



Should Mom Who Killed 3 Kids, Pled Insanity, Get Released from Hospital?

Dianne Evers Pled Insanity in Her 1981 Trial in Florida

By EMILY FRIEDMAN

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A woman who was found not guilty by reason of insanity after claiming the Virgin Mary told her to [drown her three young daughters](#) nearly 30 years ago is healed enough to be released into the free world, according to medical professionals.

Dianne Evers, 53, was present in a Tavares, Fla., courtroom last week when doctors who have been caring for her at the Florida State Hospital testified that she is healthy and no longer suffers from [hallucinations stemming from schizophrenia](#).

"We honestly believe that she's the best she'll be," Shirley Pace, a social worker who has cared for Evers, told the court, according to the [Orlando Sentinel](#).

Amy Louch, a psychologist who cares for Evers, testified that her patient is a rare "success story" and now can handle stressful situations without "drama," according to the paper. Louch and Pace also testified that Evers' hallucinations are controlled with counseling, coping strategies and drugs.

Evers admitted to [drowning](#) her three daughters -- 4-year-old twins Carrie and Sherri and 2-year-old Mandy -- on New Year's Day 1980 in the family's bathtub in Leesburg, Fla.

According to news reports at the time of her arrest and trial, Evers claimed the voice of the Virgin Mary told her to [kill her daughters](#) while family members played chess in a nearby room.

Then 25, Evers was found not guilty by reason of insanity in 1981 and was committed to the state hospital in Chattahoochee, Fla. She has been there ever since.

Assistant State Attorney Bill Gross objects to Evers' potential release, questioning whether her hallucinations are truly over and whether she may be a potential danger to herself or others.

"My position is that she has been stable and hallucination free in the past on a number of occasions," said Gross, who has been working on Evers' case for more than 20 years. "She keeps having relapses, and I'm concerned she'll have another when she's out on the street and someone -- or even herself -- would be hurt."

Gross said that the doctor's recommendation that Evers be put in an adult living facility should not be granted until it's proven that she will "not relapse when she gets into a stressful situation."

"The doctors have commented that Evers has been with them for 28 years, and they are saying that there is nothing more than can do for, that it's been long enough [in the hospital]," said Gross. "Well you know, for some people it is and for some people it isn't, and they shouldn't get out, and they're dangerous and grossly mentally ill."

Messages left for the Florida State Hospital were not immediately returned, and Evers' attorney, public defender Raymond Sloan, declined to comment.

ABC News was unable to reach Evers' ex-husband, Jerry Evers, but he told the Orlando Sentinel he thinks it would be a huge mistake to release her.

"She robbed them of all they had and all they would ever have -- their hopes, their dreams," Jerry Evers told the paper. "I don't believe she's any better or any safer than 30 years ago."

Whether Evers is released is now up to Judge Mark Hill, who has denied similar requests at least two times before. Hill has asked for the doctors to submit a written plan of what kind of care Evers would be under if she switched to a less secure facility and what limitations would be placed on her contact with children, given her crime.

Charles Ewing, a forensic psychologist and a professor at the University of Buffalo Law School, said that while it's not easy to get released after using the insanity defense, it is possible for individuals like Evers to be granted freedom after years in a mental institution.

"In most states, to be released you have to show you're no longer dangerously mentally ill," said Ewing. "That's a pretty tough burden, particularly in a case like [Evers'] where there were multiple homicides."

Typically, neither the court nor the medical staffers are willing to deem a patient no longer insane, Ewing said, because of the risk that the individual will act out in the future.

"But in this particular type of case, this woman drowned three children, and the danger that she posed was most likely to her own kids," he said.

"Thirty years is a long time and people do change, and circumstances change also," said Ewing. "An awful lot of these homicides that are committed by mothers are committed because of depression and stress and other factors that may not pertain to this individual anymore."

It's not uncommon for state prosecutors and the public to be outraged when former murder defendants like Evers are put up for release, Ewing said.

Despite that, it's important to remember that mental illness can be treated, he added.

"There is great disdain for the insanity defense generally because people see it as a way of shirking responsibility and as a way of 'getting away with it' and it really isn't," he said.

"People should realize that mental illness is treatable and people can overcome at least some of the symptoms of major illnesses," Ewing said.

"Also keep in mind that insanity deals with the person's state of mind at the time of the offense," said Ewing. "So this offense took place 30 years ago. You're talking about someone who is a much different person today than she was several years ago."

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