

# LONOKE DEMOCRAT

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## Stocks pleads guilty; to spend life in prison

By Ed Galucki

LONOKE — Heath Stocks of Furlow pled guilty Friday to three counts of capital murder in the Jan. 17 shooting deaths of his father, mother and sister at their home. Stocks had previously entered a plea of "not guilty."

Circuit/Chancery Judge Lance Hanshaw handed down three life sentences in response to Stocks' plea. The sentences are to be served consecutively.

Stocks was arrested Jan. 19 for the killings and first arraigned on Jan. 21. At that arraignment, Stocks was remanded to the state hospital for a mental examination. At an April 8 arraignment, Stocks pleaded "not guilty."

The "guilty" plea agreement was made between Lonoke County prosecuting attorney Larry Cook and defense co-attorneys Edgar Thompson and Mac Carder Thursday. Cook said Friday negotiations had been underway several weeks, but did not say what had led to the final decision.

Hanshaw posed a series of questions to ensure Stocks understood the significance of the plea agreement. "Do you understand in making this plea you are giving up your

right to trial by jury?...You are giving up presumption of innocence?" Hanshaw asked. Stocks answered each with "Yes, sir."

Cook read the charges against Stocks. The deaths of Joe Stocks, Barbara Stocks and Heather Stocks were each treated as a separate charge.

Stocks responded as guilty to each. Impassive for most of the proceedings, Stocks' response to the charge of killing his sister, Heather, was possibly his most apparent show of emotion.

Asked how he pled to the charge, Stocks paused for several seconds before very quietly saying "guilty."

Hanshaw then passed sentence.

Stocks was returned to Lonoke County Jail to await transfer to the Arkansas Department of Corrections. He is scheduled to be moved to the Pine Bluff Diagnostic Unit this week.

### FAMILIES SPEAK

The families of Elwood and Annie Mae Harris and Martin and Dorothy Stocks, Heath Stocks' grandparents, released a state-

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HEATH STOCKS is escorted out of the Lonoke County Courthouse by his attorney Mac Carder, left, and sheriff's investigator Sgt. Steve Finch.

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## Stocks

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ment after the arraignment.

### FAMILIES' STATEMENT

"Joe, Barbara and Heather Stocks are gone and no one can replace them. Despite the fact that their deaths came to the hands of their son and brother, Heath Stocks, our families are convinced that they had been alive today, they would have asked for mercy from the court. Despite intense public pressure, Prosecuting Attorney Cook honored the unanimous wishes of our families when he allowed this plea bargain. Mr. Cook heard our pleas and responded as we requested. We are sincerely thankful for his decision.

"As we have struggled with the events of the past few months, it has become clear that our loved ones were not just loved by us but by people from across the state. While many may not understand our request for anything other than the death penalty, our decision was based on our own moral convictions and what we believe would be the wishes of Joe, Barbara and Heather. Heath is our only link to this family. His remorse is genuine, but only God can grant him forgiveness. We can only pray that the Heath we knew and loved will conquer the demon that committed this crime, and will be able to make a positive difference in someone else's life.

"To friends and classmates who held each other tight, to parents who listened more to their children, and to children who began to appreciate their families more because of the events of January 17, we pray that you will not wait for another tragedy to show your love for each other."