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Judge brings murder victim's daughter to tears

Apology unprecedented



In my Opinion

■ Dick Braendle,
Chief Courtwatcher

The publication deadline for the July issue prevented us from relating the climax to the feature story concerning the 13-year ordeal to which the family of Marilyn Vest was subjected by the decisions of our pro-criminal Florida Supreme Court. — Editor

After sentencing Gerald Murray to death for the third time (for the brutal murder of Marilyn Vest), following a jury recommendation of 11 to 1, Circuit Judge Charles Arnold concluded:

"Before recessing court, I want to express especially to Ms. Vest's daughter, Ms. Coble, and to all other family and friends of Ms. Vest, the sincere apology of this Court for almost 13 years you've grieved for the loss of Ms. Vest. And all any of you have asked for is that justice be served.

"Everyone in the Criminal Justice System has performed their jobs to the best of their abilities, but yet there is no finality to this case. That is regrettable. I place no blame on any person or any

Court, I simply apologize to each of you on behalf of the Criminal Justice System and I would hope that justice will ultimately be served in this case."

Vest's daughter, Jennifer Coble, was so moved by Arnold's remarks that she could not hold back her tears.

In my nearly eight years of almost daily court watching, I have never heard a judge apologize for the system. This case certainly deserved it more than any I have seen.

Besides the compassion he showed for the victim's family and friends, Arnold must also be commended for the most efficient, fair and non-nonsense manner in which he conducted this trial.

"...I simply apologize to each of you on behalf of the Criminal Justice System and I would hope that justice will ultimately be served in this case."

— Circuit Judge Charles Arnold

In an effort to make the trial as appeal-proof as possible, Arnold favored Murray on all close rulings, particularly the difficult one in which he barred introduction of any DNA evidence against Murray. Readers will recall that the Florida Supreme Court twice remanded the case for retrials on the basis of technicalities involving DNA evidence, even though this evidence played little role in establishing Murray's guilt.

All attorneys I know, prosecution and defense, applaud Arnold for his efficient court management. It is extremely rare that he starts a court session more than one minute later than scheduled.

— Dick Braendle is Chief Courtwatcher in the Duval County court system.

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

Edmund Burke,
18th-century Scottish philosopher
and British parliamentarian



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