

Childminder's second retrial delayed till June

By Declan Brennan

A JUDGE has discharged the jury in the second retrial of a Cavan childminder accused of causing serious harm to a baby, because of a legal issue.

Sandra Higgins, 36, denies a charge of intentionally or recklessly causing serious harm to the baby at her home on March 28, 2012.

On Monday morning, Judge Cormac Quinn empanelled a jury to hear the trial at Dublin Circuit Criminal Court.

However, a legal issue arose before the trial opened in evidence. Judge Quinn sent the jury home to deal with the issue, then on Tuesday morning



Accused: Sandra Higgins

he told the jury that the legal issue now means the trial is not ready to proceed.

He discharged them and

remanded Ms Higgins, of The Beeches, Drumgola Wood, Cavan town, Co. Cavan, on continuing bail. He set a new trial date for June 11.

Earlier Judge Quinn said it is alleged that the defendant assaulted the ten-month-old. He said that it will be alleged that on March 28, 2012, the baby was brought to hospital with non-accidental injuries.

He told the jurors the case had gone to trial twice already. He said these trials were accompanied by publicity and that in order to serve as a jury for this trial, it was crucial that jurors felt they would not be affected by anything they had seen or heard in the media.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

A day in my life straight out of Poe's stories of absolute terror

LAST week, I celebrated my birthday. I have long gone past the age when you think you will live forever. At a certain stage, mortality takes hold with an icy grip.

I suppose that is why, on my big day, I am prone to remembering my childhood. And do you know, in such moments, the strangest memories arise. This year, the oddest memory was provoked by a discussion regarding birds.

We were on our way to school when a large black crow landed beside the car. 'Oh, look, Dad, there's a horrible bird staring at us!' It was, indeed, a ghastly creature, one that could have flown straight off the pages of Edgar Allan Poe.

It was when I gazed into its beady eye that I recalled the bizarre tale of Mrs Doyle.

My boys were rapt as I began to tell them of that day when I was only five or six years of age. My grandmother took me by the hand and led me to what appeared like an ordinary terraced house.

'Go on, Dad, go on!' urged the boys, knowing by my tone that this would draw them to the edge of their seats.

My grandmother knocked. Nothing. She knocked again. Still nothing.

As we turned to leave, the door slowly opened. My grandmother pushed it but there was no-one on the other side. I gripped her hand as we entered a shaded room.

'Mrs Doyle, are you in?' she called. In a voice that was barely audible, Mrs Doyle answered from an armchair. She was very old and clad in black from head to toe.

There was neither radio nor television but simply a kind of dead silence. Mrs Doyle had, quite literally, become part of the furniture. To my tender and petrified eyes, it was as though she had become one with the chair. If she moved, you felt the whole thing would move with her.

'Ah, there you are, Mrs Doyle', said my grandmother.

I stood motionless in the middle of the room, not really knowing what we were doing there. All I knew was that I wanted to leave as quickly as possible.

I was told to 'say hello' to Mrs Doyle, but before I could answer, something caught my eye. It was

large, black and sinister, and it soared through the room at full speed. I leaped with shock and then I heard it say: 'Say hello to Mrs Doyle! Say hello to Mrs Doyle! Say hello to Mrs Doyle!'

In a deafening high-pitched squawk, this infernal creature was ordering me to 'say hello to Mrs Doyle!'

It was perched on top of a high cabinet and had the menacing appearance of a common raven. There was no cage in sight.

I froze to the spot, not knowing where it would fly to next. Mrs Doyle sat motionless in the corner. My grandmother, who had obviously thought better of warning me beforehand, made light of what was quickly becoming a scene from the Hammer House of Horror.

'How are you, Mrs Doyle?' she inquired, to which the bird responded: 'How are you, Mrs Doyle? How are you, Mrs Doyle?' What made it even more terrifying was that its words were crystal clear and it seemed to know what it was saying.

It soon became apparent that the bird was boss. A conversation was impossible because, as soon as anyone spoke, the creature continually repeated the sentence. It was like trying to conduct a discussion in the presence of a banshee.

AND then, when it found that it was being ignored, it would suddenly take flight. To me, it was like a giant bat, which is why I reacted by crouching down for fear it would take hold of my hair. As it flew, it seemed to spit out the words: 'It's a lovely day, Mrs Doyle! It's a lovely day, Mrs Doyle!'

The bird was jealous that Mrs Doyle would dare speak to anyone but it. But she didn't speak because she wasn't let. It was almost with joy that, as we departed, it squawked: 'Goodbye, Mrs Doyle! Goodbye, Mrs Doyle!'

I finished my story of Mrs Doyle's bird and there was silence in the car. Had I gone too far? Was this tale a tad too terrifying, especially after our encounter with that ghastly crow?

The silence was broken with this: 'Did Mrs Doyle have a cauldron?'

I laughed and laughed some more.

But then, I turned to see another crow and I laughed no more.

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