

Girlfriend's Murder Trial; Centers On Jealousy, Rage

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Girlfriend's Murder Trial Centers On Jealousy, Rage

SHE IS ACCUSED OF KILLING BOYFRIEND'S EX-GIRLFRIEND

By THOMAS W. KRAUSE

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TAMPA - Laisha Landrum's disdain for her boyfriend's old flame grew until one summer night in 2004, when she repeatedly struck the 16-year-old girl over the head with two steel pots, a hammer and, possibly, a boombox, prosecutors told a jury Tuesday.

Landrum's defense attorney countered that representation. In the months before Emily Clemons died, Brian Gonzalez said, she obsessed over her former boyfriend until, one day, she came to their apartment and tried to stab Landrum. Landrum, he said, struck the teen once with a pot. Any following strikes were made by Landrum's boyfriend, he said.

"I believe the evidence will show that Laisha Landrum's actions were justified in that apartment," Gonzalez said.

Landrum, 18, faces life in prison if convicted of Clemons' murder. Landrum's boyfriend, Rocky Almestica, 17, is serving a life sentence for his role in the slaying. A jury convicted him of second-degree murder in November 2004.

On Tuesday, Assistant State Attorney Donna Hanes described for the jury how Clemons was struck a minimum of 34 times. A sheriff's detective displayed two steel pots that prosecutors said were used to strike Clemons until the handles broke.

Landrum then called a friend to help dispose of the body, Hanes said. Marshall Watson testified that he came to the apartment and saw a bloodied body. He said he left, refusing to help.

Clemons, bleeding badly with a cracked skull, was wrapped in a comforter, dragged down a flight of stairs and thrown into a trash bin, Hanes told the jury. Two women eventually walked by and heard noise. Rescue crews found Clemons barely alive. She died the next day at Tampa General Hospital.

In the months before Clemons' death, the relationship among the three teens had grown volatile.

Clemons and Almestica stopped dating in January 2003. Clemons had been pregnant with Almestica's baby but suffered a miscarriage. She moved out of town.

When Clemons returned in March 2004, Almestica was dating Landrum, and the two had a child together. Nonetheless, Clemons spoke with Almestica often. Landrum, Hanes said, grew jealous.

Landrum's attorney said the jealousy came from Clemons. Gonzalez said she was obsessed with Almestica; Landrum had the life she wanted.

Clemons, Gonzalez said, came to the apartment and told Landrum she was going to kill her and her child. Later that night, Landrum told police that Clemons stabbed her with something so she grabbed a pot and struck back.

Prosecutors, however, said Landrum was found to have a scratch but no stab wound.

Landrum also lied to detectives, telling them Clemons left the apartment after the scuffle. Landrum's attorney admitted to jurors that his client had lied.

Testimony continues today.

Reporter Thomas W. Krause can be reached at (813) 259-7698.

Photo credit: Tribune photos by JASON BEHNKEN

Photo: Attorney Brian Gonzalez talks with Laisha Landrum on Tuesday. He told jurors that Landrum hit Emily Clemons with a pot after Clemons tried to stab her.

Photo: Emily Clemons

16-year-old was struck at least 34 times.

Photo: Marshall Watson testifies Tuesday about being called to the couple's apartment to help dispose of the body. He said he refused and then left. Laisha Landrum's boyfriend, Rocky Almestica, 17, is serving a life sentence for his role in the slaying.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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