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Manslaughter conviction for former Island woman

Jury rejects murder charge for Queens resident in death of her father

By PETER N. SPENCER
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

They did not want to send Brigitte Harris to prison.

That's what jurors said yesterday at state Supreme Court in Queens, after convicting the former Staten Island woman of second-degree manslaughter in the killing and mutilation of her father two years ago — and acquitting her of more serious charges of second-degree murder and first-degree manslaughter.

She could be released on parole in a year and a half.

"There wasn't one person that really wanted to see her go to prison. If there were some way we could have done that, we would have. But there was no way out of it," said jury foreman Anthony Marshall yesterday outside court, where he and other members of the panel gathered to speak about the two-week-long trial.

The seven women and five men came to their decision after less than three hours of deliberation. They said Ms. Harris had suffered enough at the hands of her father, who she said repeatedly raped, molested and beat her from the age of 3.

Only one of the men even suggested convicting Ms. Harris of murder, the jurors said, but he changed his mind after the judge fully explained the legal definition of intent: "The objective or purpose to do something."

The distinction was critical to the case. Ms. Harris, 28, contends that she did not intend to kill her father, 55-



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE FILE PHOTO

Jurors said they did not want to send Brigitte Harris, above, to jail after hearing her testify that she was sexually abused by her father; she does face 5 to 15 years at sentencing Oct. 29.

year-old St. George resident Eric Goodridge, after luring him to her Far Rockaway apartment on July 28, 2007. She only wanted to keep him from sexually abusing anyone else. He was found handcuffed and beaten, with his penis severed and a towel stuffed in his mouth.

DISTURBING TESTIMONY

"I have daughters, and hearing the stuff she was going through started to get to me," said Marshall, who admitted he was uncomfortable listening to Ms. Harris' testimony.

The unusual case flipped the common dynamic that a jury is supposed to feel sympathy for the victim and at least some aversion toward the defendant.

One juror called Goodridge "a sick pedophile"; others agreed with the prosecutor's statement that he was "despicable." At least 10 jurors said they plan to write letters to the judge and the parole board to ask that Ms. Harris be set free on time served.

"No one should have to go through what she had gone through. I just felt to put her away for another 30 or 40 years is not justice. Hopefully, she will get the help she needs and be able to make a life for herself when she gets

out," said a female juror who did not wish to be identified.

Ms. Harris, who appeared calm and emotionless during the trial, turned to defense attorney Arthur Aidala after the verdict was read aloud. "I'm happy," she said, according to the attorney.

Aidala also was pleased with the outcome.

"Under all of the circumstances, any time the top count is murder two and you walk out with manslaughter two, you have to feel relieved," Aidala said. "Hopefully, the judge sentences her appropriately, considering the abuse she suffered."

Aidala said the Queens district attorney had turned down a deal for his client to plead guilty to second-degree manslaughter in exchange for five years in prison — similar to the plea deal Sung-Ann Choi-Lee agreed to after stabbing her husband to death in their Fort Wadsworth home six years ago.

Ms. Choi and psychiatrists testified at her 2004 trial that she "snapped" after years of unrelenting physical and psychological abuse, including numerous rapes and sexual assaults by her husband.

Ms. Harris now will face a maximum of five to 15 years in prison when she is sentenced on Oct. 29, instead of the 15 years to life a murder conviction could have brought. She was also found guilty of fourth-degree criminal possession of a weapon (a scalpel).

Her sister, Carleen Goodridge, said she was "ecstatic" about the jury's decision. Ms. Goodridge said the trial brought out a lot of the guilt she feels for not helping her sister before she killed their father.

"I am looking forward to bonding with my sister again, finding ways we can make our relationship better, how we can make our family better," Ms. Goodridge said.