

Huntington's Hope

Comments by J. C. Spencer

Huntington's disease is one of the most devastating neurodegenerative challenges known to man. We must do everything in our power to stop this ravaging of the mind and body. Some have started naturally fighting Huntington's and according to the testimonies of family members, they are successfully using and benefiting from the sugar trehalose. Many science paper abstracts are posted in the NEWS Section at www.endowmentmed.org and more information is available on Sugar Science Forum of The Endowment for Medical Research.

The news story for today is not pretty. It is news and it is tragic. It is my hope that we can play a role in keeping this from happening to families with Huntington's.

Now the story.

Illness [Huntington's] complicates Iowa murder case

By AMY LORENTZEN

Published January 23, 2009



DES MOINES, Iowa - Debi Joy Olson is adamant that she stalked her ex-husband across the country, then stabbed him to death in a Davenport mall last summer.

She wants to plead guilty and go to prison, saying her only regret is that she can't be extradited to her home state of Florida, where she could face the death penalty.

But what seems like a simple case has been complicated because the 53-year-old Sarasota, Fla., woman apparently suffers from Huntington's disease. The illness wastes brain cells and has caused the court to question her mental competency.

Olson has fired her lawyer and is representing herself on the charges of first-degree murder and willful injury. And a judge has ordered a mental competency evaluation and threatened to obtain medical samples of bodily fluids by "nonconsensual means" if she doesn't cooperate.

Even as she admits to killing Mauricio Droguett, her husband of about 20 years, the case appears nowhere near

In this undated photo released by the Scott County, Iowa, Jail, on Friday, Jan. 23, 2009, Debi Olson is shown in a booking photograph. Olson is adamant that she stalked her ex-husband across the country, then stabbed him to death in a Davenport mall last summer. She wants to plead guilty and go to prison, saying her only regret is that she can't be extradited to her home state of Florida, where she could face the death penalty. (AP Photo/Scott County, Iowa, Jail)

completion.

"I gave up my Country, my relatives, my friends for him 25 years ago. I will give up the rest of my life for Him now," she wrote to District Court Judge James E. Kelley in a letter titled "Confession to First Degree Murder."

"I need to plead guilty now ... I want to go to prison for life," she wrote in the letter, dated Oct. 14, 2008.

Olson is accused of stabbing her ex-husband 10 times at the Northpark Mall on July 10. Droguett worked as a comptroller for Carson & Barnes Family Circus, a Florida-based operation that was setting up in the mall parking lot.

In a series of letters to the judge, Olson detailed how she tracked Droguett across the country and bought a hammer and knife before confronting him in front of about a half dozen witnesses.

Olson was arrested a short time later, and police said she immediately confessed and cooperated with the investigation. Court records show she also told an officer that she has Huntington's disease, which was causing slurred speech and stumbling.

Since the arrest, Olson has been less responsive to court officials who question whether she can understand the proceedings. She has refused to share her medical records or be evaluated by doctors.

In another letter to the judge, she wrote that no one except she and her ex-husband will ever know why she killed him, and that she "did not kill him out of anger, it was out of love."

Olson discharged her lawyer two months after her arrest and chose to represent herself. In court documents, Judge Kelley expressed concerns about that decision and ordered a mental competency evaluation.

"The Court became concerned during her answers that at times she referred to her deceased husband in the present tense and sometimes in the past tense," Kelley wrote.

Olson refused to be examined in November by experts from the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. In response, the Judge Kelley ordered the examination to be held at the Iowa Medical Classification Center in Oakdale, but a short time later he learned a lack of psychiatrists at the prison meant the evaluation couldn't be done there.

At a hearing last week, the judge again ordered University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics officials to evaluate Olson as well as provide treatment, obtain medical records and run

other medical tests to determine if she suffers from any mental or physical disease.

He noted that Olson must cooperate or he will authorize officials to obtain medical samples of bodily fluids without her approval. A date for the evaluation wasn't immediately available.

James Tomkovicz, a law professor at the University of Iowa, said an order for nonconsensual medical tests is unusual. He said there is little precedent for obtaining samples against someone's wishes to test for an illness.

Mark Dobson, a law professor at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., also called the situation unusual.

"The question is whether the interests of the state outweigh her interest of bodily integrity," he said. "The state has an interest in making sure any plea entered into is knowing and intelligent so that she can't come back years from now" and challenge the validity of the plea.

In some of the letters, Olson tells the judge that she wants court officials to "stay out of my business."

"I wish I could of been extradited back to Florida and face the Death Penalty and you know I'd be OK with that too," she wrote in a letter from October. "I do not think it's fair to me about this evaluation."

A few months later, she threatened to contact the U.S. Supreme Court and told Kelley, "I truly believe you are purposely letting me sit here for whatever reason unnecessarily."

Weeks later, though, she asks to be sent to the Oakville facility, saying she is doing poorly at the Scott County Jail and her memory is worsening. In a letter this month she warned, "My memory is going: I wouldn't want to forget what I did!"

In a Jan. 7 letter she requests a Huntington's disease specialist to be present at her next hearing, but it's unclear if a specialist was available at that hearing or whether her request meant she was ready to submit to testing.

Judge Kelley refused to comment on the case.

Assistant Scott County Attorney Jerald Feuerbach said, "She appeared a little bit more receptive than in the past, but until she actually sees the doctors, I don't know,"

Source: Fort Mill Times DES MOINES, Iowa

<http://www.fortmilltimes.com/124/story/433165.html>