

Man gets life with no possibility of parole in slaying of Spotsylvania store clerk

Keith Epps

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David Junior Washington was allowed to hug his mother Friday in Spotsylvania Circuit Court before he left to spend the rest of his life in prison.

Minutes earlier, Washington heard a statement from the family of the man he brutally murdered in 2016, Saleh Yousef Abukhait, in which they described the pain of never having the chance to give him a goodbye hug.

“My family and I didn’t get a chance to say goodbye,” Moab Abukhait wrote in a statement read by Commonwealth’s Attorney Travis Bird as he faced Washington on Friday. “We feel cheated that we will never get a chance to feel his hugs. ... We have been robbed of closure and one final chance to say goodbye.”

Washington, 52, was formally sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for the Dec. 3, 2016, slaying of the 54-year-old Abukhait. The sentence was the only option available for Judge Joseph Ellis after Washington pleaded guilty earlier this month to capital murder and robbery. As part of the plea agreement, the death penalty was taken off the table.

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The evidence showed that Abukhait was working at the Sunoco in the 5300 block of Jefferson Davis Highway that morning when Washington entered the store. The store surveillance camera showed Washington and Abukhait having what appeared to be pleasant conversation when Abukhait bent over to get something.

Washington then grabbed a stick he had sneaked into the store and attacked Abukhait, striking him repeatedly in the head. After the stick broke, Washington used it to jab the fallen clerk.

The camera showed Washington grabbing some beer before returning to Abukhait and stomping on him. He then grabbed some hot dog tongs and used them to saw on the victim's neck before leaving the store with beer, cigarettes and money.

Another customer entered the store a short time later and called police after noticing blood on the floor. Police quickly identified Washington as a suspect and found him later that day at a Fredericksburg housing complex.

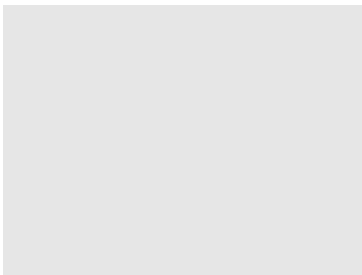
Among the evidence recovered was money Washington spent at an ABC store that had Abukhait's blood on it.

Prior to Washington's surprise plea this month, his case was slowly dragging through the court system. He had not even been arraigned and a trial appeared to be many months away.

Bird said he agreed to the plea agreement after talking with Abukhait's family, who wanted an end to the ordeal.

Other factors were Washington's poor health and reports that he helped rescue a correctional officer at the Rappahannock Regional Jail who was being attacked by a mentally ill inmate.

Ellis called Washington an "enigma," saying his "heroic" actions in the jail did not match up with the heinous slaying of Abukhait. "The heinous acts you committed against Mr. Abukhait are completely beyond understanding," Ellis said.



Washington

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