



The Galveston County Daily News
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'They're On the Floor...Dead'

By Scott E. Williams
Published December 9, 2005

TEXAS CITY — Jurors in a capital murder case heard the 9-1-1 call the dead couple's daughter made when she found their bloody bodies in the Texas City home they had shared for decades.

Julie Thomas placed the call shortly after midnight on Feb. 11, 2004. She went to her parents' home in the 1200 block of Third Avenue South and found her father, 74-year-old William Clement, lying dead in the kitchen.

Nearby was her mother, 71-year-old Lorena Pearl Clement, who was clinging to life.

"Someone broke into the house!" a near-hysterical Thomas told a 9-1-1 operator. "My parents were attacked! They're laying on the floor, dead!"

As police operator Frank Furley implored her to "stop screaming," Thomas pleaded with him to send help immediately.

"My mother is bleeding to death!" she exclaimed.

Help arrived, but Pearl's injuries were too grave to treat. She also died.

Thomas' family tragedy would only deepen. As she was calling for help, police less than a block away had pulled over a van containing four teens who would become suspects in the case. One of them, the one prosecutors accused of beating the couple to death with a tire iron, was Thomas' son.

Prosecutor Stacey Jones played the tape during the second day of the capital murder trial of Thomas Justin "T.J." Thomas, 19.

Thomas' attorney, Tad Nelson, discussed his client's calm demeanor and what he saw as problems with evidence collection during cross-examination of officers at the scene.

Gene Crow, with the Texas City Police Department's identification division, admitted under cross-examination that the kitchen, where William Clement had been attacked, was not one of

the rooms where officers searched for hair samples.

Crow answered, "Yes," when Nelson asked, "If you had hair samples in the kitchen of someone other than T.J., that might have implied that they were in there, wouldn't it?"

Police officers stopped the van because it matched the description of one used in an unrelated stabbing. Inside, officers found the four teens, a tire iron and several items that had come from the Clements' home.

Because prosecutors are not seeking the death penalty, a guilty verdict in this case would mean an automatic life sentence for Thomas.

Daniel Robert Northrup, 17; Eric Lee Kilman, 19; and Christine Marie Cox, 19; also face capital murder charges in the case. Thomas is the first to go to trial.