NEWS RELEASE

Luther Strange

Alabama Attorney General

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AG STRANGE ANNOUNCES GUILTY PLEA IN DEATH OF WIFE AS MONTGOMERY MAN'S TRIAL WAS SET TO START TODAY

(MONTGOMERY) –Attorney General Luther Strange announced that a Montgomery man this morning admitted that he killed and hid the body of his wife who was missing several years before being declared dead. Albert Leonard Wilding, 82, was set to begin trial today for the murder of his wife, but instead pleaded guilty to manslaughter. He was sentenced to 20 years, which was split for him to serve five years imprisonment followed by five years of supervised probation.

"The guilty plea this morning is a result of years of dedicated teamwork by many agencies, including the perseverance of a man who began the investigation when the victim first disappeared, and those who followed new leads and fought in court to see that this killer would be brought to justice," said Attorney General Strange.

Albert Leonard Wilding and his wife Judie Wilding were owners of the Ani-Mall pet store in Montgomery, which Judie Wilding operated. Upon pleading guilty this morning, Albert Wilding admitted that he killed Judie Wilding on April 1, 2000, and disposed of her body. Evidence gathered by investigators and prosecutors includes the following:

Employees of Ani-Mall became alarmed when their boss Judie Wilding did not appear at work on April 2, 2000. Fearful because they had seen Albert Wilding in rages against his wife within recent days and because they had witnessed him take a razor blade and mutilate images of animals at the store, they reported Judie Wilding missing. Albert Wilding claimed his wife had been angry and left home voluntarily.

A search warrant served by the Montgomery Police Department in 2001 found Judie Wilding's identification and credit cards were still in Albert Wilding's possession at the couple's home in the Arrowhead neighborhood of Montgomery.

For five years, Albert Wilding paid to keep up life insurance policies that were owned by his wife and for which he was the beneficiary. He paid a total of $30,000 for policies which, had she been alive, she could have cashed out herself or terminated at any time. After Judie Wilding was declared dead in 2005, Albert Wilding received approximately $815,000 from these policies.

The Attorney General's Office presented the case to a Montgomery County grand jury and obtained an indictment of Albert Wilding in August of 2008. Subsequent investigation determined that Albert Wilding opened a particular safe deposit box just days after learning that the Attorney General's Office had taken the case and reopened investigation of Judie Wilding's disappearance. Judie Wilding's wedding rings were found in that safe deposit box.

This morning in court, Albert Wilding said he found his wife packing a suitcase to leave him, that he tried to stop her, and he stated that she had a gun that he tried to take from her. He stated that the gun went off and killed her, and that he did not attempt to call the police or an ambulance, but rather, that he put the body in a bathtub at the house for a day, burned the body the next night, and then disposed of the remains in numerous locations in Lake Martin.

Attorney General Strange commended those who worked to bring this case to a successful conclusion, noting Assistant Attorney General Don Valeska, chief of the Criminal Trials Division, Assistant Attorneys General Andrew Arrington and Tina Coker, also of the Criminal Trials Division; Assistant Attorney General John Davis; Special Agents Gene Sisson, Jeff Chandler, J.W. Barnes, and Danny Billingsley, all of the Attorney General's Investigations Division. In particular, he gave high praise to Don Favor of the Montgomery Police Department for his dedicated perseverance throughout the years to solve this crime. He also thanked the Alabama Department of Public Safety and the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office.

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