

Fort Lauderdale man accused in death of Alzheimer's-suffering father gets probation



Robert "Bobby" Yurkanin II pleaded guilty to manslaughter Friday in the death of his 84-year-old father. (Deanna Dent, Sun Sentinel / November 13, 2009)

Concerned onlookers told police the adult son cursed at his naked father on a Fort Lauderdale beach, treated him roughly and dragged him into the ocean, where he went limp.

The son, Robert "Bobby" Yurkanin II, says he was trying to cover his 84-year-old father, who suffered from [Alzheimer's](#), and put his swim trunks back on him on that June 2007 day.

Robert "Bob" Yurkanin Sr. died a day later of complications from near drowning, and his son stood accused of murder.

On Friday, the son pleaded guilty to manslaughter. Broward Circuit Judge Mily Rodriguez-Powell sentenced him to 15 years probation.

"It was a nightmare, let's just say that," said Yurkanin, tall, balding, nervous and docile. "People with Alzheimer's get violent, and sometimes you have to be firm with them."

Yurkanin said he spent five long, stressful years caring for his father.

He said he slept on a mattress by the front door to prevent his father from wandering the halls of their upscale Galt Ocean Drive condominium while naked. His childlike father would imagine flying birds and insist that Yurkanin — an only

child — had a brother named Rick. In public, he'd blurt out inappropriate remarks, the son said.

"You don't really understand it until you're placed in that position and live it," Yurkanin said. "It's difficult to find compassion from onlookers, because they have no idea."

Defense attorney Michael D. Weinstein said his client had "no intention of harming" his father. The tragic incident, Weinstein said, exemplifies the toll that Alzheimer's disease takes on caregivers.

The Alzheimer's Association estimates that 5.3 million Americans are living with the disease. Millions more live with other types of dementia.

The younger Yurkanin had a meltdown on the beach that day, Weinstein said, triggered by years of caring for his mother before her death and coping as the sole caregiver for his father.

Had Yurkanin been convicted as charged of first-degree felony murder, he faced a mandatory sentence of life in prison.

Prosecutor Brad Weissman said he agreed to downgrade the charge to second-degree manslaughter because life imprisonment "was not the appropriate sanction, weighing it with the defendant's actions and the need to protect the community."

"I don't think that he intentionally tried to kill his father," Weissman said. "But there's no question that he contributed to his father's death."

Robert Yurkanin II had the financial means to seek help but consciously, and tragically, chose not to, Weissman said.

Yurkanin disputed that notion, saying he could not even leave his father with people they knew, because he'd turn violent and shout for his son.

"He was like my shadow and he wanted to be with me every minute," Yurkanin said. "I knew that, and I love him, and I miss him dearly."

Information from [The Associated Press](#) was used in this report.

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