



Staten Island Advance

SEPTEMBER 30, 2009

A heroine or vigilante?

Jury hears conflicting views of daughter as her trial for strangling and mutilating father wraps up

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Either Brigitte Harris heroically tried to stop a sexually abusive "monster" or she was a vengeful vigilante when she strangled and mutilated her father two years ago.

A jury began weighing those conflicting views from the defense and prosecution as Ms. Harris' murder trial wrapped up yesterday at state Supreme Court in Queens.

The seven men and five women must decide if Ms. Harris, 28, is guilty of second-degree murder — a charge that carries a minimum sentence of 15 years to life in prison — or lesser charges of first- or second-degree manslaughter.

Ms. Harris is also charged with fourth-degree counts of criminal possession of a weapon, criminal possession of a scalpel and fifth-degree tampering with evidence for throwing her father's severed penis under a boardwalk in Far Rockaway.

Both sides agree on one thing: Ms. Harris attacked



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE FILE PHOTO

Jurors must decide if Brigitte Harris, 28, above, is guilty of second-degree murder or lesser charges of manslaughter in the death of her father, whom she described as sexually abusive.

her father, 55-year-old St. George resident Eric Goodridge, after luring him to her Queens apartment on July 28, 2007. He was found there handcuffed and beaten, with his genitals cut off and a towel stuffed in his mouth.

Her defense attorney, Arthur Aidala, said his client acted under the influence of "extreme emotional disturbance" brought on by years of molestation, rape and physical abuse at the hands of Goodridge, and triggered by the belief that her father planned to do the same to her young nieces.

During an emotional, hour-long summation, Aidala told the jury Ms. Harris didn't plan to kill her father — she just "needed to take his

weapon off."

"Brigitte stopped her pedophile father from destroying any more lives," Aidala said.

"A father's duty — in the animal kingdom or the human race — is to protect his young, to protect his children. Eric Goodridge preyed on his children. He made her what she was on July 28, 2007. He created her," he continued.

Now it is up to the jury to "save Brigitte," he added.

Prosecutor Karen Ross saw the matter differently.

"You may not like the victim. You may think he is the most despicable man you ever heard of. You may even feel sympathy for the defendant. That doesn't give her

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the right to take the law into her own hands," Ms. Ross said.

Ms. Harris intended to kill her father even if she didn't plan it, Ms. Ross argued. At the moment she confronted him about the sexual abuse inside her apartment, Ms. Harris became so enraged her "plan shifted from just stopping him to killing him."

"She did nothing to help him. Nothing. She just left him there, lifeless," Ms. Ross added.

Ms. Harris planned her course of action for weeks, purchasing scalpels on eBay and researching castration on the Internet. She made a video on her computer three days before the killing, attributing her lack of faith in the justice system to the inaction when her father repeatedly raped her.

"Nobody understands, unless it happens to you," she said in the video, which was played yesterday in the courtroom. "It had to be done. It just had to be done."

The jury was set to continue deliberations this morning.

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REPORTED FIRST ON SILIVE.COM
YESTERDAY, 3:32 P.M.