

Jurors mull death for Home Depot killing

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SANTA ANA — The ex-girlfriend of a man who killed a Home Depot manager in Tustin during a robbery testified Tuesday that he repeatedly raped her before trying to convince her to take him back.

The same jury that last week found Jason Russell Richardson guilty of gunning down 40-year-old Tom Egan on Feb. 9, 2007, must decide whether to recommend life in prison without the possibility of parole or the death penalty for the defendant.

As the estimated weeklong penalty phase of the trial got under way, Richardson's attorney, Associate Public Defender Hector Chaparro, told jurors he will show how his 39-year-old client was passed around his extended family throughout a troubled childhood filled with repeated exposure to drugs and violence.

Deputy District Attorney Cameron Talley countered that he will present evidence during the penalty phase of how Richardson raped two ex-girlfriends and was also convicted of grand theft.

The first prosecution witness, Dawn Carroll, said she tried several times to break off a 10-month relationship with Richardson, who she met when both worked at a Denny's restaurant in San Dimas.

"I tried to break up with Jason several times, but he kept coming back looking for me," Carroll testified.

In September 1990, after they were no longer dating, he snuck into her San Dimas house through the garage and attacked her, Carroll testified.

He refused to leave Carroll's house, and pounced as she reached for the phone, knocking it off the nightstand before slapping her, she said.

"He kept yelling how he just wanted to spend time with me," Carroll testified. "He said, 'I should beat your ass for everything you put me through.'"

As the then-18-year-old Carroll tried to scream for help, Richardson punched her in the stomach, knocking the wind out of her, she said. When she would catch her breath and try to scream again, he would muzzle her with his hand, she testified.

As Richardson pummeled her, he threatened to attack her family and another young girl living in the house at the time if she kept screaming or reported him to authorities, Carroll testified.

She sobbed on the witness stand as Talley showed her a police report from that day to help her remember the details of the attack.

Richardson raped her for about five minutes and then forced her to perform oral sex on him before shoving her in the shower to clean up so he could then anally rape her, Carroll testified.

"I just did what he said," she testified. "I figured if I did what he said, he would leave sooner, and I didn't want to aggravate him."

Richardson eventually forced Carroll to go along with him to the Pomona courthouse, where he had to appear for a traffic citation, and then made her go to Denny's to have breakfast, she testified.

"He wanted to go to Denny's because he was hungry," Carroll said, crying softly. "I just wanted to go home. And he was mad because I wouldn't eat."

Richardson took her home and then tried — for 30 minutes to an hour — to convince her to get back together with him, she said.

"He said if I didn't hurt him, he wouldn't have to hurt me," the witness said.

Carroll said she went to a neighbor's house after Richardson left and was taken to a Los Angeles County sheriff's station to report the rape.

Talley told jurors that Richardson raped another ex-girlfriend that same year.

Chaparro took jurors through a lengthy narrative of Richardson's childhood, in which he was mostly passed back and forth between his grandmother and mother.

Both women struggled with drug addiction, according to Chaparro, who said his client's mother abused alcohol and drugs throughout most of her pregnancy, except for a few weeks when she was in jail.

Jeannie Richardson didn't even find out she was pregnant until she did LSD, had a bad "trip" and went to the doctor to find out what was wrong, nor was she sure who fathered her son, Chaparro said.

After her son was born, she largely abandoned the "incessantly crying" newborn, dumping him off for days and weeks at a time with friends and family while she did drugs, Chaparro said.

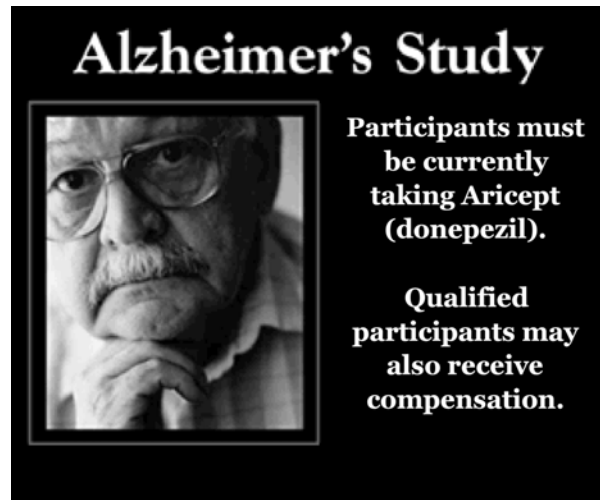
Jeannie and her heroin-addicted husband, Craig Gates, would often fight, Chaparro said. But the defendant thought Gates was his dad until his mother told him when he was 13 she did not know who fathered him, the attorney said.

Richardson did well when he was 13 and got to go live with an uncle and aunt, who was a schoolteacher, for a year, Chaparro said. But as he went to live with other relatives, his schooling suffered and he ultimately filed — and was granted — emancipation from his mother when he was 17, Chaparro said.

Richardson was sentenced to six years in prison for the rapes, but when he was released in 1995, he was addicted to cocaine, Chaparro said.

Jurors deliberated for about 5 1/2 hours last Wednesday before finding Richardson guilty of first-degree murder and finding true special circumstance allegations that the killing was committed in the course of a robbery and a burglary, making him eligible for the death penalty.

This story was written and edited by The City News Service.



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