

Samon man sentenced to life in imprisonment for toddler's murder

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A jury made up of six men and eight women found a Samson man guilty of capital murder in connection with the 2003 death of a toddler.

Last Thursday Circuit Judge Kenneth Quattlebaum sentenced Stephen L. Preachers, 33, to life in a state prison without the possibility of parole.

"We're very satisfied," said District Attorney Kirke Adams, who credits the jury for their legal acumen. "Juries are smarter than people think they are; they could see right through this lie."

Adams said Preachers tried to blame the death of 21-month-old Angel Marie Whitley on the child's mother, Gale Whitley.

"He tried to blame it on the mother and basically came up with a ridiculous story and the jury didn't buy it," said Adams.

Adams said Preachers claimed Whitley put her child in a clothes dryer, causing the toddler's death.

"We know what the scientific evidence was going to prove and it wasn't that the child was ever in a dryer," said Adams. "This child was slammed against a hard object."

According to reports, Dr. Stephen Boudreau, the medical examiner from the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences in Montgomery, testified the child died from blunt force trauma to the head.

Adams said the girl died from a skull fracture to the back of the head that resulted from the impact of "a tremendous amount of force."

According to reports, Preachers apparently grabbed the child by the legs and lifted her toward the ceiling and then smashed her head on a dresser.

"The death of any child is horrible," said Adams, "but the brutal murder of a 2-year-old is absolutely reprehensible."

The incident occurred in early June of 2003 and Adams said he is glad the family finally received closure last week.

"They had waited a long time for this case to come to trial," he said. "I know the family waited a long time to hear the words 'guilty.'"