



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

R v David Oakes

Sentencing Remarks* of Mr Justice Fulford

Chelmsford Crown Court

11 May 2012

In the early hours of 6 June 2011, David Oakes took the lives of Christine and Shania Chambers. Their tragic and needless deaths occurred in deeply shocking circumstances. A bullying and controlling man who had frequently inflicted serious violence on Christine Chambers during the course of their 5 or 6 year relationship, killed his partner and young daughter simply because he was unable to accept that Ms Chambers could no longer bear to be with him and wanted to start a new life. Ms Chambers had, for her part, made it clear that she wished to treat the defendant generously. She recognised that he was important to Shania and that contact between father and daughter ought to continue. She agreed, without any apparent hesitation, arrangements that would have enabled Shania to spend three weekends out of four with the accused and generally, notwithstanding their past rows and the accused's attacks on her, she behaved in a mature and civilised way, putting Shania's interests before anything else. In my judgment she carries not a shred of blame for what happened that night.

The reaction of the defendant was the exact opposite. When it became clear to David Oakes that the relationship was at an end and the family court was likely in the very near future to make an order for Shania's future care that would make explicit that their separation was final, his reaction was purely selfish, self pitying and grotesquely violent. Instead of thinking about his daughter whom he has claimed to love, he concentrated on himself alone and most particularly his desire for revenge and his determination, that he had expressed quite clearly on more than one occasion in the past, that no other man was going to be Christine's partner or was going to act as Shania's father. He resolved that if the family was at an end, then they would pay for leaving him with their lives. And worse still, he decided that their last hours of life would be terrifying, and in the case of Christine Chambers, extremely painful.

He planned their deaths in elaborate detail. He decided to kill them on the night before a potentially crucial court hearing, and he collected together a set of implements, the sole purpose of which was to torture Christine Chambers and then to kill her and their daughter. He took with him a 12 bore shotgun and many cartridges; a variety of very sharp bladed implements; an axe; a length of wire threaded through rubber tubing that was undoubtedly to be used as a garrotte; heavy-duty pliers to pull off parts of Ms

Chambers body (indeed that threat was made to [other daughter] as well, as she heard) and petrol to burn the house down with Christine, [other daughter] and Shania inside. Whether the drill which he used on his own head was originally intended for Ms Chambers we shall probably never know.

And he remorselessly carried out his plan. As [other daughter] described with such clarity, he made her mother beg and express her love for him whilst simultaneously inflicting cruel and substantial injuries. He hit her head not only with his fist but also with the gun and either the axe or a meat cleaver, which cut into her skull. He forced her to take her upper clothes off and he then used a very sharp implement to disfigure her torso. He told the jury that he never allows alcohol to get the better of him, and so it was that night. As Dr Cary said, the cuts to the deceased were inflicted with a clear degree of control. Drink and drugs may well have played their part, but this defendant knew exactly what he was doing, particularly having clearly prepared and planned these deaths for a not-insignificant period in advance.

Two final aspects of this terrible history need emphasising. First it is apparent that before she died, Christine Chambers would have been in agony. The injury to her head and the shotgun wound to her knee would have been excruciatingly painful. I am certain that Oakes delayed delivering the fatal gunshot wound as an act of deliberate sadism. She had made him suffer by ending the relationship as he told [other daughter] and this was his revenge.

Second, as I have already observed, he has claimed repeatedly that he loved his daughter and that he is a victim. However, the evidence has critically revealed that [other daughter] left Shania in her cot, and from the police evidence it is clear she secured the gate to Shania's room before she, that is [other daughter], escaped. Yet when Shania's body was found she was on the landing side of the closed gate. The undoubted inference to be drawn is that Shania was awake; the defendant had brought her out of her room; and as a result she would have been able to see her gravely injured mother and she would have witnessed some of these dreadful events. Throughout she would have been aware of her mother's cries and tears. In my judgment the defendant allowed his daughter to see at least part of what he was doing and she would have seen the appalling injuries to her mother. The next door neighbour heard Shania crying for a least 5 minutes after Christine Chambers had been shot. That little girl must have been terrified. He then put the barrel of the 12 bore shot gun against her head and pulled the trigger. No civilised, decent human being could ever describe that as being the result of love.

As I said at the outset, this defendant killed two people in truly shocking circumstances. There is not a shred of mitigation.

Given the nature of these crimes, the result is inevitable. I have applied the provisions set out in Schedule 21, paragraph 4 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003. The seriousness of this case is exceptionally high for the reasons I have outlined. The sentence on each count is that of life imprisonment and given the deaths of Christine and Shania Chambers were planned well in advance and they were executed with a significant degree of sadism, particularly as regards Christine Chambers but also in the case of her daughter given the fear that child must have experienced before her death, these will be whole life terms. The defendant will never be released from prison.

I want to say a word about [other daughter]. As it seems to me she is a truly remarkable child who acted with great courage during these terrible events, particularly when she tried to stand up to David Oakes whilst he was attacking her mother. She showed considerable

presence of mind in how she dealt with her sister (putting her to bed and changing her bloodstained clothes) and later when she obeyed her mother's instructions to escape and to raise the alarm. Her accounts throughout have been clear and consistent, and her measured and cooperative approach during this trial has been of considerable assistance to the court. I would be grateful if the officer in the case would pass on these remarks to her.

Finally Jean and Kenneth Chambers. I have read the statement from Jean Chambers as to the effect this has had on them and their family, and the sadness it has caused. All I need say is that they have acted with exemplary dignity throughout this trial and it will come as a surprise to no one that the consequences of David Oakes' actions on 5/6 June extend far beyond the two lives that he took.

* Reporting restrictions prevent the identification of the other daughter. As a result some redactions in square brackets have been made.