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Camden County jury finds karate instructor guilty on 3 child molestation charges in retrial

Thomas Franklin Ary, 60, convicted of three counts of touching genitals of young student at Kingsland karate school

By **Terry Dickson** Thu, Aug 27, 2015 @ 1:10 pm | updated Thu, Aug 27, 2015 @ 4:45 pm

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Thomas Franklin Ary, 60, listens as his lawyer Richard Allen gives a closing argument that Ary did not fondle one of his young female karate students for which he is undergoing a retrial of three child molestation charges.

WOODBINE | A Camden County jury found karate instructor Thomas Franklin Ary guilty Thursday in his retrial on three charges of the child molestation of a young student.

The eight-woman, four-man jury began deliberating about 11 a.m. and returned about 4 p.m. with its verdict of guilty on all counts of molesting a young girl who was 8 and 9 during two summer camps at Pak's Karate Institute in Kingsland where Ary was a long-time instructor.

District Attorney Jackie Johnson said Superior Court Judge Stephen G. Scarlett ordered to jail and set Ary's sentencing for Sept. 17.

He faces five to 20 years in prison.

Assistant District Attorney Katie Gropper, who prosecuted the case, met with the victims family after the verdict.

"They're very pleased. They're very happy to be able to put this behind them and have some justice and closure," Gropper said.

In a video with an investigator, the girl said Ary fondled her three times as she sat on his lap while watching movies. She testified Ary had also taken her into a bathroom and rubbed his genitals against hers. She said that he had once reached inside her pants, but that the contact was always through clothing.

A jury failed to reach a verdict on the charges in 2014 and acquitted Ary of two counts of the sexual molestation of a young female relative.

Defense lawyer Richard Allen described the 60-year-old Ary's accuser as a "3-foot-tall Merle Streep," and said she could turn the tears on and off.

Allen asserted that Ary has taught more than 1,000 young students over the years and was like a grandfather to them. Ary acknowledged in testifying in his defense Wednesday that he held children on his lap.



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Allen asked the jury, "What's he supposed to do? Push them on the floor?"

Allen stopped short of calling the young accuser a liar, but said that children often tell untruths because of their vivid imaginations.

"Kids lie. Kids fabricate. Kids fabricate. Kids will lie. It's part of their job description," he said.

When it came her time to respond, Gropper appeared angry as she challenged Allen's characterizations of two young accusers, including another young Paks' student who said Ary placed his hand between her legs and wiggled his fingers.

Allen wants the jury to believe the victim is conniving, vindictive and spiteful, Gropper said.

"Do you think this is fun for her? Dragging her through this process?" Gropper asked the jury.

The youngster is being punished for doing what all parents want their children to do, tell when they've been molested, Gropper said.

She said that Ary was someone the young student had trusted, and who gave her a special nickname, tied her karate belt for her, showed her a pistol he kept in his truck, gave her candy and said, "Come sit on my lap."

She noted that the young girl and another, who testified to a fondling incident for which Ary has not yet been charged, both gave consistently detailed accounts. The did that even though they hadn't seen each other in a year to keep their stories straight, Gropper said.

"If it's a lie, they're not going to be able to keep the details straight," she said of witnesses so young.

She asserted that the children told the truth and that Ary did not.

"The only person with anything to gain by lying in this case is Thomas Ary," Gropper said.

The closing arguments took about an hour, and, after a short recess, Scarlett charged the jury on the applicable law and sent them into deliberations about 11 a.m.

The jury was selected Monday and evidence took all day Tuesday and a couple of hours Wednesday.

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