



BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



MICHAEL L. RAMSEY
District Attorney

MARK MURPHY
Chief Deputy District Attorney

JASON WINES
Chief Investigator

PRESS RELEASE

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Thief Admits Stealing Thousands from Elderly Camp Fire Victim

As jurors waited to be selected for her trial this morning, a 31-year-old woman changed her not-guilty plea and pleaded no contest to embezzling over \$63,000 of Camp Fire insurance money from an elderly Camp Fire victim, who had raised her from the age of eleven.

District Attorney Mike Ramsey said the 75-year-old Camp Fire victim had received insurance payments totaling over \$127,000 for the loss of her home in the November 2018 fire. After relocating due to the Camp Fire, the victim had taken the defendant, **Brenda Rose Asbury**, into her new residence to help the defendant escape a bad relationship in Oklahoma. The victim had paid travel costs so that the defendant, whom she called her “daughter”, could make it to California.

Ramsey said the victim received the insurance payments starting in December 2018 through June 2019 and placed them into a separate bank account she created for the settlements. The victim’s husband’s health deteriorated after the fire and he was placed in a care home. In May 2019, Asbury convinced the victim that placing Asbury’s name onto the account would protect the money from any attempt by the state to recoup money for the husband’s care. Still distressed from the Camp Fire, the victim agreed to Asbury’s plan and put Asbury on the account, in name only, so that nothing would happen to the money, which was supposed to help the victim rebuild her life.

Ramsey said at no point was Asbury given permission to access the account or use any of the money in the account. However, unbeknownst to the victim, shortly after being added on to the victim’s bank account, Asbury created a new, separate, secret account and transferred over \$63,000 into that account. Asbury then packed up all of her property and secretly moved out of the victim’s home while the victim was out for the evening. Asbury disconnected her cell phone and cut all ties from the woman she called “mom”, fleeing back to Oklahoma.

Within a few weeks, Asbury’s secret bank account was completely empty through cash withdrawals and further transfers to different accounts. Bank records show Asbury spent thousands paying off credit card debt and making various purchases including from Best Buy, Lowe’s, Costco, Victoria’s Secret, and Amazon.

Ramsey said the victim was doubly traumatized, not only by the Camp Fire, but by the betrayal of her trust by the woman she helped raise as her “daughter.” Because of the theft, the victim did not have sufficient resources to rebuild her home and had to move into a small travel trailer.

Ramsey said detectives from the Butte County Sheriff’s Office used search warrants, cell phone location pings, and various interviews to eventually locate Asbury in Oklahoma. She subsequently turned herself in to the local sheriff’s office in November of 2019 and was booked into the Butte County Jail where she stayed for three weeks before being released by a local judge pending today’s jury trial.

During today’s hearing, Asbury stipulated that she stole a total of \$63,100, which will be ordered as restitution for the victim when Asbury is sentenced on October 7, 2021. She faced upwards of four years in county jail for embezzlement from an elder.

