

STEVEN BEARDS: SENTENCING

May 26th 2016

Leicester Crown Court

Mr Justice Green:-

Steven Beards the jury has found you guilty of the rape and murder of Susan Whiting.

Susan

No sentence that I can impose upon you will ever compensate Susan's family for the terrible loss they have suffered at your hands.

I can sum up Susan in the words of her mother, Maureen, given during the trial:

“Susan was friendly, loving and untidy. She was reliable. She was my friend. We were mates and she was great”.

You have brought grief untold to Maureen and to her family. They have had to listen to the awful details of what was done by you to Susan and they have also had to sit through the whole of this trial and listen to your refusal to accept even one tiny shred of responsibility for your actions.

The facts

Although there remains a number of areas of uncertainty about what actually happened I will sentence you only upon the basis of the facts that I am sure about having listened to the evidence in this lengthy case.

Susan Whiting was 20 when you violated and killed her. She had a learning difficulty and she was vulnerable. You knew this and you played upon it. You had already shown a sexual interest in Susan. You had her recorded in your

mobile phone as “Sexy Susie” and you had sent her a text back in April of 2015 telling her that she looked really sexy. However Susan was not sexually active and she did not like your attentions and she was uncomfortable in your presence.

But you wanted to have sex with her and you did not allow her dislike of you to stand in the way of you getting what you wanted.

You have a history of violence which includes violence in the course of having sex. A draft divorce petition of 2012, and evidence given in the course of this trial which I accept, shows that in a variety of ways you are a controlling and violent man. You get sexual gratification from inflicting violence upon vulnerable woman whilst having sex with them and you are indifferent to whether the sex is consensual. The evidence indicates that you would rape your wife and that you also tried to strangle her whilst having sex with her. There was also evidence given during the trial which I accept that you tried to drug your wife Julie and tie her to a bed. I have no doubt that this was also motivated by a desire for power and sexual gratification through force and violence.

On Sunday 16th August 2015 Susan came to the bungalow for a sleep-over with your wife Julie. She and Julie had been friends for about two years and over that time Susan had come regularly to spend time with Julie. Julie was 35 years old at the time and she has a learning difficulty. Susan also has learning difficulties.

You took the opportunity to obtain drugs with which to stupefy Susan. You cooked dinner for Susan and Julie and it seems most likely that you laced the mashed potato and the gravy that Susan ate with the sedative drug zopiclone. It is possible that you also used other drugs. At all events Susan was drugged and, when the drug began to have an effect, she went to sleep.

You waited. In my view you waited quite a long time. Precisely how long you waited is unclear. But when you thought Susan was still under the effects of the drug you struck.

You removed Susan's clothing by cutting away the pyjamas until she was naked from the waist down and then you forcibly raped her. You did this with sufficient force to cause a tear in her vagina.

There is some uncertainty as to when you first formed the intent to kill Susan and whether this was long before the assault or occurred during the attack. There is evidence of injuries to the mouth which the forensic scientist says is consistent with force being used on the lips and mouth. In my judgement a likely sequence of events was that you formed the intention to kill during the rape, when Susan began to awake or come around. I cannot be sure that you formed the intention earlier than this and therefore I will not sentence you upon the basis that you planned the murder from the very outset. In my view it is probable that Susan began to show signs of coming out of deep sleep and to say something and you used violence upon her in order to stop her starting to shout out or cry for help when she came to realise what you were doing.

At all events you were not going to be deterred or put off simply because Susan was waking. You decided to kill Susan and you had no hesitation or compunction in carrying out your intention. By killing Susan she could not tell anyone what had happened to her and given your history of sexual violence and control I conclude that also you obtained some pleasure or satisfaction from the violence you then used upon her.

It would not have taken long. But over that short period of time you inflicted sustained and lethal violence on Susan.

Susan died from two causes. She died because you compressed her neck. This could have been with your forearm pressing down upon her throat with force, or because you tied something around her neck and then strangled her. But you also used your own hammer to deliver a series of vicious blows to Susan's head which were sufficient to fracture her skull and cause damage to the underlying brain tissue.

When you had finished and Susan was dead you had to dispose of the body so you quickly set about wrapping Susan up which you did with the shower curtain. There is evidence that Julie helped you in concealing Susan's body. There is some uncertainty about what actually happened. But whatever role Julie played in this I reject your suggestion that you were too weak to do whatever you had to do. You work as a gardener and you are strong enough to move large concrete slabs around in the garden. Once you had wrapped Susan's body you then concealed it under the bed in Julie's room.

When Susan did not return home as expected Maureen and others began to search for her. You then set out to trick the police and Maureen's family by denying all knowledge of where Susan was. You told everyone that you had not been present in the bungalow that evening, though you said that Julie had been. You then offered to help in the search that followed for Susan. This continued until the police found Susan's body under the bed.

However your guilt was to become plain and obvious. Your semen was found inside of Susan. There is a one in a billion chance that the semen was from someone else. Your attempts to explain that away in front of the jury were absurd. You told the jury that some mysterious stranger or enemy of yours had carried out the rape and killing and then found your sperm in a container in the bathroom and inserted it into Susan. It was even suggested on your behalf that the stranger might have raped Susan but Julie might then have carried out the killing.

You have shown not a single trace of remorse or regret for your actions. The only person you have felt sympathy for is yourself. Throughout this trial you have sought to transfer the whole of the blame to anyone you could think of including some mysterious man and even your wife.

To the very end when the evidence against you was overwhelming you stuck to your ridiculous story.

The Jury however have read you for what you are - a sexually motivated and violent killer incapable of showing even a drop of sympathy for your victim or her family and friends.

Life sentence

There is only one sentence for murder and it is life imprisonment and that is the sentence that I impose upon you.

Minimum term

I am also required by law to set the minimum term that you will spend in prison.

Let there be no doubt about this: The minimum term I am going to set is the number of actual years that you will spend in prison before you can apply for parole. It will then be up to the Parole Board to decide if you are safe to be released. You might in fact never be released, but that is a matter for the Parole Board.

Premeditated rape upon a vulnerable person: In setting the overall minimum term I take account of the fact that you have deliberately preyed upon a very vulnerable young woman for your own sexual purposes and that this vicious sexual attack was premeditated.

Sedation: I have taken account of the fact that you used drugs to sedate Susan and the degree of pre-planning that this implies.

Sexual inexperience of victim and ejaculation: This was a murder committed whilst in the course of sex. You have a history of violence towards vulnerable woman and that this has included using violence during sex to heighten your sexual pleasure and pander to a sadistic tendency that you have. I have taken account of the fact that Susan was sexually inexperienced and yet you had unprotected sex with her and ejaculated inside of her.

Use of a hammer and strangulation – intention to kill: I also take account of the fact that you used a hammer on Susan. I am sure that you deliberately and intentionally used the hammer as a lethal weapon in full knowledge of the inevitable consequences of the repeated and powerful blows you inflicted on Susan's head. I also take account of the fact that you combined the use of a hammer to kill with strangulation. I am quite sure that you intended to kill and not just cause Susan really serious harm.

Concealment of body: I also take into account the cold and calculating way in which you then set about concealing the body and Susan's belongings and the elaborate lies you told to the police and to Susan's family and to others trying to find Susan in the days following the murder. You showed a callous disregard for the feelings of the family and by your actions you increased their grief.

Victim impact statement: I have listened with care to the moving Victim Impact Statement prepared by Maureen Whiting. She has spoken of how Susan was a precious gift to her and how she was her closest companion. She explains how lost she feels without Susan and how her loss is a physical pain inside of her. Your actions have made Maureen feel guilty that she could not protect Susan, even though what happened to Susan could not have been predicted by anyone. Maureen has also spoken of the deep loss felt by the whole family and all of Susan's friends.

Mitigation: There is little to be said by way of mitigation. I have taken into account everything that has been said on your behalf by leading counsel. There are a number of factors which I am not sure about which would otherwise have amounted to aggravating factors. First, I have accepted that I cannot be sure that you formed the intention to kill at an early point and I have therefore sentenced you upon the basis that the intention was formed later. Second, there is the question whether Susan suffered during the attack or whether she was unconscious. The forensic evidence suggests that she would still have been affected by the drugs when the rape and murder occurred. I tend to the conclusion that she did not suffer because you killed her before she became fully awake, as she was beginning to come around.

In setting the minimum term I have considered whether taken in the round and bearing in mind the many uncertainties in the evidence, the sentence I am going to impose is fair and proper.

In my judgment because this offence involved sexual conduct the starting point for the minimum term is 30 years imprisonment. As to aggravating factors I have concluded that these increase the starting point by 3 years to reflect Susan's vulnerability and her sexual inexperience, your use of drugs to sedate Susan, the fact that you took steps to conceal Susan's body and to divert everyone from the truth, and the degree of pre-planning that was involved.

The minimum term you will serve will therefore be 33 years. In setting this figure I have been careful to avoid double counting.

Sentence for the rape

I have taken the rape into account when setting the minimum term you will serve for the murder. However to reflect and acknowledge the fact that the jury has found you guilty on this count I am passing a 10 years sentence of imprisonment for the rape which is to run concurrently with that for the murder.

Sentence

The sentence of this Court is therefore one of life imprisonment with a minimum term of 33 years before you can apply for parole. A sentence of 10 years imprisonment is imposed for the rape but this will run concurrently with that for murder.

Please take him away.