

Case Brief: People v. Fromholz

People v. Fromholz is the trial of Haley Fromholz, a chef and contestant on the reality TV cooking show *Recipe for Success*, who is charged with murdering celebrity judge Morgan Sears using poisonous “heartstopper” mushrooms during the filming of the semi-final challenge of the show. The charge against Fromholz is first-degree murder, and in the alternative, involuntary manslaughter as a lesser-included offense.

The prosecution alleges that Fromholz committed first-degree murder when Fromholz served Sears a mushroom tlayuda that allegedly resulted in Sears’s death the following day. The prosecution attributes the motive to a longstanding feud between Sears and Fromholz, Sears’s public humiliations of Fromholz, and the \$250,000 cash prize at stake. Evidence presented includes Fromholz’s use of the iForage website to locate heartstopper mushrooms at Artemis Grove to allegedly stealthily conceal the poisonous mushrooms in the tlayuda dish, and later Fromholz’s deletion of a computer folder titled “MORGAN SEARS IS A LYING FRAUD!!!” while wiping their search history, allegedly to cover their tracks.

The defense argues that Fromholz did not kill Sears. The defense will deny that Fromholz never had the premeditation necessary for intent in first-degree murder. The contents of Fromholz’s forage basket were checked by the production staff and no heartstopper mushroom were identified. Further, the defense argues that Alden Mitchell also had a personal, contentious history with Sears and served Sears a foraged-mushroom runza during the same semi-final challenge, casting reasonable doubt on Fromholz’s guilt.

The testimonies of the experts will show that Haley and Mitchell had foraged in Artemis Grove and that heartstopper mushrooms were found in the mushroom tlayuda. The prosecution expert testimony will show that heartstopper spores were found on Fromholz’s jacket, and that Fromholz’s computer had been used to access websites that identified Artemis Grove as a place where deadly heartstoppers grow. After the alleged murder, Fromholz deleted a potentially incriminating folder from their laptop. The defense expert, a mycologist, will testify how easy it is for non-experts to confuse deadly heartstoppers with non-poisonous mushrooms.

The pretrial hearing centers on a defense motion to exclude a deletion of a folder on Fromholz’s computer titled “MORGAN SEARS IS A LYING FRAUD!!!” The Fourth Amendment protects against unreasonable searches and seizures. The question is whether Alden Mitchell had actual or apparent authority to consent to the detective’s search of Fromholz’s laptop computer and whether the evidence of the deleted folder is admissible at trial.