

THROW AWAY CELL KEY, SAYS RELATIVE

Siblings' murderer jailed for life

Tania Broughton

tania.broughton@inl.co.za

RELATIVES of murdered siblings Dennis and Crystal Roberts said they hoped the man responsible would remain in jail for the rest of his life, "so he never gets the opportunity to do this" to another family.

"I hope they throw away the key," Crystal Roberts's daughter-in-law, Shelly Gerrard, said of the life sentence given to Mario Tsawe, 29, by Durban High Court Acting Judge Karthy Govender yesterday. "He killed two wonderful people with no reason... (the) death (sentence) would have been a better option."

"His lack of remorse was nauseating," she said. "The family is still battling to cope and will never get over it."

Gerrard came to court with another relative, Graham Basson, and friend Germaine Kennedy to witness the sentencing of Tsawe, who pleaded guilty last week to the murders and two counts of robbery with aggravating circumstances.

The judge - finding Tsawe to be "cunning, conniving, determined and devious" - said there were no circumstances to deviate from the minimum legislated sentences of 15 years each for the robberies and life for the murders.

Evidence before the court was that Tsawe had been involved in a gay relationship with 75-year-old Dennis Roberts. After initially living



Double-murder convict Mario Tsawe, right, confers with his lawyer, Vijay Sivakumoor, before he was sentenced in the Durban High Court yesterday.

PICTURE: MARILYN BERNARD

with Roberts at his sister's Glenhills home, Roberts had rented a flat which he and Tsawe shared.

But the relationship soured and, in October, Roberts moved out and refused to speak to Tsawe.

At the end of last month, Tsawe, using a false name and

working with an accomplice (who is still at large), lured Roberts to a hotel, where they strangled him with an electrical cord and stole cash and his car.

The following day they went to Crystal Roberts's house, where they strangled and stabbed her and stole a

laptop and bank cards, which they used to draw money from her brother's account.

Tsawe was later arrested in the Eastern Cape.

Handing down sentence, Judge Govender dismissed suggestions by Tsawe's lawyer, Vijay Sivakumoor, that the murders had not been premed-

itated. He pointed to the fact that Tsawe had admitted having the electrical cord with him and that the murders had preceded any hunt for the bank cards and other stolen goods.

"They (Tsawe and his accomplice) also made no attempt to disguise themselves...

they were unconcerned that they would be recognised.

"They were also unconcerned the next day when they went to (Crystal) Roberts's house in her brother's car, knowing that, when his body was found, they would be linked to that. It was a brazen act and it shows they intended to kill to prevent them from being identified," he said.

The judge said Tsawe had acted in a cold, calculated manner.

And his plea of guilty - usually a sign of remorse - was a result of the formidable case against him and would therefore not count in his favour.

"His remorse seems to have coincided with his arrest... Nowhere in his plea is there a full acknowledgment of the enormity of the consequences of the murders for the Roberts family.

"Both his victims were elderly. Mr Roberts clearly sought to have a meaningful relationship with him and it appears he was generous and benevolent."

The judge also noted the extensive injuries sustained by Crystal Roberts, commenting on "this level of violence against a 71-year-old defenceless woman".

The death of the siblings must be calamitous to the family... especially as it was at the hands of a man they trustingly let into their home," he said.

Tsawe had friends and family in court, but they declined to speak to the media.