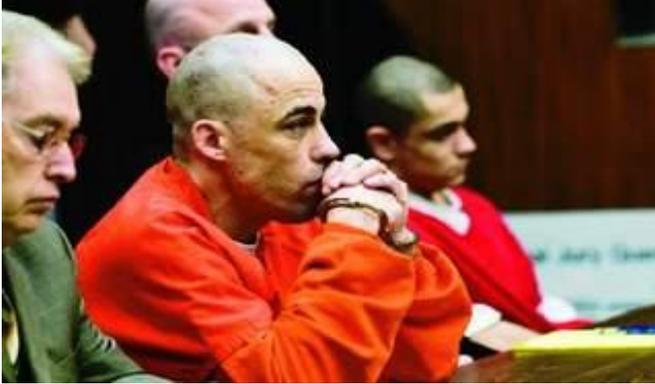


Cali Gay Couple Pleads Guilty Rather Than Face Trial and Death Penalty

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Robert Morgan, 39, left, and Jorge Morgan, 24, were sentenced to life in prison Tuesday for robbing and stabbing to death 58-yr-old Cynthia Ramos on Aug. 6, 2009 at her own home in Tracy

Couple get life sentences

STOCKTON - A sensational case involving two men who robbed and murdered a Tracy woman last summer came to a sudden end Tuesday afternoon when the defendants accepted a sentence of life in prison without parole rather than go through a trial.

Robert Morgan, 39, and his 24-year-old partner, Jorge, decided to accept the maximum sentence they faced rather than go through a trial in San Joaquin County Superior Court in the murder of 58-year-old Cynthia Ramos.

Judge Bernard Garber sentenced the men following emotional statements by four of Ramos' six children and her ex-husband. The comments were delivered as friends and other family members looked on, some dabbing at tears on their cheeks.

"These cowards that took my mother's life, I just hope you rot in hell," said Daniel Martinez, standing behind the shaven-headed Morgans, who listened silently and made no statements of their own. "Your hell is coming. You sent us to our hell."

One of Ramos' daughters, Christina Barnes, added, "Our mother was murdered in cold blood by two demons disguised as humans. ... A piece of each of us died with her."

Prosecutors had decided one week earlier not to seek the death penalty. Deputy District Attorney Valli Israels said Tuesday that prosecutors had rejected an offer from the court-appointed attorneys for the defendants to accept sentences of 25 years to life in prison.

"I thought about it," Israels said. "We decided it needed to be a little higher given the brutality of the crime."

Ramos was killed Aug. 6, 2009 in her own home in Tracy, stabbed 55 times, bludgeoned and strangled.

"How do you ever make sense out of something so senseless?" said Kimberly Elisan-McKinney, one of Ramos' daughters. "People don't even kill animals that way."

Monday, Israels said, the Morgans' attorneys said their clients were prepared to accept life sentences for first-degree murder with the special circumstance of robbery - even though those were the heaviest sentences they would have received had they gone through a trial.

"A little shocked" by the decision, Israels said she gave the defendants the night to think it over. The defense attorneys departed without comment after Tuesday's sentencing, leaving Israels to explain that she believed the defendants made the decision because they wanted the case to end on their terms.

"They wanted to choose the time they would admit they were guilty," Israels said. "This was the time for them."

Outside the courtroom, Ramos' family and friends mingled and hugged following the sentencing, some holding photographs of the slain woman and wearing clothing bearing her picture.

Barnes said the family is working to establish a foundation to provide assistance to the children of murdered parents. Family members recalled Ramos as a woman who "was coming into her own," a person who gave food to the hungry and was proud of her family.

They expressed relief that they would not have to endure a prolonged trial. But that didn't mitigate their sorrow.

"As far as the pain, it goes so deep on so many levels," Martinez said. "I never knew how deep my heart was."