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Guilty verdict in murder, sex assault of OC man

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SAN DIEGO — A former medical student accused of drugging and sexually assaulting an Orange County sportswear employee and dumping his body in a City Heights alley three years ago was found guilty Friday of first-degree murder and other charges.

It took a jury less than three hours to convict Philong Huynh, 40, in the January 2008 death of Dane Williams, 23. The panel also found special-circumstance allegations of sodomy and oral copulation to be true, meaning Huynh will be sentenced to life in prison without parole.

The verdicts came after more than three weeks of testimony and closing arguments that stretched over two days. Afterward, the victim's father said the outcome was a welcome end to a grueling and painful experience.

"We've been waiting three and a half years for today," said Jim Williams.

Huynh, who stared ahead and showed no reaction when the verdicts were read, also was convicted of sodomy and oral copulation of an intoxicated person in connection with the June 2009 assault of a then-20-year-old sailor.

San Diego Superior Court Judge Robert O'Neill scheduled a sentencing hearing for Aug. 12.

Prosecutors argued during the trial that Huynh had a history of drugging and sexually assaulting young men while posing as a single heterosexual man. The ruse allowed him to prey on young straight men, whom he would befriend then slip drugs into their drinks.

Four men testified they'd had contact with Huynh — who bought them alcohol and offered to take them to strip clubs — but had little memory of what happened after accepting the drinks.

"Mr. Huynh acted like a wolf in sheep's clothing," Deputy District Attorney David Hendren told the jury Thursday. "He was a con man whose weapons were his wiles and his pills."



JOHN GASTALDO /P>

Philong Huynh was sentenced Friday to life in prison without the possibility of parole in the killing of Dane Williams in January 2008 and the sexual assault a year later of a Navy corpsman. He is shown here in San Diego Superior Court on June 1 for the beginning of his trial.

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An autopsy revealed that Williams had alcohol and prescription drugs in his system, but the cause of his death was never officially determined.

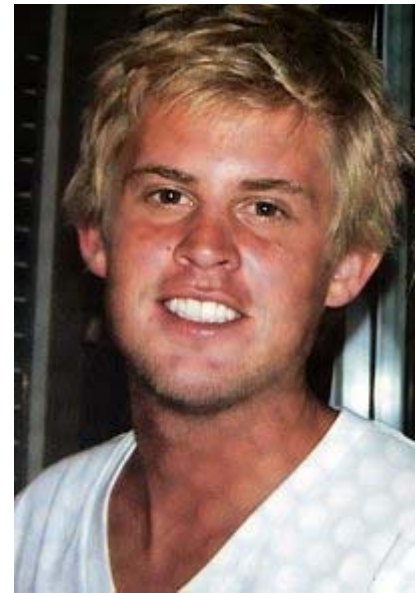
Terry Zimmerman, a deputy public defender, conceded that Huynh had contact with Williams and likely disposed of his body, but she said he was not a killer.

“We don’t know because the experts don’t know if Mr. Williams would have died that night even if he hadn’t met Mr. Huynh,” Zimmerman argued. “Coincidence does not determine proof beyond a reasonable doubt.”

Williams, of Huntington Beach, was working for Hurley International when he came to San Diego for a convention on Jan. 26, 2008, authorities said. Co-workers saw him stumbling in the Gaslamp Quarter that night, then he disappeared.

His body was found three days later in an alley near Huynh’s residence. Williams had on a red cap, but no underwear, and he was wrapped in a blanket.

The case remained unsolved until Huynh’s arrest in September 2009. Authorities were led to him through the second victim named in the case.



Dane Chandler Williams

The Navy corpsman said he felt “drugged” and disoriented for days after a night of drinking and socializing with a man later identified as Huynh. A medical exam revealed that the sailor’s body showed signs of sexual assault and that he suffered from “benzodiazepine poisoning.”

Jurors were told that Huynh, who attended medical school but never graduated, had extensive knowledge of benzodiazepines, a type of drug that depresses the central nervous system, and how they interacted with alcohol. Investigators said they found receipts for prescription drugs in Huynh’s car and wallet.

The prosecutor said the blanket wrapped around Williams’ body was covered with animal hair, which was later determined to have come from Huynh’s mother’s dog. Huynh’s DNA was found on Williams’ shirt.

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