

Rudibaugh reaches plea in murder case

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A plea agreement has been reached in the murder case against the mother of a man missing for more than two years before his remains were found on the family ranch east of Gunnison.

Deborah Rudibaugh, 69, has agreed to plead guilty to second-degree murder in exchange for a stipulated sentence of 40 years in prison. That's according to a motion to vacate Rudibaugh's trial — previously scheduled to commence May 20 — filed by her attorney, Randy Canney of Salida.

"Defense counsel has absolutely no worries that Ms. Rudibaugh will not go through with this disposition," Canney wrote. "She is absolutely a straight-shooter who is good for her word and who fully admitted to her actions here."

Rudibaugh is one of three family members arrested early last year for a wide range of crimes related to the death of her son, Jake Millison, who was embroiled in a family feud over the future of the 7-11 Ranch near Parlin when he went missing in April 2015.

More than two years later, authorities discovered Millison's remains buried in a corral at the ranch. At that time, Rudibaugh admitted to shooting Millison in the head while he slept and said she acted alone in disposing of his body — for which she was charged with first-degree murder after deliberation, tampering with a deceased human body, concealing a death and other crimes.

However, numerous discrepancies emerged in Rudibaugh's story, suggesting that she did not act alone. Subsequently, her daughter and Millison's sister, Stephanie Jackson, and Jackson's husband, David Jackson, were arrested as well.

Stephanie Jackson is accused of first-degree murder and accessory to murder as well as tampering with a deceased human body and other crimes. A trial is scheduled to commence this coming September.

David Jackson is currently free on bond until after the conclusion of his wife's trial. Late last year, he agreed to plead guilty to the same tampering charge, which carries a stipulated sentence of 10 years in a state correctional facility.

Last month, Rudibaugh's attorney Canney argued unsuccessfully for the applicability of self defense during his client's trial, citing physical abuse on the part of her son which was increasing in frequency and severity after Millison learned that Rudibaugh had changed her will, excluding him from receiving the ranch.

"The Court does not question the issues surrounding elder abuse, or its similarities to how victims of spousal abuse or child abuse think or react," District Court Judge J. Steven Patrick wrote in an order dated April 9, in which he cited past cases in Colorado requiring urgency for self defense. "Here there has been no showing of urgency or necessity. There is no imminent threat or danger. There are less drastic alternatives available to her."

Defense attorney Canney noted in the motion to vacate the trial that with an argument of self defense not available, "the result of any trial became a foregone conclusion."

Further, Rudibaugh's health has presented concern for those closest to the case in recent months. At the time of her arrest, Rudibaugh was reported to suffer from Stage 4 breast cancer that had spread throughout her body.

"Ms. Rudibaugh is gravely ill and has no desire to sit through such a trial," Canney wrote.

A plea and sentencing hearing for Rudibaugh is scheduled for May 13 at 1:30 p.m.

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