

Foul-mouthed parrot may be used as evidence in murder trial, prosecutor says

By Peter Holley

Everyone knows Bud can talk like the parrot that he is.

The question — for one prosecutor, at least — is whether the bird, which may have witnessed a brutal killing, should be allowed to sing like a canary.

This week Robert Springstead, Newaygo County prosecutor, told the Detroit Free Press that authorities are studying the parrot's words to determine whether the bird's speech can be considered admissible evidence in a court of law.

Springstead admitted that putting a parrot on the witness stand could get complicated. He said he "highly doubts there is any precedent" for using a bird's speech as evidence. When a judge asks someone to raise their right hand, he wondered, "to a parrot, are you raising a wing, a foot?"

The prosecutor's question arrives after Glenna Duram, 48, was charged Thursday with first-degree murder in the May 2015 killing of her husband, Martin Duram, according to NBC affiliate WOOD-TV. She is being held in Newaygo County Jail without bond, the station reported.

Family members believe Bud, an African gray parrot, may have witnessed the shooting that left Martin Duram dead and his wife severely injured.

They believe this because the bird's latest phrase — the one he won't stop shouting at the top of his lungs mimicking his owner's voice — is a chilling one: "Don't f—ing shoot!"

Duram's body was found near his wife, who suffered a gunshot wound to her head but is alive. Although police initially assumed she was a victim of the shooting, police reports revealed that she became a suspect in the slaying.

Relatives told the station that they think Martin Duram's final moments were imprinted in the bird's memory and that he continues to relive the slaying. They noted that Bud mimicked both the victim and his wife.

"That bird picks up everything and anything, and it's got the filthiest mouth around," Duram's mom, Lillian Duram, told WOOD-TV.

"I personally think he was there, and he remembers it and he was saying it," Duram's father, Charles Duram, added.

Bud's new owner, Duram's ex-wife, Christina Keller, agrees, telling the station that the bird has a habit of replaying the voices of a man and a woman locked in a fierce disagreement.

"I'm hearing two people in an intense argument," said Keller, who believes "Don't f—ing shoot!" were Duram's final words. "Two people that I know, voices that I recognize."

"It's intense," she added. "When it happens, my house turns cold."

Duram told police that she remembers nothing of the shooting and regained her memory only once she was in the hospital. She left three suicide notes for relatives before the shooting that she claims she doesn't remember writing, police records reveal.

"I know for a fact I didn't kill my husband," police quoted her as saying.

Doreen Plotkowski, owner of Casa La Parrot in Grand Rapids, said African gray parrots typically vocalize phrases they've heard many times, but the birds also are capable of using words they've heard on only a few occasions. Presented with video evidence of the bird using the violent language, Plotkowski told the station that she "definitely" heard the bird mimicking an argument between a man and a woman.

She said she also heard the bird say, "Don't f—ing shoot."

However, Michael Walsh, a Muskegon, Mich., lawyer, told WOOD-TV that the bird is inadmissible because there's no way to trace his dirty mouth.

"How did it get there?" Walsh said, referring to Bud's words. "If there's no reliable way of making that determination, you can't rule out that the bird witnessed a homicide or that the bird witnessed something on TV."

Should Bud the parrot be allowed to testify against Glenna Duram? Why or why not?

About this essay:

This 300-word essay assignment helps us assess your writing. You will not be graded on your opinion, but on how well you argue it as you follow the guidelines below. **All phones and electronic devices should be shut off during this assignment.**

Essay guidelines:

- 1) Read the article carefully and underline key ideas. Read the question posed and think of your own arguments to answer it.
- 2) Once you begin to write, write neatly in ink and skip every other line on your paper since this helps us read and make comments on your writing. If you make a mistake, neatly cross it out and keep writing.
- 3) **You can quote the article only once, quoting no more than a sentence, to support your viewpoint. Be sure to attribute the quote to the speaker who says it by name and title and to the story.**
- 4) You can briefly explain the issue in your own words and attribute the facts to the article, but most of your essay should be your ideas. (Simply restating the story reflects little thinking of your own.)
- 5) You should write in legible handwriting that uses upper or lower case letters. Count the words on each page and write this number on the bottom of each page. Write the total word count at the end of the essay. You should write only 300-325 words.
- 6) Turn in the article, any scratch paper you used, and your essay by the end of class.

Writing tips:

- 1) Do not waste words restating the question. Instead, write a creative beginning in your first paragraph that leads to your introduction of the article in the second paragraph by author and "Title" and explains the article's main idea in a sentence or two after that.
- 2) Your thesis or argument that answers the question should be clearly stated by the end of your second or third paragraph.
- 3) Most of the essay should be your thinking and not just restating the ideas in the story; however, you should write in third person (no "you," "your," "I" "me" "myself," "we," or "our") throughout your essay.
- 4) Proofread your essay after you've written it. Double-check names, spelling of words against those in the story. Check the direct quote you used for accuracy along with any facts you cite.