

# Hesse sentenced to 80 years for Ronan man's beating death



William Lowery Hesse.

By  
**SCOT HEISEL**

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A Colorado man was sentenced Thursday to 80 years in the Montana State Prison following his Oct. 3 conviction for the 2019 beating death of a Ronan man.

William Lowrey Hesse, 55, of Denver, was convicted of deliberate homicide and tampering with evidence in relation to the death of 63-year-old Gyne Kelley in Kelley’s fifth-wheel trailer at Mission Meadows RV Park.

Missoula District Court Judge Jason Marks presided over the case and imposed the sentence during a hearing conducted online via Zoom.

Three of Kelley’s family members addressed the court prior to sentencing, including his niece, Lindsay Zachariasen.

“He gave you a place to lay your head. That’s who Gyne was,” Zachariasen said.

Kelley’s former wife, Jeannine Padilla, pointed out that Kelley had three sons and six grandchildren, and that before his death he had contacted some of them in an attempt to re-establish relationships.

“We are all so heartbroken that you have taken such a sweet, kind brother from us in such a horrific manner,” said Darla Pollock, Kelley’s youngest sister.

Lake County Attorney Steven N. Eschenbacher requested a sentence of 100 years for deliberate homicide and 10 years for the evidence tampering charge, to be served consecutively and with a parole restriction of 50 years.

Kelley’s lead defense attorney, Deputy Public Defender Alisha Rapkoch of Kalispell, sought a sentence of 20 years for deliberate homicide and 10 years for tampering, to be served consecutively, with no parole restrictions.

Rapkoch pointed out that Hesse had been held for more than 400 days at the Lake County Jail awaiting trial, saying all of that time was served in solitary confinement and without medications.

Hesse did not address the family members in his final statement prior to sentencing. Instead, he recited the Lord’s Prayer and vowed to build a prison ministry while serving his sentence.

Judge Marks sentenced Hesse to 80 years on the deliberate homicide charge and 10 years for evidence tampering. He ordered the

sentences be served concurrently with no parole restriction.

“There’s a pattern of you going through life and doing harm to your fellow man,” Marks said, citing four previous felony convictions and other misdemeanor infractions.

According to the affidavit of probable cause filed by Eschenbacher, Sheriff’s Deputy Steve Larson was called to assist in a potential homicide investigation on Aug. 31, 2019 because he had dealt with a man at the same residence at 3 a.m. in the morning of the same date.

Kelly was found on the floor of a fifth-wheel camper at the RV park. Larson interviewed a woman who was playing pool at a bar in Pablo with Hesse and Kelly. The trio left and drove to Kelly’s camper, where they drank and talked. The woman said Hesse and Kelly began to argue and the woman and Kelly decided to go for a walk.

The woman told Larson that while she and the victim were gone, Hesse broke several items in the camper and threw a small barbecue through a window. The destruction caused such a commotion that neighbors called law enforcement. When Larson arrived, he told Hesse to go back in and sleep it off.

After the deputy left, Kelly and the woman returned and discovered the damage. She said Kelly was upset and told Hesse to leave, but he refused. The woman said the two men wrestled before an actual fight began. She said Kelly suffered from a breathing problem that necessitated the use of supplemental oxygen.

According to the court document, the fight escalated when Hesse tackled Kelly and kicked and beat him with closed fists. The woman said she yelled at Hesse to stop, but he continued to hit or kick Kelly while he was on the ground and helpless.

For the next few hours, with breaks in between, the woman said Hesse returned to punch or kick the man. She said she tried to avoid the confrontation because she was afraid Hesse would assault her.

Then, sometime in the early morning hours, she left. She said she returned periodically to check on Kelly, who was still on the floor of the camper.

At about 3 p.m. Aug. 31, the woman said she checked on Kelly and she couldn’t find a pulse. She said she convinced Hesse to call 911 and he did.

When Kelly was examined at the Montana State Crime Lab, it showed he suffered from blunt force trauma by his ribs being caved in on both sides. Coupled with his breathing problems, which led to asphyxiation, caused Kelly’s death.

At trial it was revealed that Kelley’s ribs had been broken in 23 places.

According to the court document, during their investigation, law enforcement officers found Hesse’s clothes were soaked, as if to remove the blood that was on them.

The clothes were allegedly placed in a trash can at the nearby RV park showers. Larson indicated the clothes conformed to the ones Hesse was wearing when the officer first saw him for the noise disturbance call.

The fact that the clothes were hidden from officers is the basis for the tampering charge, according to the court document.

*Deputy Regional Editor Scott Shindledecker contributed to this report.*

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