't stab another person nine times unless they intend to kill that person," she said. Lakeland lawyer Lee Cohen, representing Jones, argued the elements of the crime don't reflect premeditation, but rather the lesser second-degree murder charge. He suggested the two had been arguing and drinking alcohol that day, and Juanita Jones may have provoked the attack.

"There's an argument running all day," he said, "and two people drinking. Two people get into such an incident that Mrs. Jones is dead."

The jury deliberated about three hours before reaching its verdict.

Source:

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