

Murder of Mark Steven Bass - October 16, 1984

Venson Dean Vampran and Susan Bass were charged by a single grand jury indictment with the second degree murder of Mark Steven Bass in violation of La.R.S. 14:30.1. The trial court, on motion of both defendants, ordered severance of the indictment. Defendant, after pleading not guilty, was tried before a jury and found guilty as charged. The trial court sentenced defendant to a term of life imprisonment without benefit of probation, parole or suspension of sentence.

Defendant brings this appeal urging twenty-six assignments of error. Assignments of error numbers six, ten, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, eighteen, twenty, twentyfour and twenty-five were not briefed and, therefore, are considered abandoned. Uniform Rules, Court of Appeal, Rule 2-12.4; State v. Trevathan, 432 So.2d 355 (La.App. 1st Cir.1983), writ denied, 437 So.2d 1141 (La.1983).

FACTS:

Shortly after midnight on October 17, 1984, a pickup truck driven by Venson Dean Vampran was stopped in Madisonville, Louisiana, by Corporal John Dillon of the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Office. Corporal Dillon testified that he pursued defendant's vehicle because of broken taillights and the erratic and evasive manner in which the vehicle was operated. After initially approaching Corporal Dillon, defendant returned to the truck's cab to retrieve his driver's license. At the same time, Susan Bass, a passenger in defendant's vehicle, exited the cab and approached the rear of defendant's truck. Corporal Dillon asked defendant and Susan Bass to step aside so he could check the truck license plate. At that time, he noticed fresh blood seeping from beneath the tailgate. In response to Corporal Dillon's inquiry seeking identification of the cargo being carried, defendant remarked, "Oh, shit," which was followed by Susan Bass' assertion, "It's a body. He's killed my husband." Upon inspection, Corporal Dillon discovered a dead body, later identified as that of Mark Steven Bass, in the bed of defendant's pickup truck. Thereafter, defendant was placed under arrest and advised of his Miranda rights. After preliminary investigation at the scene, defendant and Susan Bass were both transported to the sheriff's office. Each was interrogated and gave a statement describing the events preceding Mark Bass' death.

Defendant stated he returned from work during the afternoon of October 16, 1984, to find that his wife and children had moved from their family home. That evening, he drove to Waveland, Mississippi, hoping to locate his wife, who had relatives residing in that city. Defendant bought a pint of Jack Daniels whiskey in Covington, Louisiana, which he consumed during the trip to Mississippi. Defendant stopped and bought another bottle of Jack Daniels whiskey later that evening. While returning from Mississippi, defendant offered a ride to a female hitchhiker who was standing near a St. Tammany Parish interstate exit. That hitchhiker, later identified as Susan Bass, offered defendant sexual favors in exchange for a detour of his intended course of travel. The purported object for the detour was to retrieve a package. Susan Bass directed defendant through a circuitous route which ended on a dead-end road in Oak Knoll Subdivision off the Talisheek-Abita Road in St. Tammany Parish. When defendant stopped his truck, he

immediately observed a human figure laying on the side of the road. Further investigation revealed that the figure was the bleeding body of a man, later identified as Mark Steven Bass, Susan Bass' husband. Susan Bass told defendant she would inform the police he had killed her husband if defendant did not assist in disposing of the body. While attempting to leave the scene, defendant's truck became stuck in a drainage ditch. Defendant gave Susan Bass a tire tool to use as a digging implement in an attempt to free his truck. Defendant ultimately used a tractor which had been located in the yard of neighboring property. With the assistance of Susan Bass, defendant towed his truck from the ditch and loaded Mark Bass' body onto the bed of the truck. Defendant and Susan Bass were en route to dump Mark Bass' body in the river when they were stopped by Corporal Dillon.

Lieutenant David Bulloch testified that defendant was able to direct him and Detective McCormick to the site where the victim's body was loaded into defendant's truck. Corporal Wyatt McCullough, also involved in the crime scene investigation, discovered a tire tool in a ditch at that site. About forty feet from the tire tool, he found scattered coins and a brown wallet which contained items belonging to Mark Bass.

An autopsy conducted by Dr. Charles Crumpler, a pathologist, revealed that Mark Bass had died as a result of multiple wounds to the front and back portions of his torso and the back of his head. Hemorrhaging in his soft tissues indicated that the victim was still alive when all the wounds were inflicted. Time of death was fixed at between 6:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. on the night of October 16, 1984. Additionally, Dr. Crumpler testified that the wounds on the victim's body were consistent with having been inflicted by the recovered tire tool. Because of the similarity in the size of the wounds, Dr. Crumpler opined that all the wounds had been caused by one instrument.

Defendant's employer, Preston Crawford, testified that due to inclement weather defendant did not work on Monday, October 15, 1984. James Tamplin, an employee at the Wine Cellar liquor store in Waveland, Mississippi, testified that the defendant, Susan Bass and Mark Bass arrived together at the store during the late afternoon of October 15, 1984. (Defendant, in his statement, denied ever seeing Mark Bass alive or being acquainted with Susan or Mark Bass prior to the night of October 16, 1984.)

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http://www.leagle.com/decision/19861847491So2d1356_11563/STATE%20v.%20VAMPRAN)