

Woman gets 15 years for trying to burn down Spotsylvania house with five people inside

Keith Epps

Jan 16, 2019

A woman convicted of trying to burn down a Spotsylvania County residence and kill its five occupants nearly two years ago was ordered Wednesday to serve 15 years in prison.

Dina Elizabeth Guardado, 32, of Triangle was sentenced in Spotsylvania Circuit Court to a total of 80 years with all but 15 years suspended. She again repeatedly declared her innocence, but Judge Joseph Ellis said the evidence against her was “overwhelming.”

Ellis’ decision set off an emotional reaction from Guardado and her parents, who had a bailiff standing almost directly in front of them throughout the lengthy hearing. Her father, Luis Guardado, had had prior courtroom outbursts.

As Dina Guardado was being carried out of the courtroom, the tiny woman was hysterical, shouting, “No, no, this isn’t correct. I’m the victim. Me and my family were the victims!”

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Her mother began hollering, “Leave her alone,” and her father complained loudly about the court process.

Ellis had bailiffs bring both parents in front of him and declared them in contempt of court. He threatened to have them join their daughter in jail if they said another word, but eventually had them escorted out of the courthouse.

Guardado was convicted of 13 charges in October, including arson, five counts of attempted murder and five counts of attempted malicious wounding. The charges stemmed from an incident early March 29, 2017, at the Arcand residence on Chancellor Road during which a homemade bomb exploded. No one was seriously injured.

According to the evidence, a pressure cooker exploded, expelling debris that struck Patrick Arcand as he tried to put out a fire in the basement area of the home. Investigators found another pressure cooker and a crock pot that had been made into homemade bombs but did not explode.

A receipt for one of the pressure cookers was found in her purse when she was arrested the next day in Prince William County, and manuals for all three devices were found in her room in a subsequent search. Guardado had been quickly identified as a suspect after investigators learned about numerous run-ins she'd had with the Arcands when they were neighbors in Prince William.

Commonwealth's Attorney Travis Bird also put on evidence at the trial showing that a computer seized from Guardado's room had about 150 searches related to making homemade bombs. The entries included "using a pressure cooker to make a bomb" and "how to burn a house down."

Guardado on Wednesday continued to insist that she had nothing to do with the incident and had no idea how incriminating evidence ended up in her room. She accused the Arcands of setting her up so they could assault her younger sisters.

"I'm a pacifist, not a terrorist," she said. "I help people, not hurt them."

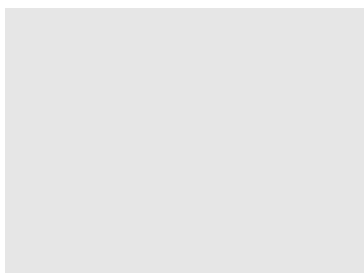
Bird asked the judge to give Guardado as long a sentence as possible. He said she clearly intended to kill five people and should not be rewarded for being incompetent.

Defense attorney Price Koch asked for leniency. He said Guardado clearly has mental health issues and was in need of services, not a lengthy incarceration.

While Koch was talking, Guardado blurted out, "Can I object to my own lawyer?"

Ellis let Guardado ramble for nearly an hour before cutting her off to pronounce judgment. She talked about mundane experiences she'd had with the Arcand family, such as giving one of them a ride to work, and also talked about being threatened and stalked.

She continued talking even as the judge was announcing the sentence, leading Ellis at one point to tell her that he wasn't sure that "your grasp on reality is entirely there."



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