

Man sentenced for role in death of 2 girls

 durangoherald.com/articles/281446

By Jim Mimiaga Journal Staff Writer Saturday, June 15, 2019 7:00 AM

June 15, 2019

A man charged with crimes connected to the death of two children in Norwood in 2017 was sentenced June 4, according to the San Miguel Sheriff's Office.

Ashford Nathaniel Archer was sentenced to serve 24 years in prison, with credit for time served, for charges connected to the deaths of the two young girls who died in a car parked on a farm.

"The criminal justice system in San Miguel County is working well," said San Miguel Sheriff Bill Masters. "The sheriff's office and state agencies investigated this case properly, the prosecution did a great job against a vigorous defense all with a fair jury and judge, and the system worked."

Archer was one of five people in a doomsday group charged in the deaths of 10-year-old Makayla Roberts and 8-year-old Hannah Marshall. The girls' bodies were found in a car on Sept. 8, 2017, on a farm near Norwood, a town of about 500 people 30 miles west of Telluride.

In March, after a three-week trial in Montrose County, a jury found Archer guilty of two felony counts of "child abuse, knowingly-recklessly causing death" and a felony count of accessory to a crime.

Investigators believe the group's spiritual leader, Madani Ceus, ordered the girls kept in a car without food or water for days as the others waited for the apocalypse in advance of the 2017 solar eclipse, according to court documents reported by *The Daily Sentinel* and Associated Press.

She and the girl's mother have each been charged with two counts of first-degree murder and two counts of child abuse resulting in death. Two other group members are each charged with two counts of child abuse resulting in death and a single accessory count.

Other group members were charged with two counts of child abuse resulting in death and a single accessory count.

In May 2018, farm owner Frederick "Alec" Blair, the newest member of the group blamed for the girls' deaths, was charged with two counts of child abuse resulting in death and being an accessory. He accepted a deal with prosecutors that drops the child abuse charges in return for pleading guilty to the accessory charge, *The Daily Sentinel* reported.

Blair told investigators that he met the group at a gas station outside Grand Junction in May 2017 and invited them to use his land and soon joined them, living there in tents and cars, according to court documents.

The Archer verdicts “are the result of the hard work from the entire prosecution team,” stated District Attorney Dan Hotsenpiller of the 7th Judicial District in a news release.

“We recognize the expenditure of not only time, but energy, investigation and resources by our partners in law enforcement including the entire San Miguel Sheriff’s Department and the Colorado Bureau of Investigation. We appreciate the tireless efforts they expended, and continue to expend, during the investigation of these criminal acts.”

jmimiaga@the-journal.com