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Orinda Resident James Collin Pleads Not Guilty in the Murder of Evangeline Cumbe Devera

By Laurie Snyder

Following two prior Contra Costa Superior Court appearances, James Collin pled not guilty today to the June 26 torture and murder of his long-time companion, Evangeline Cumbe Devera, at their residence in Orinda.

The Contra Costa District Attorney's Office added an initial enhancement charge "for personal use of a deadly/dangerous weapon ... a machete," and added the torture enhancement because of additional wounds that Devera was alleged to have suffered to her extremities, including the near severing of one of her hands. The second enhancement may signal the intention of prosecutors to pursue the death penalty for Collin.

Mary Knox, Deputy District Attorney for Contra Costa County, confirmed that Collin entered "a plea today on the amended complaint, which adds a second count, torture."

Knox is serving as the lead prosecutor on the case and added, "He entered pleas of not guilty and denied the enhancement."

The 62-year-old Collin allegedly made statements to the Orinda Police Department indicating his involvement in Devera's death.

When asked if the not guilty pleas indicated a potential self-defense claim Mike Kelly, the public defender representing Collin, said he needed more time to complete his review of the documents from today's court appearance.

Knox said that Collin is expected to appear in court again August 20 at 1:30 p.m.

Devera's cause of death, determined by an autopsy the day following her death, was "blunt force and sharp force injury of head," according to the Contra Costa Sheriff's office.

According to KTVU news, this was not the first instance of domestic violence suffered by Devera. Collin "was arrested and charged with misdemeanor domestic battery for assaulting Devera" in 2006. He was sentenced to probation following his "no contest" plea.

Prior to that, Collin fatally shot his brother in the chest in the same house in an incident 26 years ago that is once again raising eyebrows in a community that hasn't seen a murder since 2002. The Contra Costa Times is reporting that Collin claimed that the 1986 shooting of his brother was accidental – and related to his cleaning of a shotgun. The father, who had heard the shot from an adjoining room, stated that "there were no arguments or problems between the brothers before the shot rang out." Collin's brother, Tim, died later at the hospital.

Evangeline Cumbe Devera

The victim of the June 26, 2012 homicide in Orinda was born Evangeline Cumbe in the Philippines. Her home town was the municipality of San Leonardo, which is located in the province of Nueva Ecija.

According to the Philippine Consulate in San Francisco, Devera arrived in the United States approximately 23 years ago on a tourist visa. She had been living with James Collin for roughly the past 10 years. They never married.

Following a funeral which was reportedly held by her family and friends in an East Bay community outside of Lamorinda early last month, Devera's remains were returned July 11 to the Philippines, where her sister still resides.

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