LYNCHBURG MURDER TRIAL

Jury finds man guilty of murder

Defendant gets 21 years for killing Gracie Dillard

By Jeffrey Sykes
The News & Advance

A Lynchburg jury convicted Gregory Curtis Jones of first-degree murder Tuesday, but then only sentenced him to 21 years in prison for killing Gracie Dillard last year.

The sentence left about 20 of Dillard's family and friends dumfounded and prosecutors with a bitter-sweet victory.

Relatives of Jones and Dillard left the courtroom calculating when he will be eligible for release.

Jones is currently 30 years old.

He was also convicted of the use of a firearm in the commission of a felony for shooting Dillard once in the head at point-blank range in front of her 7-year-old son and a group of people waging a tug-of-war over Dillard as she tried to force her way into a stranger's apartment to escape from the gun-wielding Jones.

> 'Gracie was a sweet little person. She wouldn't harm anybody and she loved everybody.'
>
> **Kathleen Dillard**
> **Victim's mother**

The jury deliberated for about two hours Tuesday afternoon before finding Jones guilty of first-degree murder and the gun violation.

In addition to the 21-year murder sentence, he faces a mandatory three years on the gun charge, and could be released when he is 54.

During the sentencing phase of the trial, Deputy Commonwealth's Attorney Michael Doucette asked the jury to send Jones to prison for the rest of his life.

The jury foreman declined to comment when asked why they rejected the commonwealth's plea for a life sentence.

Doucette put Dillard's mother on the stand to tell the jury of five men and seven women just how much of an impact the murder has had on her family.

Gracie Dillard was the mother of a 7-year-old son and a 5-year-old daughter.

Family and friends call the children "B.B." and "C.C."

Kathleen Dillard wept as she described how she heard about her daughter's death.

She was at her third-shift job when her [illegible] called and said Gracie had been shot.

"It's affected the whole [illegible] a sweet little [illegible] she [illegible]

He also is [illegible] izing local referendums on a [illegible] cent sales tax increase to pay for [illegible] public school construction [illegible]