

THE ADVOCATE

May 10, 2017

Slain Stamford cabbie's wife refutes defendant's testimony

By John Nickerson



Shota Mekoshvili, 29, is charged with first-degree murder in the stabbing death of taxi cab driver Mahomed Kamal, 47, on Wednesday Aug. 27, 2014, in Stamford, Conn.

It only took a few moments for Razia Shalia to become overwhelmed with emotion Wednesday morning as closing arguments began in her dead husband's murder trial.

Shalia cried uncontrollably when the prosecution showed

“ [Defense Attorney Norm] Pattis said the scores of stab wounds to Kamal's face, neck and head was evidence of a brutal close-quarter fight, not a robbery. ”

pictures of Mahomed Kamal, 47, who was stabbed 127 times in August 2014.

“That was the first time I saw those pictures,” said Shalia, who left the courtroom after the photos were shown and did not return for the more than two

hours of closing arguments.

Shalia also refuted claims made by defendant Shota Mekoshvili, who testified Tuesday he lashed out after he said Kamal made sexual advances toward him in his taxi.

“He was a nice guy. He loved his family, his son and me,” she said as she began to cry again. “I don't believe it. I don't believe it. Never — ever.”

Mekoshvili, 32, testified for more than four hours Tuesday, saying Kamal drove him to Doolittle Road, a quiet cul-de-sac off Long Ridge Road, where the cab driver initiated a sexual encounter. Mekoshvili testified he reacted by repeatedly punching Kamal.

Mekoshvili said he then wrestled a knife away from Kamal and feared for his life when he was beaten in the head with a metal flashlight.

Shalia testified early in the trial that her husband was carrying

between \$500 and \$700 the night he was killed. Police only found \$18 in one of his pockets after his body was discovered several hours later.

During his closing argument, Senior Assistant State's Attorney James Bernardi touched on the majority of more than 100 pieces of evidence he presented at trial and told the jury the murder was a robbery that went wrong.

"He did not act in self-defense when he killed that man," Bernardi said as he pointed at the bloody picture of Kamal still on the screen for the jury.

Bernardi said it would have taken only 10 to 15 stab wounds to ensure Kamal was not a threat.

"The blood on either side of the headrest is talking to you," he told the jury. "What that scene says to you is the defendant was sitting behind the driver with a knife around the front of his neck. 'Give me the money and keep your mouth shut,' it is saying to you."

Bernardi said Mekoshvili's claim that Kamal picked up a much younger and stronger stranger for a sexual encounter did not make sense.

"Robbery is the only logical explanation," Bernardi said.

Mekoshvili's attorney, Norm

Pattis, began his rebuttal by asking the jury what else the evidence could mean.

Pattis said the scores of stab wounds to Kamal's face, neck and head was evidence of a brutal close-quarter fight, not a robbery.

Pattis also reminded the jury that the expert from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner said Kamal could have died of three causes. All the wounds on his face, a stab wound to his lung or the wound to his jugular vein in his neck.

Pattis said Mekoshvili was in the front passenger seat when the fight began. He said Kamal jammed down the accelerator, sending the car careening into some trees that pinned the passenger door shut. When the fight began, Mekoshvili could not get out of the car, Pattis said.

"Oh, I guess I'll exercise my duty to retreat," Pattis said sarcastically to Bernardi.

Circling back to Bernardi's contention that it would take 10 stab wounds to render Kamal harmless, Pattis pointed at an autopsy picture and asked in a loud voice, "Which 10? Which 10?"

Bernardi responded angrily, "You talking to me? Talk to them."

Pattis then turned to the jury

and said, "He can't tell you."

Pattis said it was also a significant leap to accuse his client of a murder-robbery just because an unknown amount of money was missing. He also questioned the \$18 found in Kamal's pocket.

"You are going to kill a man and leave some money behind?" Pattis asked the jury. "That's the state's theory."

"The evidence in this case is only consistent with a self-defense claim."

The jury began deliberation Wednesday afternoon. ■