

Neo-Nazi John Ditullio gets life sentence in 2006 stabbings

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NEW PORT RICHEY — Neo-Nazi John Ditullio walked into court Thursday with his tattoos in plain sight: the large swastika and the words "f--- you" on his neck, the barbed wire running down the side of his face.

A court-approved makeup artist had covered the tattoos during Ditullio's murder trial, but after he was convicted Wednesday night, Ditullio decided to show his full face to the jury.

"I wanted them to see me," he explained Thursday from the witness stand.

The 12-member jury had returned for the penalty phase, to hear more testimony and recommend either life in prison or the death penalty. They deliberated about 30 minutes before picking life. Circuit Judge Michael Andrews, who had the final say, followed their recommendation.

Ditullio, 24, was convicted of first-degree murder and attempted second-degree murder. In early 2006, he was living with a group of American Nazis near Hudson who hated Patricia Wells, their next-door neighbor, for having an African-American friend and a gay son.

One night, authorities said, Ditullio put on a gas mask and broke into Wells' house, attacking her with a knife. She escaped with injuries to her face and hands, but her son's friend, 17-year-old Kristofer King, died from stab wounds to his skull.

Ditullio maintained his innocence and said another member of the neo-Nazi group, Shawn Plott, was the real culprit.

Testifying Thursday while dressed in all black, Ditullio told the jury he didn't care whether he got life or death.

"I'm not going to beg you people for my life or my death, man. You do what you do. Okay. I don't care. Life in Florida is death in Florida," he said. "But the people that just sat up here and testified that they love me and they want to be part of my life, that's who I ask you to render your verdict on. Not me."

The jury had heard from Ditullio's sister and grandmother, who said they still love him and would continue to have a relationship with him through letters, phone calls and visits to prison.

The defense also called two inmates — both of them African-American — who said they formed friendships with Ditullio while in jail.

Adam Jones said that when he turned 25 in jail, Ditullio gave him a cake from the jail commissary.

"He just surprised me out of nowhere," Jones, 27, said. "He just made me this one outstanding birthday cake. It was unbelievable to see something like that from another person. From another man to another man.

"I didn't ask him, he just did it out of the kindness of his heart."

The second inmate, Morris Standifer, said that when he was facing a life sentence and contemplating suicide, Ditullio helped him keep his head up.

"Ditullio talked to me and tried to bring me through this time. He gave me a little hope," said Standifer, 29.

He said Ditullio told him, " 'If I can't overcome something, then I've got to learn to deal with it.' That's something that I want him to remember, too."

Assistant State Attorney Mike Halkitis asked Standifer if he knew that Ditullio expressed hatred of black people during their friendship.

"I ain't never heard nothing like that," Standifer said.

Halkitis said the killing was "cold, calculated and premeditated" in asking the jurors to consider a death sentence.

Charlene Bricken, King's mother, spoke at the sentencing, turning toward Ditullio and saying, "Why do you have the right to take his life, or anybody's?"

This was Ditullio's second trial. When he faced a jury last year, they deadlocked, leaning 10-2 toward acquittal. There were discrepancies in the evidence — this year and last — about the description of the attacker and tainted blood evidence.

He plans to appeal. His lawyer, Bjorn Brunvand, said he will represent Ditullio in the appeal for free, in part because of the public's outcry over the cost of the makeup artist.

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