

Gang member spared death in women's killings

Jury weighed Osorio's troubled childhood during penalty phase.

The Orange County Register May 24, 2005

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SANTA ANA An Anaheim street-gang member known as "Criminal" slumped in his chair and gave a heavy sigh of relief Monday when a Superior Court jury spared his life for murdering two women during apartment burglaries in October 2000.

The 10-woman, two-man jury instead recommended that Edgar Omar Osorio, 24, serve the rest of his life in prison without the possibility of parole for killing Angela King, 34, a civilian employee of the Anaheim Police Department, and her neighbor, Betty M. Easley, 70, after they walked in on separate burglaries in progress.

Osorio, the son of an abusive, alcoholic father, embraced both of his attorneys when he learned he had escaped a death verdict.

His mother, aunt and two of his sisters wept uncontrollably in the courtroom audience. Nancy Osorio, one of the sisters, said, "They were tears of joy."

She said her family believes her brother is innocent of the murders and that he will be cleared when the case is appealed.

On the other side of the courtroom, Sophia King, the mother of victim Angela King, wept quietly. She said later that she wanted a death verdict, but was satisfied that Osorio would never be free again.

"I feel as though a tremendous weight has been removed from my broken heart," Sophia King said after the verdict. "But the reality is, Angela is still dead and two mothers have each lost a child."

The jury deliberated for about seven hours before voting for life.

One juror said she voted against death because of the abuse Osorio suffered while growing up. Another said she did not believe that life without parole is a lesser sentence than the death penalty.

The same jury last month voted to convict Osorio of two counts of murder, burglary and arson.

Osorio shot Angela King in October 2000 when she walked in on him burglarizing her apartment. He shot her in the head, then took her wallet with police ID as a "trophy" to bolster his street credentials with his gang, prosecutor Howard Gundy told the jury.

After leaving King's apartment, Osorio bragged that he had "smoked that pig," but decided he must go back to cover his tracks, Gundy said.

When he got back to King's building, Osorio broke into the apartment of her neighbor, Easley, a grandmother who walked with two canes. When she returned from a prayer meeting, Osorio beat her, stabbed her in the back, cut her throat and left her for dead.

Osorio then set fire to each apartment in an attempt to eliminate his fingerprints.

Easley died months later of the effects of smoke inhalation, after her son ordered life-sustaining machines disconnected.

In closing arguments for the penalty trial phase, Gundy said that Osorio took pleasure in King's death, believing he had killed a police officer. In Easley's case, Osorio was attempting to get property to sell for cash, "a cold, calculated business at this point," then systematically covered up the crime by setting the fires, the prosecutor said.

"That's a business killing, folks. That's not a rage killing," Gundy said. "He's doing the things he needs to do to end her life. That's his goal."

Deputy Public Defender Steve Biskar asked jurors to spare his client's life, reminding them that Osorio was abused by his "monster" of a father and was taught by his uncles to steal.

Osorio was hit as a child, which caused brain damage, and he was clearly out of control the night of the killings, Biskar said.

"Where is the pleasure in these killings?" he asked. "This is panic. This is immaturity."

Biskar begged the jury for justice, and mercy, saying Osorio had both bad and good inside him.

"A life verdict does not diminish their value," Biskar said of the victims. "What it does is, it shows you have compassion."