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Saturday, December 22, 2007

Grant may never be free again

Despite option for parole, legal experts believe release is unlikely

George Hunter and Edward L. Cardenas / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- It will be a long time before convicted murderer Stephen Grant gets out of prison -- if he ever does get out, legal experts say.

Circuit Judge Diane Druzinski is scheduled to sentence Grant on Feb. 21, after he was convicted Friday of second-degree murder in the Feb. 9, 2007, strangulation death of his wife, Tara.

Grant also pleaded guilty to dismembering his wife. Mutilation of a body is a 10-year felony, although Grant will serve that sentence concurrent with the second-degree murder sentence.

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"I doubt if he'll ever be a free man again," said Sterling Heights attorney Charlie Langton, who attended the trial from its start. "People don't have to move out of Michigan because they're afraid Stephen Grant will get out of prison."

Macomb County Prosecutor Eric Smith said he will ask Druzinski to exceed the sentencing guidelines because of the heinous nature of the crime. University of Detroit Mercy Law Professor Lawrence Dubin said that is unusual.

"Prosecutors ask from time to time to exceed the guidelines," Dubin said. "But the appellate court scrutinizes the sentences (that go) beyond the guidelines."

In sentencing Grant, Druzinski will consult the 2007 edition of the Michigan Sentencing Guidelines Manual, a 245-page book in which there are 20 offense variables she can consider. The categories include the degree of physical injury caused, and whether family members suffered serious psychological injury and may require professional treatment because of the crime.

"These are points each side will argue," said Bill Shelhart, an attorney with Vitale, Crosby & Associates in Mount Clemens. "It's not scientific."

Shelhart went through the guideline manual point by point, adding up how many points he thought the judge might give Grant. The more points, the longer time he will serve in prison.

"On the low end, I think he'll get 19 years to life," he said. "On the high end, I think it'll be 31 years to life."

Shelhart said Druzinski is "a fair judge -- but she has no qualms about sentencing on the harsher side."

Grant likely will come up for parole some day, Shelhart said. "But when he goes before the parole board, who's going to vote to let him out?"

Stephen Grant is likely to start his prison life where Tara Grant spent her childhood -- in Michigan's Upper

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What's next

Macomb Circuit Judge Diane Druzinski will sentence Stephen Grant on Feb. 21 on his second-degree murder conviction. Druzinski will consult the Michigan Sentencing Guidelines Manual to determine how many points to give Grant, which will determine how long a sentence she will hand down. The sentence could be for any period of years up to and including life, depending on how many points the judge gives to Grant.

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Metro-TaraLynnGrant


Peninsula, Michigan Department of Corrections spokesman Russ Marlan said Friday.

You can reach George Hunter at (586) 468-7396 or ghunter@detnews.com.

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