

[Home](#) > [Local News](#) > Sentencing draws tears

Wednesday, December 22, 2004

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Sentencing draws tears

Web-posted Dec 22, 2004

Wife gets 9-25 years for poisoning husband's coffee

By **STEPHEN FRYE**
Of The Daily Oakland Press

Traci Beth Jackson's tears, pleas for leniency and steadfast denial of guilt did little to help her Tuesday.

Oakland Circuit Judge Richard D. Kuhn sentenced Jackson to serve nine to 25 years in prison.

It was an emotional afternoon in Kuhn's courtroom as the woman convicted of putting D-Con mouse poison in her husband's coffee left for prison.

First, her husband, Dr. Paul Jackson, described tearfully the damage done to their families when she turned an affair with another man into a motive for attempted murder. The doctor described the ordeal of telling their two young children that "Mommy isn't coming home because she tried to kill Daddy."

Then, Traci Jackson's attorney, Neil Rockind, became emotional and misty when describing how sure he was that she was innocent - despite the fact that a jury needed less than four hours to convict her Dec. 6.

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Finally, the 37-year-old wife and mother cried throughout a lengthy statement to Kuhn.

"I know I am innocent," she said. "I feel my constitutional right to freedom of speech was violated."

Several friends and neighbors, as well as detectives, had testified during the trial that Jackson told them she had put poison in her husband's coffee. Earlier, she had asked her best friend how best to kill her husband.

On Tuesday, Traci Jackson said she was only being melodramatic, even outrageous.

"That's all they were - words," she cried. "However you label them, they are only words."

According to police and prosecutors, Traci Jackson's "words" were, in fact, a confession.

She and Rockind said she should not have been convicted without any physical proof of poisoning. However, Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor Tare Wigod said he had to prove only that she intended to kill her husband and that she attempted to do so.

Kuhn, who held his hand to his mouth and sat motionless as he listened to her statement, appeared unmoved.

"It is the sentence of this court that you serve nine years to 25 years in the state prison," he said, summing up his decision in just seconds.

Describing how much she missed her children - Jacob, 7, and Samantha, 4 - Jackson told the judge that she prayed he would overturn the verdict.

Rockind also read a letter from Jackson.

"My life has been destroyed," she wrote.

She described how she has lost her nursing license, her Commerce Township house, her husband, her kids and her dogs.

"I pray to God that I don't wake up the next morning."

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Her parents, Paul and Harriet Schlecter, did not comment after the sentence. They sat quietly and did not react when the sentence was announced.

Paul Jackson said the only pain that has been worse was the death of his mother. He wished that his wife had thought about their children before she tried to kill him.

He said their son wakes up in the middle of the night afraid.

"He's scared of you," Paul Jackson told his wife. "How do you tell a 7-year-old and a 4-year-old that Mommy isn't coming home because she tried to kill Daddy?"

The husband, who has filed for divorce, also chided his wife for ruining her parents' lives. Paul Jackson said that she forced them from their home - her parents were living with the Jacksons - and has now sucked their life savings into lawyers.

"Now they are without a daughter," he said. "You were given everything in this world. You appreciated nothing."

Immediately after the sentence, Rockind argued - at times loudly - that the assistant prosecutor's mistakes during closing arguments warrant a new trial.

Rockind claimed that Wigod should not have referred to the fact Traci Jackson did not testify on her own behalf, which came in response to Rockind telling the jury during closing arguments that he advised Jackson not to testify.

Wigod, in response, said that it was Rockind's advice but Jackson's decision.

Kuhn disagreed with Rockind, refused to grant a new trial and said that Rockind was trying to elicit errors.

"The defense counsel throughout the trial was inviting error," Kuhn said. "The verdict was just, and I think the jury was correct in its decision."

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