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Grandparents' killer erupts at sentencing

Michael Chadd Boysen, who killed his grandparents in their Renton-area home a day after he was released from prison in March, was sentenced Friday to life in prison without parole.

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Ellen M. Banner / The Seattle Times

Michael Chadd Boysen spent about 25 minutes on Friday lashing out at his jailers, the criminal-justice system and the media for the way he has been treated since his arrest in March for strangling his grandparents with a shoelace, ransacking their Renton-area house of valuables and fleeing to a motel on the Oregon coast.

During his sentencing hearing before King County Superior Court Judge Douglass North, Boysen, 27, said the only reasons he entered an Alford plea earlier this month to two counts of aggravated first-degree murder is because he did not agree the killings were premeditated and “because it drives the prosecutor insane.”

In entering an Alford plea instead of a guilty plea on Oct. 4, Boysen acknowledged that a jury would likely find him guilty of killing Norma and Robert Taylor a day after the couple in their 80s picked Boysen up from the Monroe Correctional Complex, where he had served a prison sentence on an attempted-burglary charge.

“I have remorse and I am sorry, whether my family chooses to believe me or not,” said Boysen, who was sentenced to two life terms in prison without the possibility of release.

While he claimed “drugs had nothing to do with” the killings, Boysen — who became addicted to drugs in his teens and suffers from mental illness — offered no explanation for why he killed the Taylors, a couple who he said were like second parents to him and had offered him unconditional love and support.

In his plea statement, Boysen claimed he did not remember committing the slayings, but said he wanted to spare his family the trauma of a trial. He was arrested March 12 after a statewide manhunt led police to a motel in Lincoln City, Ore., where Boysen attempted to kill himself before officers broke down the door.

Before Boysen and members of his family addressed the judge, North heard and rejected an argument from Boysen’s defense team, which had sought an exceptional sentence of 40 years instead of life in prison.

Defense attorney James Conroy urged the judge to legally challenge the state’s decision to charge Boysen with aggravated first-degree murder instead of first-degree murder, which carries a standard sentence of 20 years to life.

He said Boysen’s case was unique because he entered an Alford plea, while other defendants since the 1980s were convicted of aggravated murder at trial.

Senior King County Deputy Prosecutor Wyman Yip said it makes no difference — and state law is clear that the only possible penalties for aggravated first-degree murder are death or life in prison. The facts of the case, he said, “support the most serious charge” of aggravated first-degree murder.

“The state is not seeking the death penalty, which leaves the only possible sentence of life in prison,” Yip said.

Melanie Taylor, Boysen’s mother, recalled the “lovely family dinner” her parents hosted on March 8 after picking Boysen up from prison and spending the day running errands with him to help him prepare to enter a drug-rehabilitation program “to help him with his addictions.”

When she drove away that night, her parents and son stood on the front porch waving goodbye to her, Taylor said. The next day, after being unable to reach her parents, Taylor let herself into their house — and found her son gone and her parents dead in a bedroom closet.

“I opened and shut that door three times to make sure what I saw was real,” she said of finding her parents’ bodies “piled on top of each other.”

Though she said she will “never understand what happened on March 9,” Taylor told her son she loves and forgives him.

Her siblings, Robert Taylor and Suzanne Campbell, were more pointed in their comments. Boysen refused to meet his uncle’s eyes as a victim advocate read aloud a letter he had written the court.

In his letter, Robert Taylor said Boysen “put on a great act,” pretending to be happy and grateful to be reunited with his family after his release from prison. Boysen was cowardly in killing his grandfather from behind, and vicious in attacking his frail grandmother, whose neck was broken.

“They had put so much trust in him; he knew just what to steal,” Taylor said in his letter.

Boysen took silver dollars his grandmother had received from her father as birthday gifts, his grandfather’s wedding ring and his grandmother’s jewelry, as well as silverware and cash.

Campbell, Boysen’s aunt, also lamented the trust her parents had placed in their grandson, saying Boysen knew where the couple had hidden cash and stole his grandmother’s “real jewelry,” while leaving behind numerous pieces of costume jewelry. She said Boysen’s decision to enter an Alford plea was hurtful to the family.

“I think he is doing this for himself,” she said, at which point Boysen jumped to his feet and swore at her.

In addressing the court, Boysen spent most of his time complaining about the detectives and prosecutors involved in his case, the conduct of jail officials during his stay at the King County Jail, and the media for releasing what he claimed was false information. He said prosecutors relied on statements from two mentally ill prisoners, who claimed Boysen told them of his plans to kill his grandparents months before the slayings — something he vehemently denied.

“Great, two superstar witnesses,” he said sarcastically.

The seven months he spent in jail “can only be described as traumatic,” Boysen said.

“I understand I haven’t been the easiest inmate to deal with,” he said, noting he has had 14 incidents of self-harm, four blood transfusions, 16 admissions to Harborview Medical Center and four surgeries to repair damage he has done to himself since March.

In response, jail officials regularly strapped Boysen to a restraint bed or board, often for hours at a time.

“I hope some day my family can forgive me. I hope some day I can forgive myself, but I see that as unlikely,” Boysen said.

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