

Litany of pain and sorrow ^{5/3/06}



GORDON DANIELS

Family members of David Sullivan, who was shot and killed Dec. 7, 2004, in Amherst, speak after Bryan Johnston, the man convicted of the crime, was sentenced Tuesday. From left, Mary Lou Matheson of New York, the victim's mother; Daniel Sullivan, his brother; and Daniel C. Sullivan, his father.

Murder victim's family tells of grief, ruined lives

By **KIMBERLY ASHTON**
Staff Writer

NORTHAMPTON — Speaking publicly for the first time, David Sullivan's mother said Tuesday that no words can explain the acute pain of having her son stripped from her life by murder.

"A murder has many tentacles and each one grabs hold of you and suffocates your normalcy and twists our heart so that the pain is absolutely unbearable and constant," Mary Lou Matheson, Sullivan's mother, told Judge Bertha Josephson in Hampshire Superior Court.

Sullivan was 22 and a senior at the University of Massachusetts when Bryan Johnston, a friend from high school, shot him at close range with an assault rifle in his Amherst apartment on Dec. 7, 2004.

After a monthlong trial during which dozens of witnesses took the stand, Sullivan's parents and siblings spoke publicly for the first time, unleashing intense grief and fury in a one-hour sentencing hearing before Josephson.

Matheson and Sullivan's father and sister addressed the court, as did Stephen Kubicki's mother. Kubicki was Sullivan's roommate and found his body.

Daniel C. Sullivan, David's father, spoke of the number

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GORDON DANIELS

Bryan Johnston, center, with his lawyer, Alexander Nappan, listen as Judge Bertha Josephson sentences Johnston to 20 to 30 years in prison for firearms charges. He was sentenced last week to life in prison for the murder of high-school friend David Sullivan.

■ For complete victim impact statements, see Gazettenet.com.

■ Bryan Johnston is sentenced to 20 to 30 additional years on gun charges. See story, Page A8.

Families share grief over slain UMass student

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of people Johnston's actions devastated.

He "ruined David's family's lives, he ruined his own family's lives and he ruined his own," Daniel Sullivan said in court.

"I've cried more in the past year than I have in my whole life. The first six months it was uncontrollable. I might be working along and all of a sudden I would just start sobbing," he said. "Just to think of the finality of David's absence tears me up. I keep expecting him to come walking through the door with a basket full of dirty laundry like always."

Johnston, 24, was convicted Friday of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison.

He had admitted killing Sullivan but claimed he was insane when he did so. A jury Friday found him guilty.

In their statements to the court, Sullivan's family urged Josephson to sentence Johnston to the maximum sentence.

"There is not one day that I don't see his body lying on his bedroom floor, or think of the gunshots and wounds inflicted on him and don't live with the horror of his being murdered," said a tearful Matheson.

While the family spoke, Johnston, wearing a red Department of Corrections uniform and blue prison jacket instead of the suits he wore during trial, sat with Nappan.

His mother, Joan Johnston, stared at the floor, and later, she blew her son a kiss as he left in shackles.

Defense attorney Alexander Nappan said in court that the Johnstons feel enormous shame and guilt. "There are members of the Johnston family who would give their lives to bring David Sullivan back," he said.

"The murderer's apparent lack of remorse, indeed, his haughty laughter when told for sure that David is dead, sickens my soul," said Sullivan's father.

Nappan said that in the past year, while on psychiatric medication, Johnston has expressed the first indication that he did something wrong. "Now, for the first time, there is the blossoming of a conscience," Nappan said.

David Sullivan's sister, Rachel Sullivan, 20, shook as she told Josephson that Johnston has shown no remorse. She now attends Westfield State College, where Johnston had been pursuing a degree in criminal justice.

She also read the statement her brother, Daniel Sullivan, 22, wrote — a compact commentary charged with anger. "I believe that I speak for society as a whole in saying that this sociopath needs to be locked away forever so he cannot hurt anyone again and ruin any more lives," Rachel Sullivan read on her brother Daniel Sullivan's behalf.

Two other siblings, Nathan Sullivan and Sarah A. Pratt, were not in court.

Josephson told the family that she was sorry for their loss and that it was clear David Sullivan was a wonderful person.



GORDON DANIELS

Daniel C. Sullivan, father of murder victim David Sullivan, standing at right, reads a victim impact statement at a Hampshire Superior Court session Tuesday. To his left is prosecutor Renee Steese.

Gun charges bring 20-30 years more

NORTHAMPTON — Convicted murderer Bryan Johnston was in Hampshire Superior Court Tuesday for sentencing on the remaining charges of armed burglary, possession of a large-capacity firearm in the commission of a felony and possession of a large-capacity firearm.

Judge Bertha D. Josephson adopted the recommendation offered by First Assistant Northwestern District Attorney Renee Steese that Johnston receive a prison sentence of 20 to 30 years in prison in addition to his life sentence.

That time is significant because should his murder con-

viction be overturned on appeal — and appeals on murder convictions are automatic — he will still face 20 to 30 years in prison.

Defense lawyer Alexander Nappan had asked for any additional time to be served concurrently with the life sentence.

— **KIMBERLY ASHTON**

Excerpts from family's statements

From Mary Lou Matheson, David Sullivan's mother:

On Jan. 28, 1982, my son, David, was placed in my arms for the first time just minutes after he took his first breath. He was so precious, his face so flawless, his skin so soft and I whispered, "I love you, son," for the first time.

On Dec. 17, 2004, I was led to a coffin where my beautiful son lay. This time his face not flawless, his skin not so soft, only cold, very cold, and I whispered, "I love you, son," for the last time.

Being a victim of a violent crime such as this murder is at least these things:

It is about the initial shock, throwing the telephone and screaming uncontrollably for three hours after receiving the life-altering call.

It is about the stress and pains in the neck and depression, having counseling once a week and medication every day to help me cope.

It is about calling David's cell phone number just to hear his voice and saying the message out loud to yourself to feel closer to him.

It is about the agonizing frustration of knowing that he died alone.

It is about the fact that if Bryan had gotten help then David would be alive today.

From Daniel C. Sullivan, David Sullivan's father:

Losing my David ... is a viscerally wrenching experience without comparison.

This last year I've racked my mind asking God "Why? Why David?" By all accounts, we have heard what a good person he was. He was always concerned about those around him: his family, his friends and, yes, Bryan Johnston.

The one thing that brings me a measure of comfort is the distinct possibility that, to God, perhaps David was a "perfected spirit," and as such had no more reason to slog along on this earth like the rest of us.

From Daniel Sullivan, David Sullivan's brother:

Bryan Johnston is crazy. He is crazy like a fox. He has lived his pathetic existence in a twisted quest for respect and a desire to be feared by others.

I want everyone to forget of Bryan Johnston, while he wastes away the days and hours of his pathetic existence, as my family and I will.

From Rachel Sullivan, David Sullivan's sister:

I last saw my brother the week before the murder. He gave me a big hug and told me to be careful.

Things like this are not supposed to happen.

My family and I will suffer every day for the rest of our lives for what he has done.