

# Guilty plea, then tears, then prison for Michelle Rietz

By DAN EGGEN

REGISTER STAFF WRITER

Before being led away to serve up to 50 years in prison, a tearful Michelle Lynn Rietz apologized Thursday for plunging a steak knife into the neck of her friend and former landlord.

"I never meant to hurt anybody," Rietz said, choking back tears. "This was an accident, and I'm very sorry it happened."

Polk County District Judge Glenn Pille then handed down the manda-

tory 50-year prison term for second-degree murder, to which Rietz had pleaded guilty.

Such sentences commonly translate into about 16 years of actual imprisonment. Rietz could be released even earlier with good behavior and completion of drug treatment.



Rietz  
"An accident"

Rietz, 27, had been charged with first-degree murder in the death of Terry Sims, 71. She pleaded guilty to the lesser charge last week.

Prosecutors maintained that Rietz was the aggressor in the stabbing. But Rietz and her attorney said she acted in self-defense and said Sims had previously attacked her.

In a letter to The Des Moines Register, Rietz referred to "Sims' criminally violent record, neighborhood concerns, alcohol problems and mental instability."

Sims had a long history of commu-

nity activism, but also was convicted of rape in 1949 and assault in 1960.

Prior to the killing, police said, Rietz had rented a bedroom in the back of Sims' home at 1064 14th St. Early Jan. 14, police said, she went back to the house to retrieve some belongings after she had moved out.

Rietz called police to break up a dispute between the two at about 7 a.m. Both apparently had been drinking, and Rietz had a small scratch on her neck. Twenty minutes later, she called police again. Sims had been stabbed, and Rietz was arrested.