

## Man who stabbed victim over parking spot sentenced

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**La Plata, MD** - Kenny Earl Morris, 55, formerly of Waldorf, convicted in February of attempted second-degree murder and deadly weapon with intent to injure, was back in Charles County Circuit Court Thursday, July 30 for sentencing.

Morris was convicted of stabbing Tyrone Jeter in an argument over a parking space in front of the town complex where they lived at Bryan Court in Waldorf Jan. 31, 2014.

During the altercation, Jeter was stabbed in the neck with a kitchen knife and the three-and-a-half inch blade broke off in his neck.

The hearing opened with a motion by defense attorneys Matt Mckenzie and Byron Warnken for a new trial, a motion denied by Judge H. James West.

The two lawyers argued that the jury was not made aware of perfect and imperfect self-defense on the part of the defendant. They based their argument on assertions made during the trial that the victim, Tyrone Jeter, forced his way into the town home of Morris and Patricia Johnson and at one point choked Morris' partner.

Charles County Assistant State's Attorney Sarah K. Freeman said according to her notes, Morris' attorney at the trial, David Simpson, "after you read jury the instructions, he accepted those instructions, it was not objected to at the time. Direct evidence indicated the defendant used deadly force."

Warnken suggested that West was "legally incorrect because the jury didn't get that instruction."

The judge however said his decisions during the trial "was really in defense of Mr. Morris. Instruction was given by the facts of the case."

Once the motion was denied, things got interesting in the courtroom. Freeman called the victim to the stand. Jeter said he felt for the defendant.

"I get no joy out of seeing Mr. Morris there like that," he said, "none at all.

"If he and Mrs. Johnson had come to me and showed any remorse, I would have been the first one to wrap my arms around them," he said.

Jeter, who is married to Johnson's sister, said Patricia Lynn Johnson "was like a sister to me. He turned her against me. That stuff they said in the trial about me choking her, none of that happened. If he had come to me and apologized, it would have been over. Instead, I have scars I am going to have to live with."

Janice Johnson said she and Jeter are making a home for the daughter of Morris and Johnson when she returns from college in Arkansas. She said Morris' actions were caused by his drinking.

"He turned a simple conversation into a violent attack," she said.

Mirza Donegan, Morris' first wife for more than 25 years before their divorce, said she and her former husband remained friends for 27 years.

"He has always been there for every aspect of my daughter's life," she said. "She went to a four-year college, which Kenny paid for."

Morris' sister, Patricia Higgins, stated that the charges against her brother "were so out of character for Kenny."

Richard Funkhouser said Morris has been his friend for 17 years.

"I've never seen Kenny become belligerent or out of control in any manner," he said. "It's quite a tragedy for everyone involved."

The most pertinent testimony in Morris' favor came from Emmanuel Smith, a 24-year veteran of the Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, D.C. At one time he was honored as one of the top 50 police officers in the nation. He said Morris was his neighbor for more than 11 years.

"This person some of these people are describing, I don't know," Smith said. "I don't know that Kenny Morris. This is the best neighbor and best friend I've ever had in my life."

The final person to testify on Morris' behalf was his daughter, Gabrielle Morris.

"Throughout my entire life, he has been there every step of the way," she told West. "I know what's important in life because of my father. I love my father very much. This has been very painful."

Warnken asked West to give his client 18 months in the Charles County Detention Center.

"Anything more than a year and a half takes the notion more in the wrong direction," he said.

Then for the first time ever in the courtroom, Morris, who did not testify on his own behalf during the trial, addressed the court.

"I want to thank everyone for being here," he said to his family and friends. "I don't feel like my story was told. They have their version and I have my version."

He said he laments the lack of communication between he and Johnson's daughter.

"We had one argument in 18 years and she hasn't spoken to me since," he said. "All I tried to do was stop him [Jeter] from attacking me. I tried to help people, not hurt them," he said.

"To me, the jury believed it was your intention to kill Mr. Jeter, even if it was only for a split second," West said in handing down his sentence. "At the end of the day, the jury chose to believe it was your intention to end a life."

West said on the second degree attempted murder charge, he was sentencing Morris to 30 years in the Maryland Department of Corrections with all but nine years suspended. On the deadly weapon charge, he sentenced the defendant to one year and gave him credit for 178 days for time served.

He also ordered four years of supervised probation upon his release and added on alcohol and drug counseling.

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