
Posted on Fri, May. 05, 2006

Psychologist: Ross confession forced

SYLVIA LIM
Herald Staff Writer

BRADENTON - A forensic psychologist testified Thursday that Manatee County sheriff's detectives coerced Blaine Ross into confessing that he killed his parents.

Greg DeClue, who testified at a pre-trial hearing for Ross, based his conclusion on a review of audio and video tapes that recorded Ross's conversations with investigators after his parents were killed in January 2004.

The bludgeoned bodies of Richard and Kathleen Ross were found Jan. 7, 2004, in their Lionshead home. Two days later, detectives say that Blaine Ross confessed to the slayings.

Defense attorneys used pre-trial hearings this week to try to convince Circuit Judge Edward Nicholas to rule as inadmissible the confession and other statements Ross made. The attorneys have argued that detectives obtained the statements without fully advising Ross of his Miranda rights.

Ross, 23, is set to stand trial on first-degree murder charges the week of June 26. If he is convicted, he could be sentenced to death.

On one of the videotapes reviewed by DeClue, Ross is sandwiched by a wall and a table, with a detective in front of him. Ross is seen cupping his face in his hands and denying that he killed his parents.

But Manatee County Sheriff's Detective Bill Waldron pressed on, telling Ross to think about his family, alternating between accusations and persuasion.

DeClue testified that this type of interrogation technique may have cracked Ross. He said Waldron ruthlessly elicited a confession from Ross.

"He (Waldron) challenged his memory, provided the crime's details and evidence," DeClue said. "He suggested thoughts, feelings and a motivation."

Authorities say Ross killed his parents over money, after his mother apparently cut him off of a \$107,000 inheritance. They also have said that Ross was angry with his parents, especially at his father, for cheating on his mother and for their pending divorce.

In false or coerced confessions, DeClue said, studies have shown that a suspect will admit to a crime but usually claim they cannot remember carrying it out. The suspects are also likely not to be able to provide investigators with little known facts about the crime.

DeClue isolated clips of Ross's interrogation to reinforce his points.

In most of the clips, a barefoot Ross denied killing his parents, stealing an ATM card and ransacking his own home to stage a break-in.

"I don't remember, I don't think I could go this far," Ross told Waldron.

But after nearly seven hours of questioning, DeClue said, Ross finally broke down and admitted to the homicides.

"I am sorry for what I did, I know I can't take it back," cried Ross toward the end of the interview, which was played in court Wednesday. "I didn't mean to, I don't even remember it."

Prosecutor Art Brown is scheduled to cross-examine DeClue, when the pre-trial hearing resumes June 15.