

https://www.smdailyjournal.com/news/local/convicted-bomber----grudge-or-paranoia/article_83a8f3a5-e694-59fa-ae53-1b34a34812d5.html

From the Daily Journal archives

Convicted bomber -- grudge or paranoia?

By Michelle Durand Daily Journal Staff

Apr 6, 2011



The convicted teen school bomber who wanted to kill his teachers was seeking payback for perceived wrongs in past years instead of acting from concern they were presently out to get them — signs Alexander Robert Youshock was not paranoid and possibly not mentally ill, testified a psychiatrist hired by prosecutors to determine if the boy was sane.

"Mr. Youshock's grudge had to do with the past tense," said Dr. James Missett. "That's revenge ... that's not paranoia."

Missett's assessment differed from defense expert Dr. Pablo Stewart, who on Monday said Youshock was an "extremely psychotic" schizophrenic and didn't know what he was acting wrongfully. Missett also veered from two other doctors called by the prosecution who said Youshock is most likely a paranoid schizophrenic who felt justified in acting but knew the murder plot was legally and morally unacceptable.



"In my opinion, he knew that his acts at the time were wrong or illegal," said Dr. Jeffrey Gould, who evaluated Youshock on behalf of the court after the 18-year-old entered a plea of not guilty by reason of insanity to seven felonies.

Gould said he is "very" confident the teen was sane.

Last week, a jury convicted Youshock of six of those crimes, including the premeditated attempted murder of his former chemistry teacher at Hillsdale High School. The jury hung 9 to 3 on another count of attempted murder, prompting a mistrial.



Jurors are now hearing from doctors, both court-appointed and retained, to determine if Youshock was sane on Aug. 24, 2009 when he went to the campus with 10 homemade pipe bombs, a chain saw and sword. After failing to start the chain saw, Youshock ignited two bombs that injured no one before being tackled by a teacher.

The defense has the burden of proof in this phase of trial which determines if Youshock is incarcerated for up to life in prison or hospitalized in a state facility. To be found insane, Youshock must have a mental illness or deficiency and not have known that his crimes were either morally or legally wrong by societal standards.

Youshock's likely schizophrenia left him unable to realize that the teachers and Principal Jeff Gilbert were not trying to ruin his life by pushing him to participate in school and complete homework, Gould said.

On the morning of the attack, Youshock continued having that delusion, said Gould.

"Because of his mental illness, he thought he was doing the right thing," Gould said.



However, his mental illness did not keep him from being able to plan and prepare for the attack in an organized manner and does not discount his ability to understand the crimes' wrongfulness, Gould testified.

Gould said Youshock knew his mother would disapprove of his killing people with bombs, deliberately acted out of character by lying to avoid detection and alluded to knowing of society's disapproval in a suicide note.

"Don't remember me for my final actions," Gould read from the note found after Youshock's arrest.

Gould, who interviewed Youshock and several others including his family, friends and jail staff to reach his conclusion, said it is hard to know if he was in the throws of schizophrenia at the time of the incident but it would have been a "very early stage" if so. His hallucinations were "fairly mild," Gould said although under cross-examination he conceded that the events could be serious for an individual even if they don't rank high on the formal psychiatric scale.

Missett, who specializes in school and workplace violence, said Youshock may have moderate mental and emotional troubles but he doesn't hold the same diagnosis as the other doctors.



Most schizophrenics have a universal mental decline but, after dropping out of Hillsdale to enroll in West Bay High School, his grades actually shot up to 90 percent to 100 percent, Missett said.

Like Gould, Missett highlighted that Youshock focused on five months of planning his school attack rather than displaying disorganized thoughts. Youshock displayed some signs of psychosis but that doesn't mean he fits the criteria of mental illness, particularly if he was appropriately afraid his plot would be discovered, Missett said.



"Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean you're a paranoid schizophrenic," he said.

Instead, Missett said Youshock was a copycat of other school attacks and reacting to other real-world shootings rather than delusional threats inside his own head. After arrest, Youshock told police he wasn't crazy, he knows right from wrong and accepts a glass of water even though he claims to fear being poisoned, he added.

Even Youshock's calm, almost happy, demeanor the days before the attack show that Youshock's issues did not have a biological source like schizophrenia, Missett said.

Youshock had conceived and planned the attack and was ready to go ahead, Missett said.

"He's really come to the end of the road and the only thing left is to wait for Monday and go to school," he said.

In several testy exchanges, defense attorney Jonathan McDougall hammered Missett for potentially rushing a 62-page report in four days after interviewing Youshock in mid-March. McDougall questioned why Missett did not include family history or medical records from juvenile hall and county jail although he had access to the information for two years prior. He also pointed out several perceived errors the doctor made during the interview such as asking Youshock how he thought his dog would feel because he believed "Collie" was an animal instead of the chain saw named after the Columbine School massacre.

The prosecution rested after Missett's testimony. Attorneys will present closing arguments beginning at 9:30 Wednesday, followed by jury deliberations.

Youshock remains in custody without bail.





San Carlos Elms
Kaiser Permanente Medical Center

Our fully-vaccinated residents are once again enjoying an open social lifestyle. Together we are moving forward!

CLICK NOW TO SCHEDULE YOUR PERSONAL TOUR

Michelle Durand can be reached by email: michelle@smdailyjournal.com or by phone: (650) 344-5200 ext. 102.

