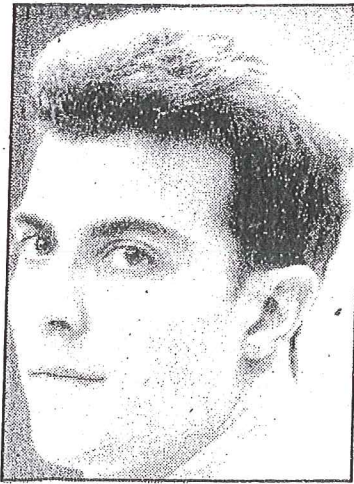


Victim's son: 'I'm happy there is justice'

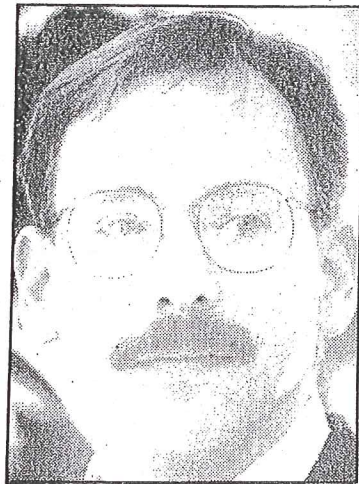


Oakland Press photos/TIM THOMPSON

Tom Copeland Jr., Helen Bazzetta's son: 'The jury has seen the obvious.'



Joseph Bazzetta



Michael Stern

Bazzetta guilty but mentally ill in '83 murder

By STEPHEN W. HUBER

Of The Oakland Press

Joseph C. Bazzetta will spend the rest of his life in prison after a jury found him guilty but mentally ill Monday of first-degree murder in the 1983 strangulation of his step-mother.

Bazzetta showed no emotion as the Oakland County Circuit Court jury foreman read the verdict, convicting Bazzetta of the Aug. 1, 1983, death of Helen M. Bazzetta.

The first-degree murder conviction carries an automatic life prison term with no parole but includes a provision for psychiatric treatment while he is incarcerated.

Jurors deliberated for about nine hours before reaching a verdict.

"I'm happy there is justice," said U.S. Air Force Sgt. Tom Copeland Jr., Helen Bazzetta's son. "The jury has seen the obvious. Now I hope they see the same for Michelle."

"There is precious little justice that comes out of the courts," said Assistant Prosecutor Michael Stern. "This is as close as you can come."

A second jury, deliberating the fate of Joseph's estranged wife, Michelle Grandis Bazzetta, 27, was unable to reach a verdict.

Michelle's jury was reread portions of her testimony and also reinstructed by Circuit Judge Gene Schnelz on the legal difference between first-degree murder, which is premeditated, and second-degree murder, which is not.

That jury's deliberations were to resume this morning. Michelle Bazzetta is charged with open murder.

While members of the victim's family hugged tearfully outside of the courtroom, Joseph Bazzetta's family appeared stunned as they walked away. None was available for comment.

Troy attorney Ronald Solomon, Joseph Bazzetta's attorney, had argued his client suffered from a drug-induced mental illness at the time of the killing and had been despondent because of the death of his natural mother in 1980.

Bazzetta, who turned 25 on Monday, had testified Satan had used his body to kill Helen.

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BAZZETTA

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Stepson found guilty but mentally ill in '83 strangling death of Helen Bazzetta

He admitted he did not like Helen. Solomon said his client could not have formed any criminal intent to kill her.

"I'm disappointed, obviously," Solomon said. "... Joe told me he understood this was a realistic possibility. He doesn't want to give up hope that it may come back (on appeal)."

For Helen Bazzetta's family, the verdict ended almost six years

of waiting. She disappeared Aug. 1, 1983, and her body was discovered by a would-be fortune hunter in a shallow grave in Highland Township on April 14, 1988.

Throughout the trial, which entered its third week Monday, Stern portrayed Joseph Bazzetta as a cold-blooded killer who used his drug and alcohol abuse, coupled with his participation in satanic rituals, as an excuse for striking Helen on the head with a baseball bat and then choking her with a bathrobe belt.

Two forensic psychologists testifying for the prosecution said Bazzetta was not insane at the time of the killing.

Copeland, who once shared a basement room with Joseph Bazzetta in their Warren home,

accused Joseph Bazzetta's family of using the insurance money from Helen's death to help pay legal fees for Joseph.

"I thought it was a shame that not one of the Bazzetta family ever said they were sorry about my mother's death," Copeland said.

Helen's sister, Betty Harpe, said the family would go Monday evening to the cemetery plot where her sister is buried.

"This is it, she can rest in peace," Harpe said. "It's been very difficult. The past six years have been a living hell. We're all going to the cemetery to say it's over."

Sentencing is set for Nov. 7 before Schnelz.
