

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



SHANNON WALLACE
District Attorney

Cherokee County Justice Center
90 North Street, Suite 390
Canton, GA 30114

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Cyndi Crossland
Public Information Officer
cbcrossland@cherokeega.com
770-479-1488

**Defendant Pleads Guilty (Mentally Ill) and Receives Sentence for
Malice Murder and Theft of Motor Vehicle**

State vs. Joseph Twilley

May 2, 2019 – Joseph Twilley, 57, pled guilty but mentally ill this week to malice murder, felony murder, aggravated assault, and theft of a motor vehicle. He was sentenced to life in prison. The defendant was previously diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, depressive type.

While the defendant admitted that he had not been taking medication necessary to combat his mental illness at the time of the murder, the Georgia Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities doctor determined that he understood right from wrong at the time of his offense and, ultimately, also found him competent to stand trial.

Mr. Twilley killed his sister Karen Twilley in November 2016 at the Woodstock home she shared with their mother, Evelyn Twilley. The defendant used a piece of wood to hit Karen's head multiple times, causing fatal injuries. An autopsy report also identified evidence of strangulation, which likely contributed to her death.

During the plea hearing, in which the State was represented by Assistant District Attorney William Hunter, Mr. Twilley admitted to murdering his sister, who served as his guardian due to his mental illness.

Mr. Twilley said after the assault, Karen fell face down on concrete outside the home. "I listened to her breathe for about five minutes," said Mr. Twilley. When she stopped breathing, he covered her body with a blanket, took money from her purse, located the keys to his mother's car, and drove away.

After stealing his mother's car, he drove as far away as Mississippi, changed his clothes, replaced the car's tag with a stolen Tennessee license, and ended up back at his Woodstock apartment, where he was arrested.

"This case destroyed a family. Twilley's mother lost both her children after years upon years of attempting to address her son's mental health issues. Mr. Twilley was found responsible for his crimes under the law because he still knew right from wrong when he killed his sister; however, it's a prime example of the limitations of the systems we currently have in place," said Cherokee County District Attorney Shannon Wallace. "The sad truth is Mr. Twilley is a tremendous danger to society. The life sentence he received is appropriate so that his mental health will always be monitored."

Mr. Twilley told Judge Ellen McElyea that he went to his sister's home with the intention of confronting her about money he believed she was stealing from him. He said the money was "the straw that broke the camel's

back.” He said the real reason he was angry was that he lost custody of his child after Karen reported him to child protective services, an event that occurred 15-20 years ago. “She’s taken everything from me,” said Mr. Twilley. Karen had previously told friends and family that she feared her brother might someday hurt her.

“Evidence at the scene of the crime, such as the fact that the defendant wore gloves at the time of the murder and had unscrewed the outside light, and his own statements prove that his actions were premeditated. He went to see his sister that night with the intention of murdering her,” said Hunter. “The Cherokee Sheriff’s Office did an excellent job investigating this case. They arrested the defendant within two days, and he has been in custody ever since.”

The Office of the District Attorney for the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit is committed to seeking justice, acting with integrity, and collaborating with partner agencies in the criminal justice system in order to protect the citizens of Cherokee County and the State of Georgia.

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