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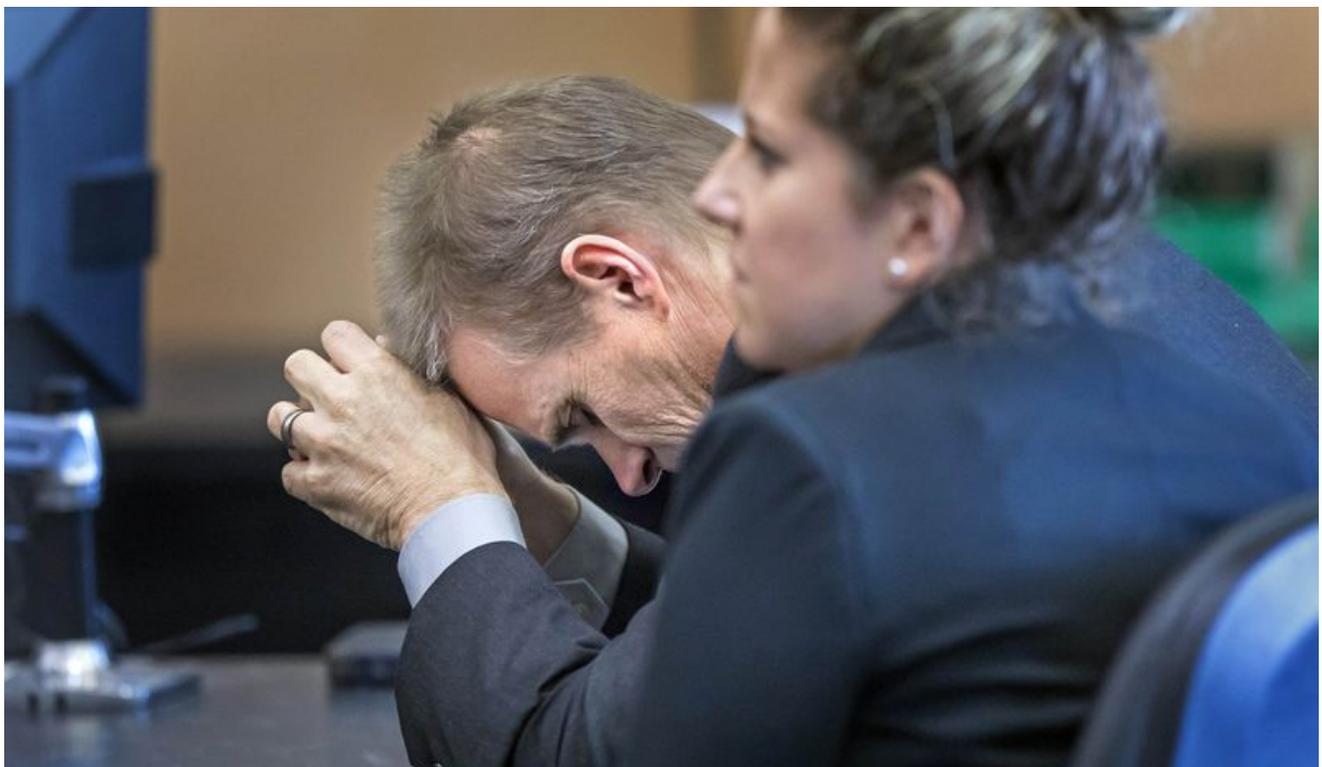
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'We prayed this day would come.' Man gets life for 1998 cold-case murder of Delray shop employee



By MARC FREEMAN
SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL | AUG 23, 2019





Todd Barket puts his head down after he was found guilty of first-degree murder Friday in West Palm Beach, August 23, 2019. He was convicted of the 1998 stabbing and bludgeoning of Sondra Better, 68, who was killed during her last week of work at Lu Shay's Consignment Shop in Delray Beach. [LANNIS WATERS/palmbeachpost.com] (Lannis Waters / The Palm Beach Post)

Sisters Gambi Better and Robin Shores will keep yahrzeit candles lit Saturday, the 21st anniversary of the death of their beloved mother, Sondra Better.

The Jewish observance this year follows a **Palm Beach County** jury's guilty verdict Friday in the 68-year-old matriarch's brutal slaying in a **Delray Beach** consignment store.

Todd Barket, a 51-year-old Hillsborough County man who eluded authorities for two decades, was convicted of first-degree murder and robbery charges and sentenced to life in prison after a weeklong trial.

“It’s a blessing,” said John Shores, Better’s son-in-law. “It’s like God has looked down and brought closure to the family.”





Gambi Better (left) and Robin Shores, daughters of Sondra Better, return to their seats after speaking about their mother in court following Todd Barket being found guilty of the 1998 stabbing and bludgeoning of Sondra Better Friday in West Palm Beach, August 23, 2019. Better, 68, was killed during her last week of work at Lu Shay's Consignment Shop in Delray Beach. (Lannis Waters / The Palm Beach Post)

The victim's loved ones say they kept their faith that someday they would get justice for their mom and grandma, who was beaten and stabbed to death on Aug. 24, 1998. She was finishing a work shift alone at Lu Shay boutique.

"We prayed this day would come, and it has," Robin Shores said, noting her sadness that her dad didn't live to see it.

[RELATED: 'Blood can tell a compelling story, even 21 years later.' Trial begins in cold-case murder. »](#)

Seymour "Zeke" Better, who died in 2015, was a longtime Delray Beach Police volunteer who was close with detectives. The Betters, of Highland Beach, had celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary one month before the tragedy.

Gambi Better thanked both Delray Beach police for their persistence over the years and the seven women and five men of the jury. The jurors reached their decision in less than 90 minutes.

"The defendant got up on the stand and fabricated this entire story," Better told Circuit Judge Cheryl Caracuzzo before Barket's sentencing. "I totally understand, what else would you do when you are charged with murder? I'm grateful that the jury had reasonable minds and could see through the lies."

In her closing argument Thursday, Assistant State Attorney Alexcia Cox said Barket decided to rob the store and wound up using his 6-foot-1, 175-pound frame to overpower the 5-foot-2, 95-pound employee when she resisted.

“It was quick, it was brutal,” Cox said, explaining that after Barket got cut during the attack and started bleeding, he grabbed a knife from a cake box and stabbed Better repeatedly.

“He made the conscious decision that he would end her life,” the prosecutor said.



Gambi Better, one of the daughters of Sondra Better, hugs Chief Assistant State Attorney Adrienne Ellis after Todd Barket was found guilty of the 1998 stabbing and bludgeoning of Better Friday in West Palm Beach, August 23, 2019. Better, 68, was killed during her last week of work at Lu Shay's Consignment Shop in Delray Beach. (Lannis Waters / The Palm Beach Post)

Detectives testified the case turned cold despite their best efforts to find Better's killer. They said their big break came when Barket last December applied for a job that required his fingerprints for a background check. Barket was charged in late March after authorities matched his fingerprint and DNA to evidence from the crime scene.

“It took 21 years for this crime to catch up to him,” prosecutor Cox said. “But it did.”

Barket didn't dispute his fingerprint and blood were found inside the store. But he

claimed he went shopping with his wife at the Federal Highway store and touched a decorative marble ball two weeks before the homicide. “I’ve been thinking of this since I was arrested,” Barket said.

What about the blood droppings? Barket said he was then a day laborer on construction jobs and must have cut a wound on his hand from handling car keys, before returning to the store on the day of the murder. Barket said he had come back to the shop alone to buy the decoration, as a surprise for his wife.

And finally, what about his blood at the cash register where more than \$100 was stolen? He made an impulsive decision to take the money because no employees were around, he testified.



Todd Barket talks with Public Defender Courtney Wilson as they wait for the jury to enter the courtroom with the verdict in his murder trial Friday, August 23, 2019. He was convicted of first-degree murder in the 1998 stabbing and

bludgeoning of Sondra Better. Better, 68, was killed during her last week of work at Lu Shay's Consignment Shop in Delray Beach. (Lannis Waters / The Palm Beach Post)

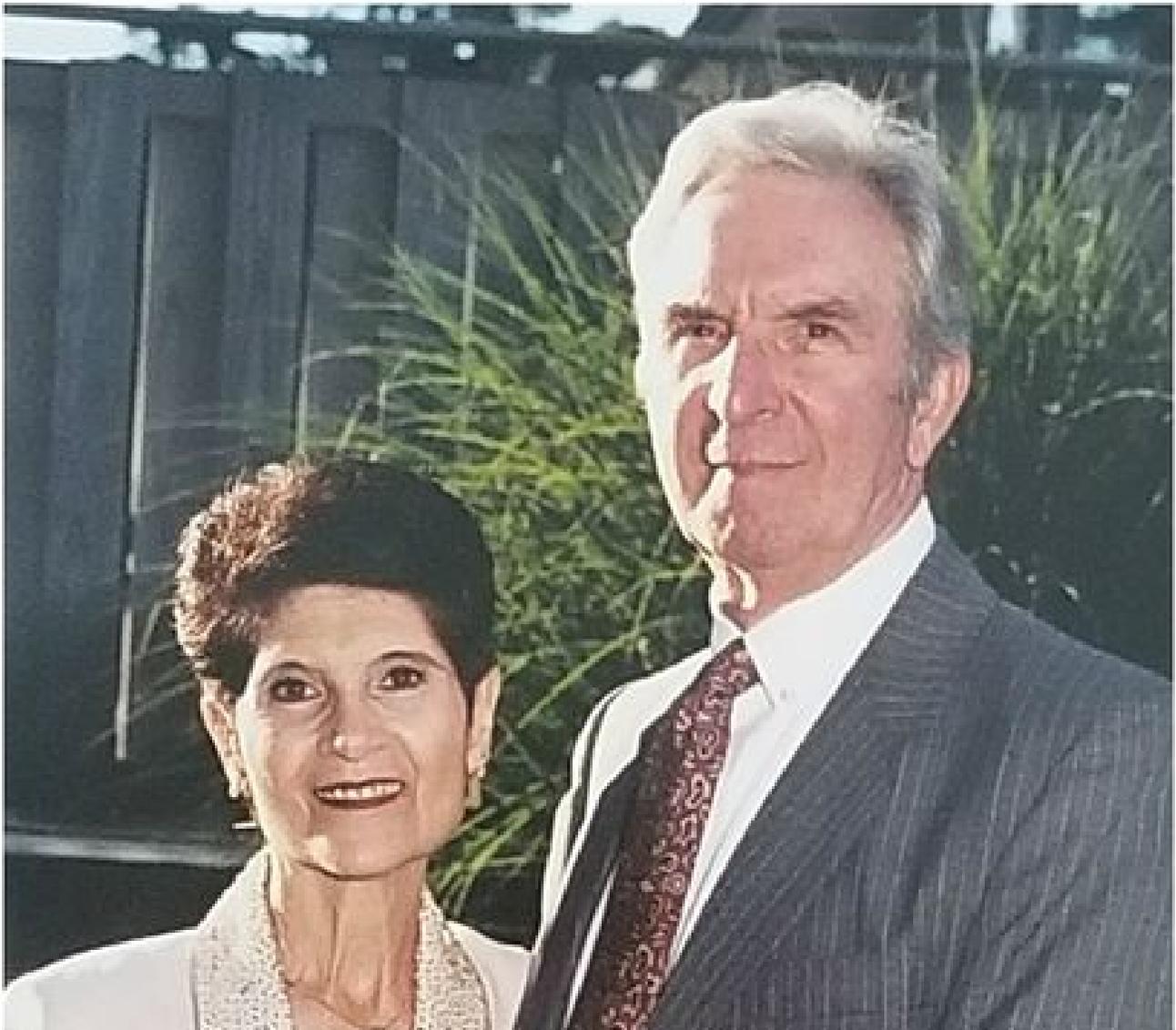
“I’m not proud of what I did,” Barket said.

“I’m sure you’re not,” shot back Assistant State Attorney Richard Clausi.

Under questioning from Assistant Public Defender Joseph Walsh, Barket said he recalled arriving at the store between 5:30 p.m. and 6 p.m.

Barket said he made a split-second decision to open the register, grab the money, and run to his car.

Barket said he never noticed Better’s body on the shop floor, or he “would have called 911.”





Sondra Better (pictured with husband Seymour "Zeke" Better)

Todd Barket, a 51-year-old Brandon man, has been arrested in a 1998 killing. Sondra Better was a 68-year-old Highland Beach resident who was found dead inside Lu Shay's Consignment Boutique, at 3175 S. Federal Highway, where she worked part-time. She had been stabbed and beaten repeatedly. - Original Credit: Delray Beach police - Original Source: (Delray Beach police / Courtesy)

Assistant Public Defender Courtney Wilson said her client had been framed, noting how a police composite sketch of a suspect bears no resemblance to Barket at the time.

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“The state needs you to believe with no actual proof, that a man who’s never been arrested before, married for 26 years, one day, for no reason, decides to come into a store, brutally beat a perfect stranger, for no motive other than to take a hundred dollars out of a cash register and not take anything else,” Wilson said.

“And then in the past 21 years, someone who is capable of doing this has never had an encounter with law enforcement?” That doesn’t make sense. That doesn’t add up,” she said.

But prosecutor Cox told jurors to reject his testimony — and they did.

"Please believe me that there is no way that this defendant and the story that he told to you all today makes any sense or is truthful," she told the jury.



Marc Freeman

South Florida Sun Sentinel



Marc Freeman covers Palm Beach County criminal and civil courts for the Sun Sentinel. He previously wrote about K-12 education, local government, and consumer issues. Marc's work has also appeared in The Palm Beach Post, The Philadelphia Inquirer, and The Patriot-News.

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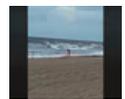
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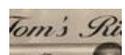


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