

## **PAIR CONVICTED IN GIRL'S KILLING - VERDICT PROVIDES LITTLE COMFORT TO GRIEVING FAMILY**

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Author: BEN SCHMITT FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

When Harold Pollard Jr. thinks of his 7-year-old granddaughter Ajanee, he recalls a bright, popular girl whom he called his little butterfly.

"She was beautiful," Pollard said Friday after two Detroit men were convicted of murdering her during a drive-by shooting. "Intelligent, well-loved, just a special girl."

Pollard spent the past week reliving Ajanee's death during the trial in Wayne County Circuit Court.

After about two hours of deliberation, separate juries convicted **Willie Robinson** and Joel Allen, both 24, of first-degree murder. They face mandatory life prison sentences without parole. Sentencing is scheduled for Sept. 17.

"It feels good, but it doesn't bring Ajanee back," said the little girl's grandmother, Amelia Casey. "Nothing can."

Ajanee was gunned down in front of her northwest Detroit home on Feb. 25 when **Willie Robinson** opened fire on a car full of children.

A third man, Bryant Daniels, 39, of Detroit, faces second-degree murder charges for allegedly supplying the rifle used in the shooting. His trial is scheduled for November.

The children's mother, Aelizabeth Niebrzydowski, who also was injured in the incident, was taking her four children to a mall that February afternoon because she had just received an income tax refund check. She was waiting for her 6-year-old son, Jason Jr., who was inside wiping his nose, and her brother, Anthony Niebrzydowski, to come outside to the car.

She testified that she saw Robinson's car traveling slowly down Dolphin Street and heard him yell expletives at them. Then she heard the passenger side window shatter, followed by the rear windshield.

Anthony Niebrzydowski, who by this time was outside with Jason, dived inside the vehicle with the child. By the time the shooting ceased and Robinson and Allen sped off, Ajanee was dead and her three siblings wounded along with their mother.

Police and prosecutors say an argument between Robinson and a Pollard family friend over a \$40 radio led to the shooting.

"I just hope those wannabe gang-bangers take a look at this case and see what can happen when you mess with guns," said the children's grandfather, Harold Pollard Jr. "Think before you want to go get a gun to solve your problems, because that's not going to solve anything." Ajanee's mother crouched over in her seat and held her head, crying as the second guilty verdict was read. Ajanee's father, Jason Pollard, kept his arm around her. Both declined to comment.

"They're hurting," Harold Pollard said. "My kids are really hurting."

Defense Attorney Marvin Barnett said Robinson will appeal the verdict. His defense was that Robinson was angered over the argument but did not know anyone was in the car when he shot at it. He said Robinson intended to shoot up the car to make a statement, but had no intentions of hurting anyone.

"I certainly disagree with the decision," he said. "I'm saddened by it."

Allen's defense was that he was just the driver and did not know Robinson had a gun.

Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Kenneth King, who prosecuted Allen, said he was pleased that the jury viewed Allen as just as culpable as the gunman. Allen's attorney Richard Cunningham said, "I'm disappointed in the verdict," and declined further comment.

Wayne County Prosecutor Terrence Haugabook, tried the Robinson case and said it shows that the prosecutor's office is making a hard push against violent gun offenders. And this case was senseless, he said.

"It was over nothing."

Contact BEN SCHMITT at 313-222-6597 or [schmitt@freepress.com](mailto:schmitt@freepress.com).

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