

Survivalist gets 3 life sentences in Jenner slayings

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Kathy Cutshall reached down and lifted her daughter's wedding dress, white with pink flowers. The tags were still on the garment. Lindsay Cutshall never got to wear it.

On Monday in a Sonoma County courtroom, Cutshall held up the dress and asked the man who executed her daughter and her fiance on a Jenner beach almost 15 years ago to look at it. And Shaun Gallon did, turning to the grieving mother for the first and only time during his sentencing hearing.

"I brought it because it's empty. It represents what they lost," Cutshall said. "Thank you for looking at it."

Calmly, she draped the dress on a wooden partition and continued with what is known as a victim impact statement, detailing the destruction and pain the 40-year-old Gallon, a survivalist with a history of strange and violent behavior, heaped upon her family.

Moments later, Judge Robert LaForge sentenced Gallon to three consecutive life sentences in prison without the possibility of parole.

The hearing marked an emotional end to one of Sonoma County's most notorious criminal cases. After his arrest for killing his brother in 2017, Gallon confessed to shooting to death Cutshall, 22, of Fresno, Ohio, and her 26-year-old fiance, Jason Allen, of Zeeland, Mich., ending the mystery of a crime that shocked Northern California and remained unsolved for years.

The deeply religious couple, who had been working that summer at a Christian youth camp along the American River in El Dorado County, had planned to return to the Midwest to get married after a three-day sightseeing trip up the coast.

Instead, they had the terrible fortune of coming across Gallon. After a night spent driving up Highway 1 upset at his own life, Gallon spotted the couple, whom he had never met, sleeping on the beach — and shot both at close range. The couple were killed sometime between nightfall Aug. 14, 2004, and before sunrise Aug. 16, officials said.

Monday's hearing provided new details of the couple's murder. It had been unclear if those details would ever become public after Gallon pleaded no contest last month to murdering the couple and his brother as well as attempting to murder another man with a package bomb.

The deal spared Gallon the death penalty. The victims' families said they were at peace with the result.

"We are OK with the death penalty being removed," the Allen family wrote in a statement read by father Chris Cutshall. (The Allens could not attend the hearing due to a family illness.) "He must now answer to a righteous God."

Wearing a blue jail jumpsuit and a bushy beard, Gallon sat quietly, staring straight ahead, for much of the proceeding.

Cutshall's mother recounted that she had almost brought her daughter's cross necklace along with the wedding dress, until her grandson persuaded her to leave it behind.

"What if you lost it?" the young boy told her, she said. "We've already lost so much."

She put it back in her dresser.

Her husband brought one of his daughter's hair ties, which he had found in her dresser, still with strands of her hair tangled in it. And her gold ring, which he wears on his right pinkie finger.

"To think I was just 3½ weeks away from officiating that wedding," Cutshall, a pastor, told the judge. "But then pure evil walked down on that beach and came upon two sleeping people.

"I'm a man with a broken heart, and I always will be, and I'm OK with that," he said. "Lindsay's worth it. ... This man is not going to have any power in my life. This man doesn't deserve to have any control over me, and he doesn't."

The hearing began with Gallon's defense attorney, Deputy Public Defender Jeff Mitchell, saying his client's life changed dramatically around 2001. He alluded to multiple hospitalizations and an incident in which Gallon took "too large a dose of LSD and was never the same after that."

His mental health issues appeared to have "driven him to commit these acts," Mitchell said, calling them "senseless" and with "no motivation."

Mitchell read from Gallon's confession, in which he said the killings made him "feel wretched inside." He said he wrote to the victims' families from jail, saying, "There's not a day that goes by that I have not thought of what I've done."

Chief Deputy District Attorney Spencer Brady, who got emotional at times during the hearing, called the murders "some of the worst crimes in the history of this county."

He showed photos the couple took in the days before the murder: Allen in front of the Golden Gate Bridge, a selfie of the smiling couple, and finally a shot of the sunset on the Jenner beach, presumably taken hours before they would be shot.

For the first time, Brady described the events of the murder in detail. Gallon was driving in his car, "upset at his own life," the prosecutor said. He would tell investigators he "snapped" that day over the "torment" he was going through.

After spotting what he thought was a couple of homeless people descend down an embankment, he returned to the spot later.

"I was gonna kill them out of spite," he told investigators.

Gallon scaled a 200-foot cliff in the darkness with a flashlight, saw the couple sleeping on the beach and then climbed the narrow path up the slope to his car. He retrieved his .45-caliber Marlin rifle, which he had sawed off a foot from the barrel to conceal it, and again climbed back down the cliff, finally standing above the sleeping couple.

What happened next was described in detail by Gallon himself as Brady played audio of his April 27, 2017, confession to police.

“I saw two people asleep in sleeping bags, just layin’ there asleep,” he told the detective. “I just made myself do it ... like, I don’t, I don’t know what I was thinking.”

He said a voice told him he’d regret his action, but he went ahead. He shot Allen first from about 7 feet away.

“The girl sat up and looked at her boyfriend, and by that time I had already cocked and shot her behind the ear,” he said in the interrogation.

As the audio played to a crowded courtroom, Cutshall’s mother sobbed in the front row as her husband rubbed her back. They had never heard those details.

“She sat up,” Chris Cutshall told the judge during his statement. “I didn’t know that until today. We were hoping she was still sleeping.”

Brady also played a memorial video of Cutshall and Allen, showing the two as children and enjoying life together. As the images played, Kathy Cutshall dropped to her knees and softly sang along to a gospel song.

Before flying back to Ohio on Tuesday, the Cutshalls planned to return to the beach to collect sand.

New details also emerged in the 2017 shooting of Gallon’s 36-year-old brother, Shamus.

Gallon built the AR-15 he used to kill his brother. With no warning, he got the gun from his car, walked up a staircase to his family’s Forestville home and shot his brother in the chest at point-blank range. As his brother struggled to breathe, Gallon’s gun jammed, but he calmly cleared the stuck round and finished off his brother, shooting him repeatedly in the neck, Brady said.

After Gallon’s arrest for that murder, he sent a note to Sonoma County detectives saying he wanted to talk to them about a double murder he committed.

Once he was charged with the unsolved Jenner beach murders, Kathy Cutshall mailed him a Bible. She doesn’t know if he ever received it, but she asked him about it Monday in her final comments to him.

“Do you have a Bible, Mr. Gallon?” she asked.

“Yes, I do,” he responded.

“Please read it.”

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Sonoma-County-man-gets-3-life-sentences-for-14096944.php>