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Killer Convicted in Anti-Lesbian Shooting

November 10- On October 27, Adams County, Pennsylvania Judge Oscar Spicer convicted Stephen Roy Carr of first degree murder in a shooting that killed Rebecca Wight and critically wounded her lover, Claudia Brenner. In a move praised by Brenner, the gay community and victim advocates, the judge also excluded as inadmissible any arguments by the defense that the victims' sexual orientation and behavior provoked the attack.

On May 13, the two women were fired upon at their Appalachian trail campsite by Carr, whose attorney claimed in a preliminary hearing that Brenner and Wight "provoked" the attack by performing sexual acts in front of him, and otherwise teased him. While acknowledging that she and Wight had made love at the campsite, Brenner insisted that they both thought they were alone, and described the accusation that they provoked the attack as "not only untrue but insulting." In a statement released to the press, Brenner asserted that "Rebecca and I were lovers... Nothing about who we were or our love for each other could be considered motivation for the outrageous, inhumane violence that Stephen Roy Carr perpetrated against us."

Commented Kevin Berrill, Director of the NGLTF Anti-Violence Project, "While the criminal justice system's handling of this particular case was better than usual, we should all be outraged at the attempt by Carr's attorney to blame Brenner and Wight for provoking the attack. It is another revolting example of how our society seeks to shift responsibility for anti-gay violence from the victimizers to the victims."

Carr waived his right to a jury trial in exchange for an agreement by the prosecution not to seek the death penalty and to drop several lesser charges. Although he has not yet been sentenced, Carr faces life imprisonment without parole. An appeal by Carr's defense attorney is expected.

Commenting on the sentence, Brenner stated that "a life sentence with no parole in a maximum security prison, while not compensating for our tremendous loss and pain, is the appropriate response to a nightmare that nothing can ever make right." Brenner also praised the handling of the case by the local prosecutor and police, describing them as "respectful and professional... All those involved never wavered in the investigation and prosecution of the crime. Most gay people who are victims of

violence do not receive the kind of treatment that I received." Brenner also called for greater visibility as a means of countering anti-gay violence: "The only really helpful position we can take is to be open about our lives and to share our loves and losses with all people we come in contact with," she said.

"This attack is the worst nightmare of every woman and every gay person; it is the ultimate violation of our right to live and love as we choose," said Berrill. "In the face of this ordeal, Claudia has shown incredible strength and will and dignity. Her decision to speak out about the attack --and the bigotry that led to it-- is an inspiration to lesbian and gay people everywhere."

Brenner *from page 1*

took a map and a flashlight. As she walked through almost four miles of heavy underbrush and rugged mountain terrain, the thought that her friend needed help kept her going, she said.

"I think the motivation of believing if I only got help for her she might live...propelled me just as much as realizing I needed help for my own injuries. I really feel... that Rebecca saved my life before she died," Brenner said.

Along the way, she said, she worried about being found by the gunman.

"I was terrified," she said. "But I felt I had no choice but to go and take my chances, not knowing if he was waiting somewhere."

Brenner was picked up by two young men driving on the Shippensburg Road. She told them how to find her friend, but by the time searchers reached Wight, she had died.

Brenner praised state police who interviewed her for information about the attack. She has recuperated from her wounds, she said, but she is still shaken by the experience.

"I felt like a widow of 32 years old," she said. "That grieving process and the pain isn't over and probably will be with me the rest of my life. That and the experience of having someone trying to murder me intentionally may never go away."

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