

STATE

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Obituaries

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*Haysom's true nature remains an enigma***Commentary**By Carlos Santos
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BEDFORD — At the end of her three-day sentencing hearing, even Circuit Judge William Sweeney wasn't sure who Elizabeth Haysom was, so many versions of herself did she live and invent.

The skein of lies, half-truths, exaggerations and exotica that filtered through her trial in August and the sentencing hearing last week left a sense of bewilderment.

She was a poised schoolgirl who used heroin, a cosmopolitan vamp versed in French and the cello who was bisexual because it was fashionable in her European circles.

She was so lonely she invented secret friends, so smart she rewrote Shakespearean plays, so lost she slipped notes under her parents' door to communicate.

She came from an exotic world; she was born in Zimbabwe and educated in prestigious schools, including one that the Princess of Wales attended.

A Middle Eastern sheik once offered her father a

number of camels for her hand, a witness testified, one of the few times laughter was heard in the courtroom. She was an international-level skier and an expert lacrosse player who wrote a 40,000-word treatise on the metaphysics of the water molecule.

A times she looked petulant, at times vulnerable, but she was always poised. She looks striking in an unconventional way.

It was that uncommon background, evil dished out with good manners and good breeding, that drew intense media attention.

Which person was Elizabeth Haysom? The one who sent flowers to the ailing minister who visited her at the county jail? Or the one prosecutors say was cleaning the fireplace mantel at her parents' house several weeks after their murders and joked: "Here are pop's brains"?

Was she truly remorseful or did she give on the witness stand "the performance of her life," as Commonwealth's Attorney James Updike charged?

Was she Lady Macbeth, to whom she once compared herself?

She claimed that someone from the West German Embassy had been in contact with her asking that she keep quiet to protect her boyfriend, Jens Soering, a West

German citizen. The embassy in Washington has denied having any contact with her.

Judge Sweeney felt compelled Thursday to explain why he gave her 90 years for her part in the killing of her parents. It was obvious he agonized over his judgment.

He called her sensitive, gifted, poised, intelligent and articulate. He also called her a liar, a cheat, a manipulator and a drug addict.

"It is difficult to say why these crimes occurred," Sweeney said. "We are left only with the feeling that this case is a grotesque monument to inappropriate response to parental hatred."

Updike tried to find out. "Why are your parents dead?" he asked her again and again.

She answered in an unfailingly polite, precise British accent, a product of her European schooling, that it was because of love.

Soering loved her too much. She loved him "beyond reason." Her parents loved her too much. She said Soering manipulated her and she him.

The answers were surreal, given the butchery that befell Nancy and Derek Haysom, a couple so urbane one witness said, "When they walked into the room, you straightened your backbone and became as witty and

charming as they were."

The Haysoms were stabbed to death in April 1985 at their house in Bedford County they called Loose Chippings. Ms. Haysom pleaded guilty in August to two counts of being an accessory before the fact of their murders.

Updike contended that Soering, who is fighting extradition from his London prison, killed the couple with the encouragement and plotting of his girlfriend, Ms. Haysom.

Updike, who played the shrewd country lawyer to the aristocratic criminal, said the killings were done because Ms. Haysom's parents wanted to break off Soering's relationship with their daughter.

He also said that Soering, who met Ms. Haysom at the University of Virginia, wanted to share in Ms. Haysom's inheritance.

Somehow, though, those ordinary motives didn't seem to be enough for such extraordinary people.

There were hints of more tangled motives, an ugly undercurrent of perversity that haunted the polite courtroom.

Soering and Ms. Haysom lived in a fantasy world. Continued on page 4, col. 1

C-4 Richmond Times-Dispatch, Sunday, October 11, 1987

Haysom's nature still enigma

Continued from first page

writing obsessively of nonsense, exchanging her macabre fantasies about her parents with his bizarre sexual fantasies.

The couple spun a black fairy tale. Soering was no longer impotent after the murders. The couple consummated their love the night of Nancy and Derek Haysom's funeral.

The ugly question kept recurring.

"How could you make love to the man who butchered your parents? On the night of their funeral?" Updike asked.

Ms. Haysom has told three versions of that night. In one, they simply made love; in another, she claims she was raped; in the third version, she said:

"I was in a separate room. Jens came to me and said he was lonely and scared. I was on sedatives," Ms. Haysom testified. "Up to that time, he was completely and totally impotent. I went to sleep. When I woke up, he was making love to me, for want of a better word."

There was an even more troubling charge. Was Ms. Haysom sexually abused by her mother?

Again, there were differing versions. In one version, Ms. Haysom said her mother sometimes came to her bed naked for "very affectionate kissing." In her pre-sentencing report, she said there was no sexual activity with her mother.

"My mother did sleep with me and was very affectionate with me," she said Wednesday in her most emotional and angry testimony.

"Was there any sexual abuse?" Updike asked. Ms. Haysom paused so long Updike asked again. "Was there any sexual abuse?"

"I don't want to discuss it in public.

... My mother isn't here."

"Exactly. Your mother has been butchered."

"Did your mother sexually abuse you? For God's sake, if she didn't, clear the record now," Updike said, as angry as he ever got.

Another pause.

"No, she didn't."

In his statement, Sweeney said, "I agree with witnesses who have testified that many of Elizabeth's accusations against her parents, particularly her mother, were either exaggerated, untrue or the product of fantasy."

Ms. Haysom gave four versions of how the murder weapon, a knife, was obtained. She gave so many versions of how an alibi was or was not set up that Updike, in disbelief, said: "In another year, she'd come in here saying she didn't even know her parents."

How could justice be meted out amid such tangled stories?

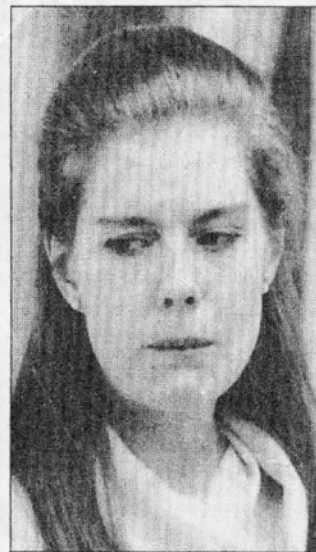
Sweeney said that Nancy and Derek Haysom's "attitudes toward punishment are unavailable," but added that their views could be reflected in the opinions of their other five children, though Elizabeth was the only child of their marriage.

Even there, Sweeney found no easy answers. Veryan Haysom, her half-brother, asked for a sentence tempered with mercy.

Dr. Howard Haysom told the judge he believe his half-sister was a liar and was not remorseful.

Richard Haysom, who said he was once the closest to Elizabeth, judged that his half-sister should be given two life terms, the harshest sentence.

Later, as she was walking to a holding room shortly before she was sentenced, he bent over the courtroom rail and kissed his sister.



File photo

Elizabeth R. Haysom

Testifying last week