

# 'Papa Thighe shot me'

Kavanagh pleads guilty to shooting granddaughter, awaits sentencing

BY JULIA SHANAHAN  
Rappahannock News Staff

As part of a deal with prosecutors, Rappahannock County resident Thighe Kavanagh after just one full day of witness testimony on Jan. 20 pled guilty to shooting his granddaughter in the ankle, with Commonwealth Attorney Art Goff saying "he's scared to death."

Kavanagh's trial began Jan. 19 after more than a year of pandemic-related interruptions and two failed attempts to convene a jury in Rappahannock County. The trial took place in the Fauquier County Circuit Court.

Kavanagh initially pled not guilty to six felony charges connected to him shooting his granddaughter in the ankle in July 2019 in what the prosecution called a "drunken rage." Kavanagh's two grandchildren, the victim and her brother, testified on Jan. 19 and recounted details of hiding in the bathroom and hearing gunshots the day of the shooting.

Kavanagh changed his plea to guilty before court began on the second day. Kavanagh could face more than 40 years in prison for the use of a firearm in a felony, reckless use of a gun causing permanent injury, malicious shooting near an occupied building, disregarding the life of a child and seriously injuring a child.

"It didn't go the way he expected yesterday," Goff said after the trial's first day. Kavanagh's attorneys called Goff Thursday morning before court asking for a deal, Goff said.

Since he pleaded guilty, the aggravated malicious wounding charge will be reduced to ordinary malicious wounding, dropping the maximum possible sentence for that charge from life imprisonment to 20 years. As another part of the agreement, the prosecution will drop the charge of felony possession of a firearm and ammunition, which was going to be tried at a later date.

Public defender David Walls, who represented Kavanagh, said the defendant decided overnight to resolve the case, but would not speak to how Kavanagh was feeling after a full day of testimony. Walls also would not say what he hopes the sentencing decision will be, but said he has "some ideas for what to present."

The maximum sentence for each charge ranges from five and 10 years, and Kavanagh could face up to 20 years for malicious wounding. Judge Dennis Hupp will determine sentencing after the presentence trial this spring.

The trial was originally scheduled to end on Jan. 21 prior to Kavanagh reaching a plea agreement. Thursday's proceedings were subsequently cut short.

Kavanagh will appear again at the Fauquier County Circuit Court on April 18 at 1 p.m. for a pre-sentencing trial. Because Kavanagh has out-of-state convictions, Goff said a pre-sentence report will take about 60 days to complete.



BY JULIA SHANAHAN

**Thighe Kavanagh is led back to jail after his plea in Fauquier County Circuit Court last Thursday.**

Kavanagh is a convicted felon in New York, Florida and South Carolina and has a 30-year record of criminal behavior, including numerous charges involving theft and drug and alcohol offenses.

In July 2019, Kavanagh shot his 5-year-old granddaughter in the ankle in a "drunken rage" at his father Edmund Kavanagh's residence on Tiger Valley Road.

On the trial's first day, the jury also heard testimony from the doctor who treated Kavanagh's granddaughter at the Fauquier Hospital, the children's foster mom and one of Kavanagh's neighbors.

**"It didn't go the way he expected yesterday," Commonwealth Attorney Art Goff said after the trial's first day. Kavanagh's attorneys then called Goff before court the next morning and asked for a deal, Goff said.**

If the trial had continued into Thursday, the jury would have heard from forensic scientists and Rappahannock County Sheriff's deputies who responded to the incident in July 2019.

Deputies responded to the incident after Kavanagh's granddaughter arrived at the Fauquier Hospital. Kavanagh's wife Sherry Dytrych told a deputy that Kavanagh was trying to shoot a snake and the bullet ricocheted and hit the 5-year-old in the ankle.

Goff told the judge on the second day that when law enforcement officers arrived at Kavanagh's residence, he was

passed out on a lawn chair outside the home and became "belligerent" when one of the deputies woke him. Kavanagh then told law enforcement that there were no firearms in the home.

Law enforcement found six bullet holes in the home, including a spent bullet in the bathroom that was a match to the pistol found in the home. There was also red paint on the weapon that was a match to red paint on Kavanagh's hands.

#### **"A BLAST" THROUGH HER ANKLE**

Goff and Fauquier County Assistant Commonwealth Attorney Roshni Dhillon were the prosecutors overseeing the case, and public defenders David Walls and Paul Fore represented Kavanagh.

During opening statements, Dhillon told jurors that Kavanagh was heavily intoxicated at the time of the incident and that his "drunken rage put a bullet hole through a five-year-old's foot." Fore argued that the Rappahannock County Sheriff's Office did not complete a thorough investigation, saying only two out of the five people present at the shooting were tested for gunshot residue on their hands.

In July 2019, the two children, originally from South Carolina, were living at Edmund Kavanagh's home for the summer with their grandparents, Thighe Kavanagh and Sherry Dytrych, all of whom were in the home at the time of the shooting.

Kavanagh's grandchildren, who are now nine and 12 years old, both testified on the trial's first day and had difficulty remembering details of what happened the day of the incident, such as what they were doing before it occurred and specific things adults said before and after the shooting (The Rappahannock News does not name minors). One grandchild

wrongly identified Thighe Kavanagh in the courtroom, pointing instead to Fore.

But, both children testified that they were hiding in the bathroom after hearing an argument between Kavanagh and Dytrych.

Walls objected to allowing the older grandchild, 12, to testify because of lies he told law enforcement officers after the shooting, like how Kavanagh "killed 100 people" and kept a machine gun in the living room, both of which are not true.

The child told the prosecution that Kavanagh told him those things and that he believed them to be true at the time. Judge Dennis Hupp denied the defense's objection, saying the child was competent to testify.

The younger grandchild, who at the time was five years old, said she remembered feeling scared and went into the bathroom at the direction of her older brother, who was nine at the time the incident occurred. In an interview shown to the jury between the alleged victim and someone at the Child Advocacy Center, the child recounted feeling "a blast" go through her ankle, saying "Papa Thighe shot me."

Her brother testified that he remembered hearing a gunshot and getting hit with tiles that broke off the wall during the shooting.

After the shooting, both children testified that they, along with Dytrych and Edmund Kavanagh, got into their car to go to the hospital, and Thighe Kavanagh stood in the driveway in front of the car, pointing a gun at the windshield before they drove off.

Kavanagh remains in custody at the RSW Regional Jail, where he's been held for the past 30 months.

**Bobby Marks secures his tractor on a flatbed trailer after recovering it from a property in Sperrville.**



BY JULIA SHANAHAN

## ‘I can’t make this up’

*Charlottesville couple reunites with tractor in Rapp years after it was stolen*

BY JULIA SHANAHAN  
*Rappahannock News Staff*

A Charlottesville couple thought they would never see their John Deere tractor again after it was stolen from a farm three years ago. That was until this past February when they woke up to a note duct taped to their mail-

box with information about the missing tractor.

“YOU NEED TO CHECK ... SPERRYVILLE VA ... FOR YOUR MISSING JOHN DEERE TRACTOR!!!! ITS IN YOUR GOOD INTEREST TO CHECK

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# TRACTOR

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INTO THIS ASAP,” the note said.

The Albemarle couple, Judy and Bobby Marks, called the Rappahannock County Sheriff’s Office and made the drive from their home in Charlottesville with a flatbed trailer on Feb. 17. The couple was reunited with their \$30,000 tractor — which had been missing for three years — at the home of a person they had never met before. Marks said they were leasing the tractor to a farm near Charlottesville when it was stolen in February 2019.

“I told my friends, ‘I can’t make this up,’” said Judy Marks. “I cannot make this up. It is just ridiculous. We never, ever thought we would get this back. Never ever.”

The anonymous note and the couple’s call to the Rappahannock County Sheriff’s Office led to the arrest of Sperryville resident Christy Keys on June 17 after being accused by police of possessing stolen property. She was

later released after posting a \$7,500 bond, according to an official in the Rappahannock County General District Court. Commonwealth Attorney Art Goff declined to answer any questions about the case.

Judy Marks first called the Albemarle County Sheriff’s Office when she found the note on her mailbox in February. That’s when she learned the tractor was never officially entered into the department’s records as stolen due to a clerical error. The department confirmed the mistake with the Rappahannock News.

So, for the past three years, no one was officially investigating the theft. The Rappahannock County Sheriff’s Office ultimately took over the case, reuniting the Marks with their tractor and opening an investigation into other potentially stolen items found on Keys’ property.

“That was a big loss for them,” said Rappahannock County Sheriff Connie Compton in a February interview. “And I’m just happy that we were able to recover that for them, and I think

the Marks were happy... they came and picked it up and took it on home.”

The tractor was found on Keys’ property with the serial number scratched off, but the tractor was able to be identified with a serial number still on the battery, according to a Rappahannock sheriff’s deputy who was on the property when the tractor was recovered. The tractor was in good condition and there were no parts missing.

In a February interview with Keys, she said she did not know the tractor on her property was stolen. Keys implicated another individual in the theft of the tractor, but no other charges have been brought forward.

Keys wrote to the Rappahannock News on Tuesday that she’s “being charged for something she knew nothing about” and that if she had known the tractor was stolen, she wouldn’t have kept it on her property.

Rappahannock County Sheriff’s Captain Jim Jones would not provide any information on the investigation.

# *'Everything we own fits in a milk crate'*

Community rallies around Ennis family following fire that left their home in ashes



BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

**The Ennis family stands on what used to be the main door of their home in Gid Brown Hollow.**

**BY JULIA SHANAHAN**  
*Rappahannock News staff*

**S**hannon Ennis' background as a Rappahannock County Fire and Rescue volunteer did not prepare her to see her own home engulfed in flames last week, bringing out

volunteers from every fire and rescue company in the county.

Ennis' Gid Brown Hollow residence caught fire last Tuesday around 8:30 a.m. She and her husband, Robert, were at work, and her two kids, ages six and eight, were at school. Ennis said she

got an alert on her phone of a fire in Washington, and realized it was her own address.

"I feel like, probably in any type of loss, you see it, but maybe you're not believing it," Ennis

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PHOTOS BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

Shannon and Robert “Punkin” Ennis with their children, Marissa, 8, and Justin, 6.

*“I’m living through the ‘we are Rappahannock’ motto right now’... I know everybody knows Rappahannock is special, but you just really see it in these times of need.”*

SHANNON ENNIS

## ENNIS

From Page 1

said. “Each day it almost gets worse, because reality sets in when you wake up in the morning, and it’s not a nightmare. It’s true.”

The fire reignited five times between last Tuesday and Thursday, prompting additional emergency calls to the fire and rescue companies. All that is left of the home is the foundation. The family has been staying in a hotel since last week and is looking for rentals in the county.

Ennis said an investigator found the cause of the fire to be electrical and started in the middle of the home. The family lost everything, Ennis said, but was able to salvage her grandmother’s wedding albums. “Everything we own fits in a milk crate,” she said.

She said that the night before, her kids fell asleep on the couch after shopping for party favors for her daughter’s birthday. Ennis said that if her family had been in the house during the time of the fire, the only way out of the family room — where her kids were sleeping and where the fire started — would have been through a window.

“I think more about all their little things,” Ennis said. “My daughter wanted me to keep every little schoolwork she did ... And I’ll never see that stuff again. They had made me hand prints when they were little. It’s those types of things that hurt the most, because when people



Marissa Ennis finds a burnt purse with an intact matching wallet amongst the debris.



#### HOW TO HELP

- ▶ The Ennis Household Recovery Fund on GoFundMe: [rappnews.link/rh5](https://www.gofundme.com/rappnews.link/rh5)
- ▶ Donation station at Atlantic Union Bank off U.S. 211
- ▶ Bake sale at Quicke Mart on Sunday, Sept. 4

➔ tell you everything can be replaced, that's not true."

As of now, Ennis said they plan to rebuild their home in Gid Brown Hollow, saying they've lived there for 19 years and love their neighbors. She said one of her biggest concerns will be if insurance, along with money raised by the community, will be enough to cover the costs of rebuilding, especially with the increased cost of building materials and interest rates on loans.

#### LIVING THE 'WE ARE RAPPAHANNOCK' MOTTO

Members of the Rappahannock County community did not hesitate to show support for the Ennis family soon after the tragedy. "I've cried so much, but it's only been because of the generosity and love from our friends and community," Ennis said.

Kim Williams, Ennis' coworker at the Fauquier County GIS Department, said when she saw Ennis run out of work last week to tend to the emergency, she knew she had to step up and help. Williams organized a fundraiser for the family through GoFundMe shortly after the incident. Since Aug. 24, the fund has raised more than \$29,000, and it continues to grow.

"We wanted to be there so that the community would have a way to help Shannon," Williams said. "She's done so much to touch so many people, and we knew that a lot of people would



The former door to the home's main entrance.

want to reach out and help her too."

The initial fundraising goal was set at \$10,000, but that goal was exceeded in the first 24 hours. More than 200 people have donated to the family, some leaving messages of encouragement and donating as much as \$1,000 at a time.

Rappahannock resident Heather Farmer, Ennis' best friend and Girl Scout co-leader, said she's been working to organize everyone's donations and fielding questions for the family so that they don't receive multiples of items or something they don't need at the moment.

Farmer said she knew there were some gift bags that were lost in the fire that were for their Girl Scouts for selling cookies, and one of the first things she did after hearing the news

was to make sure those items could be replaced.

"So I walked up [to her house after the fire] and I gave her a hug, and the first thing she says is, 'oh, the cookie rewards,'" Farmer said. "So I was able to just take her face in my hands and be like, 'don't worry about it. I've handled that.'"

Ennis said she has been overwhelmed by the support and generosity from members of the community. She said they've received clothes, children's toys and food, along with cash donations and other fundraisers.

"I'm living through the 'we are Rappahannock' motto right now," Ennis said, referring to a slogan coined by Rappahannock County Public Schools. "... It's just people checking on

you and the church offering you home cooked meals, because of course, we haven't had one of them since the fire. I know everybody knows Rappahannock is special, but you just really see it in these times of need."

On Sunday, Sept. 4, resident Christie Atkins will host a bake sale from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Quicke Mart, and all proceeds will go directly to the Ennis family. All donations are welcomed, whether it be monetary or baked goods.

There is a station to collect donations for the Ennis family at Atlantic Union Bank in Rappahannock, located at 7 Bank Rd. in Washington. They will accept monetary and non-monetary donations. Those with questions can contact Angie Shavatt at [angela.shavatt@atlanticunionbank.com](mailto:angela.shavatt@atlanticunionbank.com) or 540-987-8384.



Justin Ennis takes a shovel to some of the debris of his former home.