



“The jury is deliberating” – An interview with Miranda about being a jury member in Florida

The questions were asked by Carmen and Ines Aubert, Switzerland, 2019

In December 2000, 22-year-old Anthony killed an elderly couple, his two former neighbors. He tied up the couple, tried to extort money, tortured and killed them.

Miranda, you got to know Carmen as a juror of her pen friend Andy’s case. At the trial, she was present via Skype. You kindly agreed that I may ask you a few questions. How old are you, and what do you do for a living?

I’m 22 about to be 23 and I’m a childcare teacher for a living.

In Switzerland, we have a completely different legal system. There is, for instance, no Supreme Court, and we don’t have jurors involved in trials. Can you describe how you became involved in this, which processes you had to go through, and what it is like to be a jury member? What did you do during those Court days?

To be on jury duty, the courts draw our license number by random selection. A large group of people show up one day, and they start the elimination process by asking questions. If a person does not fit their criteria, they let them go. For us, it was a 7-day process because there were over one hundred people who were picked for this case. What we did all day was literally sit in a room and wait and wait and wait until they called us upstairs and asked us questions. Some days we didn’t even see them, we just had to go home but were still there for “jury duty”.

Were you allowed to go home in the evening and talk with others about it? Do you think jurors can be influenced by media, friends, actually anybody who has an interest in influencing?

We were strictly not allowed to talk about the case in any way with anybody - no friends, no other jurors, nobody. We were not allowed to be influenced by the media or anyone else who had an interest in the case... We could only base our vote on the evidence shown during the “trial”.

How did you ensure that you were not influenced by the media?

I didn’t view any media sources, and made sure that I didn’t look up anything about the case!

What was the atmosphere like in the jury and in the courtroom in general?

It was a very depressing case. There was a lot of evidence to go on with a lot of information being thrown at us. There were many gruesome photos from his past, his family’s past, and of many other things. Personally, I cried at least ten times within two days.

What made you decide to give Andy life without parole? Did you have this tendency from the beginning? If not, what made you change your mind?

From the beginning I was of the mindset to give Andy life without parole. But it changed in the middle of the trial upon seeing the photos and everything that he did to those two people. But then I weighed it against all of the things that he had to deal with in the past, such as in R. and his mom abusing him, his PTSD and not getting counseling, the drugs, and alcohol, all of that definitely had a factor in it.

«The jury is deliberating». What were you actually doing all these hours? Can you describe which arguments/witnesses were crucial for the jury members? Did you feel pressured?

We were back in the room arguing, which is all we did. We went over the facts, and everybody was allowed to remain on the jury. We went over the evidence one by one and discussed it. There were five of us who said the whole time that we are only going to give him life, we will not give him the death penalty. And because it was not unanimously decided that he should receive the death penalty, then we were to give him life without parole. It was rough sitting in there being a part of that deliberation because it went on for so long and everyone was getting so antsy and ready to leave. Everyone was just arguing and arguing and arguing. I almost fell asleep just to escape it.

Can you describe to me how the room you were deliberating in looks like?

It was small, had two tables, two very plain bathrooms, a coffee pot, a laptop to view the evidence, and a water jug. I don't know why the room was set up like, that but it's probably because they need us to concentrate on making such a huge decision. They don't want a bunch of distraction in there. They did feed us on deliberation day!

On an emotional level, what was it like to be a jury member?

It was hard. You really have to be strong-minded and have patience because it was a long process and it is a lot to take in. I cried at least twice a day. It was rough to see and hear a lot of the things I did, but I got through it like a champ.

Did Carmen's testimony have an impact on any of the jurors?

I honestly cannot speak for the other jurors, but for me it did. Her testimony showed how kind and loving he is, a caring person to someone whom he didn't even know at the time. I'm very happy that he can still have that being a part of him while he is locked up in prison.

Carmen wrote in her text about the trial: “Originally, I asked Mike for an interpreter, but we decided that the effect would be greater if I could address the jury directly, and if I had difficulties to understand questions or to formulate an answer, I'd simply say so.”

Did you think that Carmen talking herself instead of through an interpreter was a good decision?

Yes! It made me personally love that day. It made me happy to be able to see what Carmen looked like and her facial expressions when she talked about Andy! It made us think about our decision and its impact on Andy's life!

About the people in the courtroom Carmen wrote: "Some of them looked grumpy and seemed tired, others seemed focused and ready to take notes. I also saw Mike who asked the questions and, for a brief moment the state's prosecutors. Andy was in the room as well, but I couldn't see him." How was it for you to see Carmen on the screen?

I personally loved it! I loved the memories they shared, I loved how happy she was to be his friend, I loved Andy's smile when Carmen was talking about him. He loved seeing her face and hearing her voice! The whole process was phenomenal.

What memory will stick in your mind after the experience of being a juror?

The graphic photographs shown, and the fact that I made two really good friends out of this experience.

Can you please give an example of a graphic photo?

One of the photos showed the bodies and how they were sliced open, one showed pools of blood; all were extremely graphic photos. They informed us of the dimensions of the cuts and showed us everything, such as their faces having been beaten in and their throats slashed!

That sounds horrible and I wouldn't want to see it. What advice would you give someone who's picked as a juror?

Be patient. Like I said earlier, it's a long process and a lot to deal with. It's very hard, and if you aren't stable, it isn't something you should try to handle. It was hard on all of us. Some of the jurors literally turned away because they couldn't stand looking at the gruesome photos.

You have been very brave in your role as a juror. Thank you very much, Miranda, for answering all of my questions. I wish you all the best.