

# Parole denied for man convicted of killing Soquel High alum

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In a hearing that dredged up horrific memories, parole was denied this week for a Summit area man convicted of killing a legally blind Live Oak school teacher 17 years ago.

It was Robert Spedding's first shot at freedom for the murder of popular former Soquel High scholar and star quarterback Ernie King.

King was 38. His death outraged many.

Spedding, 46, is a former construction worker with a history of drinking and fighting. He has a good record at Salinas Valley State Prison, officials said.

King was killed after asking a group of men for a lift home from San Jose State University. They



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beat him, and Spedding admitted to planning to rob him, before King was ordered out of the back of a truck traveling approximately 50 mph. The defense contended Spedding did not force him out.

Tragically, King's tunnel vision led Spedding to believe King — who was married with two young boys — was looking at him in a suggestive way, according to trial testimony, and that sparked the first punch.

King's sister said Friday her only sibling's funeral drew 700 people to Twin Lakes Church. And she said she did not for a moment believe Spedding's words of remorse at Tuesday's hearing, calling them "self-serving."

The sister, who lives in Santa Cruz and wished to remain anonymous out of fear of Spedding, said the man convicted of killing her brother "has not changed."

Spedding has "cleaned up" since his arrest, she said, and has new front teeth and a haircut. He married, has been allowed conjugal visits in prison and now has two children, she said, adding that she finds his privileges offensive.

In 1990, Spedding was sentenced to 25 years to life for the 1988 murder. He was eligible for that maximum sentence because jurors found him guilty of murder coupled with an attempted robbery, which he admitted to police.

King had overcome a degenerative disease and did not drive. A



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college friend had driven him as far as the Summit area.

His sister said he was earning a 4.0 grade point average in graduate school at San Jose State.

Spedding had two trials. Jurors deadlocked on the first one. A second jury was bused in from San Jose due to the case's high publicity. Spedding was arrested on suspicion of threatening a witness while out of custody pending the second trial.

Spedding will be eligible for parole again in 2007, said prosecutor Christine McGuire, who

argued against Spedding's parole and tried him originally.

McGuire arranged to have King's widow, Nancy, now remarried to a minister in North Dakota, "attend" the hearing via video. McGuire said Spedding "expressed his great remorse." She also said she could see the pain on the victim's faces.

King's sister said Nancy, her brother's former wife, and their two sons heard some of the details of the case for the first time Tuesday.

"It's very difficult," King's sister said. "My brother planned to have more children and I'm a widow now and it would be nice to have a brother. We were close growing up.

"It's painful. Life goes on, and you have to live your life, but it's painful."

King was intelligent and kind and he had plans for his life, she said.

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"And that was obliterated by someone who liked to get drunk and fight with people," she said.

Spedding's attorney in 1990, Mitchell Page, said Friday that he thought it was sad and that he does not think Spedding belongs in prison or is a danger to society.

Two men with him, the truck driver, Bret Erickson, and a man who beat King, Gregory Kern, were sentenced to less than a year in County Jail.

But witnesses testified Spedding, a Los Gatos High School graduate who served one year in the Army, raised his fist in a victory salute and yelled "Yaha" after King fell.

He was convicted of assault for ramming a car more than 25 times after a chase in 1984.

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