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JUDGE ORDERS TEEN SENT TO MASSACHUSETTS

TWILA DECKER, Staff Writer

The tug of war over what sort of sentence 15-year-old Gina Grant should serve for killing her mother has ended.

A family court judge Wednesday overruled the state juvenile parole board and the Department of Youth Services and sent her to a juvenile correctional facility in Massachusetts to be near her aunt and uncle.

The parole board had decided Tuesday that Grant should serve her time in a DYS facility until she could remember the details of the night she bludgeoned her drunken mother to death with a candle holder. "Going back and forth with this case is not in the best interest of Gina, but maybe in the best interest of DYS," said Attorney **Jack Swerling**, during the resentencing hearing.

Grant, toting a colorful notebook and geographical magazine, gasped when Judge Marc Westbrook placed her on two years probation with the provision that she reside at a Massachusetts juvenile facility. Her aunt and uncle will pay for her stay.

"I felt like they'd send me one day, but I just never really knew it would be today," the teen-ager said after the hearing. She checked out of DYS about 4 p.m. on her way to Massachusetts.

Grant, who was a student leader at DYS, said she was looking forward to spending more time with her aunt and uncle, but was sad to leave her new friends.

"I wish I could take them all with me," she said of her roommates, explaining that after nightmares of her mother's killing, several of her roommates had comforted her.

The former Lexington County honor student pleaded guilty in July to voluntary manslaughter in the death of her mother, Dorothy Mayfield, 43. Psychologist say the teen-ager exploded after years of coping with her mother's alcoholism and her father's cancer.

"My goal was just to get through high school and get out of that house," said Grant, who said her mother's drinking grew worse after her father died four years ago. "In that house, it just felt like this tension was building and building."

Her older sister, Dana, 24, said she tried to shelter Grant from the alcoholism. She bought her younger sister's groceries, took her to school and tried not to leave her home alone with her

mother.

"We thought we had this terrible secret," Dana Grant said. "But after this happened we realized that it was no secret at all. Everybody knew about it, from the clerks to neighbors."

In July, Westbrook sentenced Grant to six months at DYS and the remainder of her sentence at one of three Massachusetts juvenile facilities.

But after DYS objected, claiming that Westbrook did not have the authority to decide how long and where a juvenile would serve time, the judge reconsidered. He committed Grant to DYS with a strong recommendation that she be transferred to Massachusetts at the first opportunity.

Despite the recommendation, both DYS Commissioner Richard E. McLawhorn and the parole board denied transferring the teen-ager. They said Grant hadn't accepted responsibility for the death and needed to continue therapy with DYS counselors.

But psychologists said Grant needs to be near a family support unit and might never remember the night she beat her mother to death, **Swerling** said.

"They describe it like waking up from a dream when the details are fragmented," he said.

Grant's uncle has spent eight of the past 12 months in South Carolina at his niece's side. He had taken the year off to write a novel when Gina was arrested.

"Charles (Grant's father) made us swear an oath that if he died we'd do what we could to take care of Gina and Dana," Bennett said. "At every point we said this is difficult, but if we stopped what would happen to her."

But **Swerling** said time and money were running out.

Bennett said after Tuesday's decision he had accepted that he'd have to resume a life in Cambridge, Mass., and spend less on the legal struggle.

But **Swerling** played his trump card, arranging for Westbrook to reconsider Grant's sentencing first thing Wednesday morning.

It worked.

Gina Grant leaves court with attorney **Jack Swerling**, who said she's in 'shock' over decision to move. Jim Arnold / The State



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SPECIAL SCHOOL RECOMMENDED FOR GIRL WHO KILLED MOTHER

JOHN ALLARD, Staff Writer

Gina Grant might get to attend a special school for children with emotional problems after spending four months in confinement for beating her mother to death.

Lexington County Family Court Judge Marc Westbrook recommended Thursday that the state Department of Youth Services transfer supervision of Grant, 15, to authorities in Massachusetts, where her paternal aunt and uncle live. He said he did not put her on probation because of the crime she committed.

Westbrook sentenced Grant, a popular Lexington Middle School student who excelled in academics and athletics, to remain in a youth correctional facility until she turns 21. But the judge asked DYS to let Grant attend a school in Massachusetts, where youngsters with emotional problems take classes year-round and are confined to school grounds. Massachusetts authorities have agreed to supervise her.

"I'm getting mixed signals from DYS, but it would be best for the child to go to Massachusetts. She has close family ties there, and a fresh environment wouldn't be so bad for her, quite frankly," Westbrook said. "The girl needs the best thing possible."

Grant could go to Massachusetts if DYS Commissioner Rich McLawhorn decides to transfer her supervision there or if the state Board of Juvenile Parole puts her on parole, DYS spokesman Len Hathaway said.

"The commissioner said he is quite concerned about the judge's decision and is going to pray about it," Hathaway said.

The parole board, which meets Aug. 6, occasionally gets recommendations from judges, said chairwoman Marlene McClain of Anderson. She did not know whether Grant's case would be discussed in August or September.

"Any judge's recommendation would certainly carry weight with the parole board, but it would be premature of me to comment on the proposal at this point," McClain said.

Grant pleaded no contest in January to killing her alcoholic mother, Dorothy Grant Mayfield, by hitting her skull 13 times with a crystal candleholder last September in their home near Lexington.

She said during a court hearing Wednesday that she regrets killing her mother. Grant cried as she read a short statement written on notebook paper, putting her head in her hands when she finished.

"I just wanted to express to you how sorry I am for this situation. I've had a lot of problems showing how sorry I am. I understand now a lot more about myself and my feelings," Grant told Westbrook.

Grant said going to Massachusetts would not be letting her off the hook for killing her mother.

"I don't deserve or want a free ride. I want to go to Massachusetts so my aunt and uncle can support me," Grant said. "I want to get better."

One of Grant's attorneys, **Jack Swerling**, said she and her family did not want to comment Thursday because her situation has not been resolved.

"Of course, I would much rather have put her on a plane today, but we're not disappointed," **Swerling** said. "There has been no indication that there will be any opposition in her going to Massachusetts, and I am confident that it is going to happen."

There will be no opposition from the prosecution, 11th Circuit Assistant Solicitor Lisa Bernardin said.

"Gina has made a lot of progress, but it was a brutal killing," Bernardin said. "I've just got to believe that she will end up in Massachusetts. There's not much left for her down here."

Westbrook had sentenced Grant to six months at DYS but backed off when DYS challenged the sentence because judges can give young offenders only indeterminate sentences.

Grant

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The waiting is over



Jim Arnold/The State

Gina Grant leaves court with attorney Jack Swerling, who said she's in 'shock' over decision to move.

Judge orders teen sent to Massachusetts

By TWILA DECKER
Staff Writer

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Sentence

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But Swerling played his hand, arranging for Westbrook to consider Grant's sentence on Wednesday morning. It worked.



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GIRL, 15, LOOKS AHEAD TO LIFE AFTER JAIL TERM

JOHN ALLARD, Staff Writer

Gina Grant hugged relatives and friends Wednesday after learning she will serve only six months in a youth correctional facility for killing her alcoholic mother.

Grant, 15, said in an interview that she has a chance to start a new life. The straight-A student had pleaded no contest to voluntary manslaughter.

"I feel like I have a lot to deal with, but eventually, I will be able to cope with it," Grant said. Grant hopes to move in with her paternal aunt and uncle in Cambridge, Mass., and attend a special school for juvenile offenders.

Lexington County Family Court Judge Marc Westbrook ruled Grant could not be kept in a state Department of Youth Services' facility for more than six months if she enrolls in the special school. If she does not get in the school or another program, she could be confined until she turns 21.

Grant, the first student government governor at Lexington Middle School, plans to attend college and become a psychologist or lawyer. She hopes to write a book about her experience and counsel other children raised by alcoholics.

"It's been hard for me to go through, but I've gotten a lot of support from my family, friends and the community," Grant said. "I couldn't have made it without the support."

Grant's sister, Dana, held hands with her and both wiped tears from their eyes after listening to testimony about their mother's drinking binges. Dana Grant gently stroked her sister's hand.

Their mother's brother was pleased with the sentence. He wrote in a letter that Dorothy Mayfield, 42, verbally abused her daughters.

"Gina does not need to be punished any more. She has had an abnormal life," Curtis Dickson wrote.

Westbrook said it was important for Grant to serve time so she could reflect on the gravity of her crime.

Testimony on Wednesday showed family life in Grant's home deteriorated to the breaking point after her father died from cancer in 1987. Mayfield's drinking and verbal abuse escalated.

She prohibited Grant and her sister from keeping pictures of their father and would not allow them to discuss his death.

Grant's attorneys, **Jack Swerling** and Jennifer Kneece Shealy, said Mayfield blamed her daughter for her husband's death.

Grant used a crystal candleholder to crush her drunken mother's skull last September in their home at 5037 Sunset Blvd. near Lexington.

Grant declined to discuss her mother's death or her boyfriend, **Jack Hook**, who helped her cover up after she killed her mother.

Family Court Judge W. Frank Rogers Jr. last week ordered Hook, 16, to serve an indeterminate sentence, not to exceed his 21st birthday, in a DYS facility.

Hook had pleaded no contest to accessory after the fact. DYS guidelines call for him to serve between four and seven months in a correctional facility.

His attorney, Stephen McCormack, said Hook did not receive a fair sentence because he was only an accessory to Mayfield's death.

Hook deserved his sentence because he has prior convictions for second-degree burglary, petit larceny and malicious destruction of railroad property, said 11th Circuit Assistant Solicitor Lisa Bernardin.

Grant's paternal uncle in Cambridge said justice has been served.

"It's nice that we're being given an opportunity to enter a healing process," Alan Bennett said. "It's been a real family tragedy."

Grant



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THE NEW YORKER

Abstract

JANE MAYER, THE JUSTICE FILE, "REJECTING GINA," *THE NEW YORKER*, JUNE 5, 1995, P 43

THE JUSTICE FILE about Harvard University rescinding its admissions to Gina Grant after it was revealed to them that as a juvenile, she pleaded no contest to killing her mother, Dorothy Mayfield. On September 13, 1990, Gina was held as the prime suspect in the brutal killing of her mother. In January 1991, Gina pleaded no contest to her mother's killing. She served approximately eight months in detention. In the fall of 1994, she applied for admission to Harvard. Harvard's admissions officers knew nothing of her past. Her father, an engineer, had died of cancer when she was eleven. Her mother, a secretary at Bankers Trust, had died of "an accident" when Gina was fourteen. After being released on probation, Gina moved to Cambridge, Mass., to live with a paternal aunt and uncle, Alan and Carol Bennett. As a juvenile, she'd been told, most of her court records were confidential. Harvard rescinded her admission after they received an anonymous package containing newspaper articles of the murder and a letter which describe Gina as a manipulative liar. Gina quickly became the subject of a national debate. Dana Grant, Gina's older sister, said Gina and her mother got into a fight over Gina's boyfriend. The Lexington County sheriff, James R. Metts released Gina's name to the press. even though it was against South Carolina law. Jack Swerling, Gina's lawyer said the publicity worked for them. Gina's mother was an abusive alcoholic. Dr. Harold Morgan, a forensic psychiatrist said it was the worst case of psychological abuse he had ever seen. Her mother's brother, Curtis Dickson, also supported Gina. Eileen Harrelson, the mother of Gina's best friend, Christy Harrelson, saw Gina's abuse but didn't take it that seriously. Gina's boyfriend, Jack Hook, pleaded no contest to the charge of accessory to voluntary manslaughter after his fingerprints were found on the knife in Gina's mother's throat. By taking Gina out of the hands of the overcrowded and understaffed Department of Youth Services in South Carolina. Judge Marc Westbrook stirred up a furor. Before her juvenile record became known, Columbia, Barnard, and Tufts had all accepted her.

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