

Photos by **RAJ CHAWLA**, *Free Press*

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## Tulloch admits killing professors; Parker gets 25 years to life in jail

**By Emily Stone**  
*Free Press Staff Writer*

**Haverhill, N.H.** — The first teen-age killer stood stone-faced in the courtroom as he declared his guilt. The second shook and wept as he struggled to express his remorse.  
The 14-month-old case against Robert Tulloch and James Parker ended Thursday with two separate hearings in a packed, yet silent, New Hampshire courtroom.

The Vermont teens were sentenced for the random slaying of two Dartmouth College professors in their home.  
Tulloch, 18, will spend the rest of his life in prison. Parker, 17, was sentenced to 25 years to life in prison.  
The victims' daughter Veronika Zantop described her family's anguish over the death of her parents, Half and Susanne Zantop.

"There is no statement in the world that can capture the absolute horror, disbelief, pain, sadness and anger that I and my sister and my family have experienced," she said in court.  
Thursday also was the first time the prosecutor detailed the full case against the teens. She explained how a goal of

raising money to move to Australia spiraled into a plan to stab strangers to death to steal their ATM cards and identification numbers.  
Tulloch, who was portrayed as the mastermind of the murders, pleaded guilty Thursday morning in a hastily planned hearing. The decision was against the advice of his lawyers and

had little legal rationale since the judge was then bound to sentence him to a mandatory prison term of life without parole. He received two such sentences, one for each murder.

His trial had been scheduled to start at the end of the month. He decided Monday to plead guilty.

Tulloch offered no apology in court. He stood rigidly and spoke in a loud, clear voice when questioned. He watched and listened as the prosecutors and victims' friends and family spoke, yet showed no hint of remorse. He answered the judge's questions with the air of a teen-ager acknowledging he stayed out past curfew but doesn't quite see the point in a lecture.

Tulloch's remoteness contrasted sharply with the demeanor of his best friend, Parker, who came to court in the afternoon. Parker, pleaded guilty in December and agreed to testify against Tulloch. The information Parker gave investigators made up the bulk of the case against Tulloch.

Parker entered the courtroom looking remorseful but composed. As the Zantops' daughters stood and spoke of their parents' compassion and open nature, Parker's face constricted in visible pain and his jaw began quivering. Tears slipped down his cheeks and he bowed his head to reach the tissue in his handcuffed hands in his lap.

### **A brutal plan**

Tulloch and Parker were bored with life in their hometown of Chelsea. They wanted to leave.

They fixated on traveling to Australia and decided they would need \$10,000 to do so, Assistant Attorney General Kelly Ayotte explained. Most of her story came from Parker's testimony to investigators and was backed up by blood and fingerprint evidence.

At first the two considered legal means of raising the money. Perhaps they could join a school-sponsored study abroad trip.

These ideas were short-lived, Ayotte said. In the spring of 2000, the boys started plotting crimes.

"He and James Parker became intense in planning various crimes," Ayotte said during Tulloch's hearing.

They contemplated stealing cars. They stole an ATV and tried to sell it on the Internet, but without a title they could find no buyer. That summer they tried their hands at credit-card fraud and stole mail out of rural Vermont mailboxes hoping to find credit cards inside. This was to no avail.

They thought about jumping people to get their ATM cards and PINs.

"Robert Tulloch also raised the idea of killing people," Ayotte said. "They had to kill so they could be 'bad-asses' when they went to Australia."

They began scoping out houses in Vershire and Rochester, Vt. In July 2000, they went to a home in Vershire, equipped with knives, duct tape and wrist and ankle restraints. Before knocking on the door, the teens dug an intended grave nearby and cut the home's phone lines, Ayotte said. The man who came to the door was carrying a gun and turned the two away.

In Rochester, they were sent away by a man who said he was too busy tarring his pool to talk.

They turned their attention to Hanover, N.H., reasoning "people in Hanover have a lot of money," Ayotte said. After two failed attempts on the Zantops' road, one on the morning of the murders, Tulloch and Parker knocked on the Zantops' door.

### **A double death**

Susanne Zantop was making lunch around noon on Jan. 27, 2001. Her husband answered the door and found two young men who said they wanted to conduct an environmental survey.

Half Zantop, an Earth sciences professor, surely thought he could help the teens. The two gave their real names and said they were from the Mountain School in Vershire. Half Zantop said he liked that school and led the two visitors into the study.

They spoke for about 10 minutes as Tulloch asked questions and Parker took notes on the answers. On the floor between them sat a backpack holding two military knives the teens had recently bought over the Internet.

The interview ended and Parker thought they were going to leave, Ayotte said. But Half Zantop said he wanted to help the teens be better prepared for their next survey and he began looking for the phone number of a friend in Vermont who could advise them.

He couldn't find the number in the phone book. He opened his wallet to look for the number and the teens glimpsed a wad of cash inside. That was enough for Tulloch to reach for the backpack and draw out his knife.

Tulloch lunged at Half Zantop, 62, and began stabbing him in the chest. Tulloch slit Half Zantop's face as he struggled to defend himself.

"Half was screaming, screaming terribly," Ayotte said.

The noise drew Susanne from the kitchen. Horrified, she reached for her husband. Parker grabbed hold of her.

"Robert Tulloch stopped stabbing Half and looked over at James Parker and told him to slit Susanne Zantop's throat," Ayotte said.

Parker did. She fell to the floor. Tulloch slit Half Zantop's throat. Then he went over to Susanne Zantop, 55, and stabbed her in the chest and the back of her head.

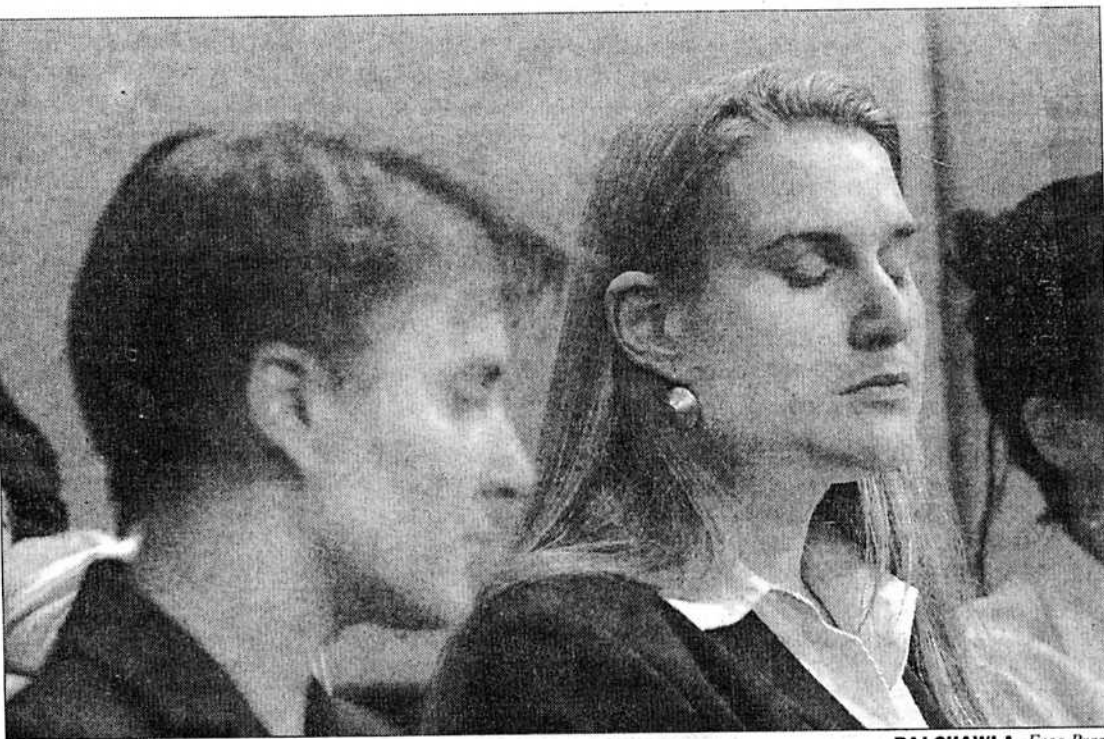
After that, the teens fled. They took Half Zantop's wallet. Inside was \$340.

### **Running in fear**

Tulloch and Parker then embarked on a bizarre road trip through Vermont and ultimately back to New Hampshire.

They stopped in Thetford, where they wiped their hands and knives off in the snow, Ayotte said. Then they went to Tulloch's house so he could change out of his bloody pants. Next, they headed to the Barnes & Noble bookstore in South Burlington to read





RAJ CHAWLA, Free Press

**Veronika (right) and Marianna Zantop sit through the sentencing of James Parker in Grafton County Superior Court in Haverhill, N.H., on Thursday. The two women are the daughters of murder victims Half and Susanne Zantop.**

up on books on killing and how soldiers deal with killing.

They realized quickly after leaving the Zantops that they had forgotten their knife sheaths there. After the bookstore, they returned to New Hampshire and drove to the Zantops' house. A police car was in the driveway, so the two left immediately and returned home.

The Zantops had been discovered around 6:30 p.m. by a dinner guest who arrived carrying a salad and found her close friends lying in pools of blood.

The teens left Jan. 30 on an intended cross-country bus trip, but a knife wound on Tulloch's leg forced them to turn back in Missouri. They'd been monitoring the news closely. Since no mention of the sheaths had been made they thought they were safe.

Police, however, had found the sheaths. They were able to trace Internet sales of the unusual knives. Parker and Tulloch were on their list of people to question. They did so Feb. 15. They also took fingerprints from the teens and a hiking boot from Tulloch that matched a bloody print at the scene.

That night, the teens fled again. They took Parker's mother's car and ditched it at a Massachusetts truck stop. This time they planned to hitchhike with truckers to California, then go overseas. They were caught in Indiana.

When they were picked up, Ayotte said Tulloch told a sheriff: "It's a house of cards. It took me 17 years to build it and I just blew it down."

### Different reactions

The Zantops' daughters, Veronika and Marianna, held hands in the courtroom as friends occasionally squeezed their shoulders or patted their backs. Small packages of tissue were shared.

There was virtually no noise short of the clicks of a camera and a reporter's laptop as Ayotte read her account. A friend of the Zantops briefly cried when Ayotte described Parker slitting Susanne Zantop's throat.

On the other side of the room, first Tulloch's and then Parker's family sat, equally quietly. All three families were escorted out a back entrance of the courtroom when the hearings were over to avoid the 70-plus reporters and photographers who had showed up at the Grafton County Superior Courthouse.

Two of the Zantops' friends and their daughters read statements twice, once for Tulloch and once for Parker.

Veronika Zantop read her statement with Marianna at her side, Marianna's arm around her sister's waist.

She explained that her father's name means "to help" in German. Her grandfather, according to family legend, picked it by randomly pointing to a sentence in the Bible.

"My father lived up to his name," she said.

Her parents were warm and welcoming, she said. They were known for bringing strangers into their home.

"That their desire to help, to teach, and to open their home to perfect strangers was abused in such a horrific way makes their deaths seem like the greatest violation," she said.

Tulloch was expressionless as he watched the daughter of his victims speak. Tulloch never turned to look at his own family. His mother, Diane, closed her eyes for much of the hearing. His father, Michael, wore dark glasses and covered his eyes often as well.

The afternoon hearing had a starkly different feel. Parker wept openly in court, dried

his face on his tissue and wiped his cheek against the shoulder of his shirt several times.

He shook and wriggled in his seat as he heard the Zantops' friend, Irene Kacandes, describe the Zantops' ability to shower everyone they knew with love.

"They loved life," she told Parker, looking straight at him. "You had a choice on Jan. 27, 2001. Susanne and Half did not and now we do not, either."

Parker was given an opportunity to speak after the Zantops and their friends were done. He took a long pause to compose himself and with a deep breath, stood up and faced the Zantop family. He stood there, again unable to speak as the room waited in silence.

"I'm sorry," he said, his voice broken and tearful. "There's not much more I can say than that. I'm just really sorry."

He turned and faced his own family, looked as though he might say something, but then slumped quietly into his chair. His mother Joan cried openly. Parker looked back at his family again twice as he was led out of the room.

### **Outside the courtroom**

The tiny courtroom had little room for anyone beyond the victims' and defendants' families and the two dozen media representatives allowed inside.

DeRoss Kellogg, a fifth- and sixth-grade teacher in Chelsea who taught both teens, was one of the few others there. He said he talks to and visits Tulloch regularly. After the hearing, he told a swath of reporters that Tulloch is sorry for what he did.

"There is remorse," he said.

Tulloch fully understands that he will never leave prison, Kellogg said. He plans to spend his time studying. He has recently become interested in Zen and tai chi.

When asked how Tulloch is handling jail, Kellogg replied: "Have you been in jail? It's awful."

Harry Beskind sat in the court lobby in the break between hearings, quietly reading a newspaper, below the radar of the dozens of reporters milling around and looking for an interview.

He was a good friend of the Zantops, he said. His wife taught with Susanne, who was in the German studies department.

Thursday was the first hearing the retired psychiatrist attended.

"I just felt I had to bear witness," he said. "I need to know something of what happened to my friends."

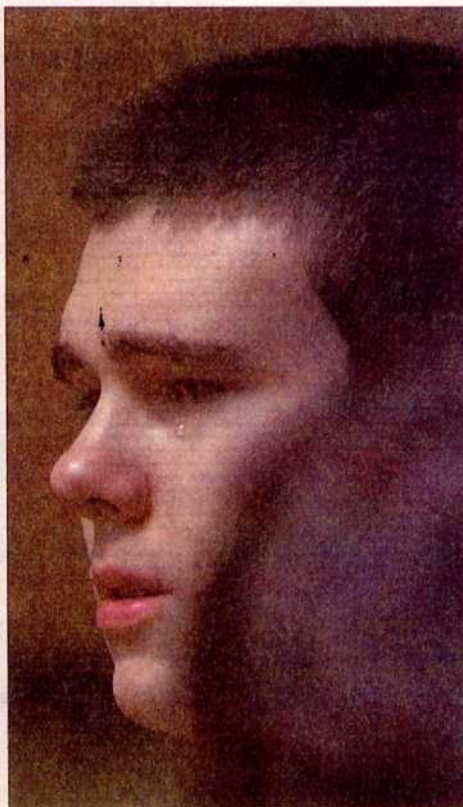
People search for answers when tragedy strikes nearby, he said. In this case, he feared there never would be a good enough answer to the inevitable question of why.

"We like to explain everything," he said. "Here we are sitting with something that has no explanation."

His friends were wonderful, socially responsible people, he said. "They were so human and so caring and so brilliant. It was a total waste."



# Chelsea teens guilty in murders



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