

Man admits stealing 'Wizard of Oz' ruby slippers from museum in 2005, but details remain a mystery

A man charged in the museum heist of a pair of ruby slippers that Judy Garland wore in the "The Wizard of Oz" pleaded guilty in a deal that could keep him out of prison due to his failing health, but only cleared up some of the mystery that dates back 18 years.

Terry Jon Martin, 76, pleaded guilty to a single count of theft of a major artwork. The shoes were stolen in 2005 from the Judy Garland Museum in the late actor's hometown of Grand Rapids, Minnesota, and recovered by the FBI in 2018.

No one was arrested until Martin, who lives near Grand Rapids, was charged this year. During his change-of-plea hearing in federal court Martin said he used a hammer to smash the glass of the museum door and display case to take the slippers. He said he thought the slippers had real rubies and that he had hoped to sell the gems. But when a friend told him the rubies were glass, he said he got rid of the slippers.

Martin did not say how he got rid of them or to whom he gave them, leaving the slippers' whereabouts during the ensuing years a mystery.

"Martin has no idea where they were and how they were recovered," Martin's attorney, Dane DeKrey, said afterward. "His involvement was that two-day period in 2005."

Under the plea agreement, the federal prosecutor recommended that Martin not face any time behind bars because of his age and poor health. Martin, who appeared in court in a wheelchair with supplemental oxygen, has advanced chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and

struggles to breathe. The proposed sentence would let Martin die at home, the attorney said. “He’s basically slowly suffocating to death.”

Martin, who has a 1988 conviction for receiving stolen goods, remained free on his own recognizance after the hearing.

The U.S. attorney’s office said it would have no comment until after Martin is sentenced.