

Torture, Death Followed Suspects In Bethalto Triple Murder

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EDWARDSVILLE - Murder suspect Brady Witcher and convicted murderer Brittany McMillan went on an eight-day crime spree of kidnapping, torture, and murder as part of a Dec. 19, 2019, triple murder in Bethalto, a prosecutor told a judge Tuesday.

Madison County Assistant State's Attorney Morgan Hudson outlined the spree Tuesday as part of a hearing to determine what evidence will be allowed in trial.

Prior crimes are normally not allowed in evidence against a defendant because such information would prejudice the jury against the defendant. However, Hudson argued that the previous “bad acts” should be allowed in because they reveal the reason why the defendants drove to Bethalto to murder three people and steal a truck.

Hudson said much of the prior “bad acts” should be allowed because they provided a motive for the crimes in Bethalto. The fleeing couple needed a vehicle to continue their flight without being identified, Hudson argued.

One of the most gruesome acts was not allowed because it was part of a murder, which, Circuit Judge Kyle Napp ruled, would be more prejudicial than “probative.”

However, she ruled that much of the evidence from alleged crimes in Clarksville, Tenn., will be allowed in Witcher’s murder trial.

Hudson said that on Dec. 11, 2019, in Alabama, Witcher and McMillan stripped a woman, tied her up, beat her, cut her all over her body, sprayed paint over the wounds, put a rag over her face to suffocate her then shot her in the head “execution-style.”

Another Alabama victim was locked in a closet but managed to escape and reported the incident to police in Alabama on Dec. 13, 2019. Shell casings from a .45-caliber handgun were found at that scene. McMillan was allegedly armed with a .38-caliber handgun.

The judge ruled that she will allow testimony that a witness saw a .45-caliber handgun believed used in Alabama, but the rest of the activities in that state cannot be introduced.

Hudson said the suspects fled in a rented car in Alabama and fled to Clarksville, Tenn., where they forced their way into a home of a random couple in Clarksville, Tenn. In Clarksville, they pointed guns at the couple, tied them up, put tape over their mouths, placed them in a closet overnight, and demanded their keys to the couple’s 2012 GMC Sierra.

The man was taken from the closet by Witcher and taken to a bathroom where he was stabbed. Witcher pulled a gun that was fired, a .45-caliber shell casing was recovered from the scene.

Meanwhile, the female victim in the Clarksville incident freed herself from the closet and got into a struggle with McMillan. The victim wrestled the gun from McMillan, and the suspects fled in the couple's 2012 Sierra. Several .38-caliber shell casings were recovered from the scene

Both Clarksville victims identified both suspects from photo lineups.

The fleeing couple then took the Sierra and drove on Dec. 18 to the Bethalto home of a family that had lived with McMillan.

In Bethalto, Witcher shot three people "execution-style," according to Hudson. They stole a Ford Focus from Shari Yates, one of the Bethalto victims, Hudson claimed. "They needed a new car. That is why they drove to the home of Shari, killed her and everyone else there, and took her car (in order to avoid detection by law enforcement.)"

After the Bethalto killings, McMillan and Witcher both apparently drove to a parking garage in St. Louis. Witcher drove the stolen Sierra, and McMillan drive Yates' Focus, Hudson said.

Before the bodies were discovered in Bethalto, police discovered the stolen Sierra, which was ditched in the parking garage in St. Louis.

Hudson said a video surveillance camera at the parking lot caught images of Witcher leaving the Sierra and entering the Ford Focus. The police in the St. Louis area tracked the fleeing to a motel, where they found items allegedly stolen from the Clarksville case and a .45-caliber handgun

Hudson said the state needs to introduce the "prior bad acts" as admissible "to explain why the triple homicide, in this case, is both plausible and understandable."

"The other crimes evidence supports that state's theory that the defendant was involved in a larger scheme or design to build some type of criminal empire. He intended to commit crimes, steal cars and continue fleeing from authorities," Hudson told the judge.

McMillan pleaded guilty last week to three counts of first-degree murder of Yates, 59, her son, Andrew Brooks, 30, and John McMillan, 32.

She pleaded guilty in exchange for a life sentence and a promise by Alabama authorities that they would not seek the death penalty and that she would be imprisoned in Illinois.

Both Witcher and McMillan were charged with nine counts each of first-degree, one count of armed robbery, and one count of aggravated vehicular hijacking.