

Accused pleads guilty to murder
Tuesday, October 26, 2010
By Glenn Smith

Man gets 30 years for drunken killing of friend

Stumbling drunk and brimming with rage, Jimmy Nehiley unleashed his fists in a moment of vodka- fueled fury. The next thing he knew, he was standing over the battered and bleeding body of his friend Janice Case.

The pair once had been stand-up people in their communities -- respectable even. She had been a wife and mother; he a Navy veteran and airplane mechanic. But booze and drugs led them down a rougher road to this pivotal moment behind a ramshackle house on Charleston's East Side.

Case, 53, died in the dirt that day in May 2009, the life strangled out of her by Nehiley's hands. When Charleston police caught up with him, Nehiley told them they could skip the interrogation. I did it, he told them. He then showed the detectives where they could find Case's blood on his pants and shoes.



provided
Jimmy Nehiley



provided
Janice Case

Nehiley, 61, never wavered on his culpability, and on Monday he made it official, pleading guilty to murder in Case's death. Noting Nehiley's cooperation and remorse, Circuit Judge Roger Young sentenced him to

30 years in prison, the minimum allowed under state law.

Given Nehiley's age, he will almost certainly die behind bars.

"This was not intentional," Nehiley told the judge. "It just happened. The two of us were really, really drunk. I only remember bits and pieces."

Case and Nehiley had known each other about six years, after meeting on the downward slope of life that landed them in Charleston.

Case followed her mother and brother to the Holy City after leaving a failed marriage and an adopted son in Alaska 15 years ago. She had close to \$500,000 in her bank account when she departed Alaska, but the money didn't last, relatives said.

Always something of a wild child, she went through her cash traveling and enjoying life, her sister, Connie Goble, said.

Initially, Case did all right in Charleston, working for a printing company for several years. But eventually, her taste for intoxication got the better of her and she started a long, slow skid. Her family tried to talk her into getting help, but she wasn't interested. She would borrow money and then disappear, Goble said.

Somewhere on the streets, she met Nehiley, a bi-polar drinking man who hailed from Boston. He had worked on planes and in oil fields, fathering a son along the way. Now estranged from his

family, he spent his days with Case and other homeless folks. They would scrounge up money for alcohol and guzzle it in the backyard of a vacant Nassau Street home.

It was there that Case would spend her final hours on May 15, 2009.

They had drunk a good bit of vodka, and Nehiley was nursing a growing grudge against Case. A good friend of their's had died, and they thought it was because of injuries he had suffered in a recent beating, Butler said. Nehiley was angry with Case because she had witnessed the attack but would not share her account with police investigating their friend's death, he said.

Nehiley suddenly snapped and went after Case. He brutally beat and choked her, and then tore off her clothes to fondle and humiliate her, prosecutor Greg Voigt said. She was found dead on the ground, a single crutch lying beside her.

Previous coverage

[Homeless woman discovered naked, beaten to death](#), published 05/16/09

[No bond for suspect in Janice Case's killing](#), published 05/17/09

Nehiley only learned later that the beating Case had witnessed had nothing to do with their friend's death, police said. An autopsy revealed their friend had died of natural causes, authorities said.

Butler said his client never wanted a trial and had offered to plead guilty months ago to a manslaughter charge which would have carried the same punishment. Prosecutors wouldn't accept the offer, Butler said, delaying a resolution to the case and closure for the victim's family.

Ninth Circuit Solicitor Scarlett Wilson said prosecutors had a strong case for murder and were not about to plea bargain with a man they considered a violent criminal.

For his part, Nehiley just seemed ready to get it over with. Wearing a striped jailhouse jumpsuit and shackled at the wrists and ankles, he stood stooped before the judge. With his short silver hair and sagging mouth, he looked older than his years. Before he was led away, he apologized to Goble and her husband, Jack, who drove in from Augusta, the only members of Case's family to attend the proceeding.

"I'm sorry it happened," he said in a raspy voice. "May God bless you and watch over you. I'm going to go do my sentence now."