

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Jury Finds Former St. Thomas Police Captain Guilty Of Killing His Wife

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ST. THOMAS -- Former police captain, Enrique Saldana, was remanded to the Bureau of Corrections Friday night, minutes after a jury found him guilty of killing his wife almost three years ago, V.I. Department of Justice Public Media Officer Corliss Smithen announced late Friday.

Following five days of testimony and after four hours of deliberation, jurors unanimously convicted Saldana, 53, of New Quarter, of one count each of second-degree murder, second-degree assault and two counts of third-degree assault, all crimes of domestic violence, in connection with the May 2, 2014, death of his wife, Jeanette Magras-Saldana, 43, pictured above.

V.I. Superior Court Judge Michael Dunston has set May 3 as the date for Saldana's sentencing. Attorney General Claude Earl Walker expressed his satisfaction at the outcome.

"I am very proud of my prosecution team and the entire Magras family because the cards were stacked against us from the very beginning, but through the desire to achieve justice for Jeanette, we did not relent," AG Walker said in a statement. "Jeanette was a beautiful lady with her whole life ahead of her, but she was miserably oppressed by Saldana. The evidence shows that in her final days, she sensed that she was going to be killed and that Saldana would be her killer. It was almost as if she was crying out, 'Deliver me from the hand of the wicked, from the clutches of my oppressor.' Saldana murdered his wife just to heal his enlarged, bruised ego and so, now that the jury has found him guilty of second-degree murder, he deserves to spend the rest of his life in jail and that will be our recommendation at sentencing."

Relying on the testimony of at least 20 witnesses, prosecutors proved that Saldana drugged his wife causing her to be debilitated, beat her and then killed her.

During the course of the trial, the nine men and six women of the jury heard several witnesses testify that Saldana was insanely jealous of his wife and as a result, he wielded control over her, decided the clothes she should wear, told her what to do and demanded that she change her gym schedule from five days per week to three days.

Saldana's domination continued during the time he was off-island, Nicole Turnbull, Jeanette Magras-Saldana's manicurist and her confidante, testified.

"He was still in that controlling way and even more so off-island," Turnbull said. "She was extremely frustrated; she was upset because even though he was off-island, he was still trying to run the show." Saldana returned to the island in 2014 having spent several years in federal prison after being convicted of conspiracy to commit extortion and extortion, and the Virgin Islands charges of conspiratorial extortion, extortion under color of official right, conflict of interest, and solicitation and receipt of a bribe.

"Just before he returned to the island, she was a nervous wreck," Turnbull said. "She got even more jittery, more frustrated, overwhelmed and it just got increasingly worse. She knew he was coming back on-island." On his return to the island, Turnbull added, Saldana's control increased. "She couldn't deal with the control from the defendant anymore... and she wanted a divorce," Turnbull said.

Another of Jeanette Magras-Saldana's friend, Robles, told the court that on more than one occasion, he saw Saldana watching Jeanette Magras-Saldana. Antonio lived next door to Jeanette Magras-Saldana.

"There was a time when I saw him walk from the street to and from the house," Robles said. "I told Jeanette I saw him watching her... and she was in shock."

Jeanette Magras-Saldana's niece, Alana Urena, who spent time at her aunt's house, recalled that on some occasions, Saldana came to the house unannounced.

Jurors also heard the testimonies of Cory Isaac and Odette Magras, who recounted the events of the last night they saw Jeanette Magras-Saldana alive. Isaac and Magras were

partying with the Saldanas on the night of May 1, 2014; they were drinking wine and dancing.

"I left the house about 12 or 12:30 that night. Everybody gave hugs and kisses and we said we'll see each other in the morning," Isaac told the court.

Odette Magras, Jeanette Magras-Saldana's cousin, remembered leaving the party sometime after midnight.

"I said my goodbyes and told her 'see you tomorrow.' We were all supposed to go to Lindquist Beach for a family get together," Odette Magras said. The next day, May 2, 2014, Odette Magras received the dreaded news that Jeanette Magras-Saldana was dead.

On the morning of May 2, 2014, Saldana called 911 to report that his girlfriend wasn't breathing and that he needed assistance to go to the hospital; he was in the area of Food Center at the time. An off-duty police officer, Cpl. Bernard Burke who heard the transmission, met Saldana at the hospital and helped him remove Jeanette Magras-Saldana from the jeep Saldana was driving.

In a video interview with police, Saldana told investigators that he was at his wife's house on May 1, 2014 and he saw her take a handful of sleeping pills on two separate occasions. He said his wife fell on her way to the kitchen and she wiped her bloodied nose with a piece of tissue, which she disposed into the toilet. Then, early in the morning of May 2, 2014, they went to Vessup's Beach at Jeanette Magras-Saldana's request. While at the beach, Jeanette Magras-Saldana fell down, he tried lifting her up and she yelled in pain. She also fell at least twice against the vehicle and as she was coming out of the water, she stopped breathing, he said.

At the hospital, medical staff took 27 minutes trying to revive Jeanette Magras-Saldana, but were unsuccessful. Medical Examiner Dr. Francisco Landron, who performed the autopsy on Jeanette Magras-Saldana, testified that she died as a result of acute diphenhydramine, a substance which is marketed as Benadryl. According to a toxicology report, the diphenhydramine level in Jeanette Magras-Saldana's body was 7,900 nanograms, which was considered a fatal level of concentration.

Dr. Landron also noted that Jeanette Magras-Saldana's body bore multiple bruises and contusions, including two large bruises on the left breast, one large bruise around the chin and several bruises on both arms.

"All the bruises were the result of an impact caused by a blunt force object, such as a punch or a kick," he said.

By the time Jeanette Magras-Saldana arrived at the hospital, rigor mortis had already set in and her body temperature was recorded at 95.6, which meant that she was dead for about two to four hours, Dr. Landron told jurors. Saldana told police that she was alive 15 minutes before he brought her to the hospital.

"Today, I stand before you seeking justice for Jeanette Magras-Saldana. I ask that you do justice in this matter. I ask that you return a verdict of guilty on each and every count," Assistant Attorney General Quincy McRae implored the jurors in his closing arguments.

Assistant Attorneys General Ednin Martinez and Nadja Harrigan also argued the case for the prosecution.

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