

"Incomprehensible" - Jerseyville couple sentenced for murder of 6-year-old child

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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JERSEYVILLE – Convicted child murderers Mike and Georgena Roberts, both 43 and both of Jerseyville, were sentenced to 25 and 20 years in prison, respectively, after pleading guilty to the first-degree murder of Mike Roberts's 6-year-old son, Liam Roberts, on Nov. 3, 2017.

During the sentencing hearing Wednesday morning at the Jersey County Courthouse, several people had the opportunity to have their statements heard by Judge Eric Pistorius as well as a crowded courtroom. Because of the guilty plea entered, many of these statements would not have otherwise been heard – as it would not have gone to trial. During the hearing both Mike and Georgena Roberts, who were shackled and in black-and-gray striped jail attire, grew increasingly emotional with Georgena Roberts's wails nearly interrupting her husband's testimony during the hearing's latter half.

Before statements were issued, Judge Pistorius revealed Georgena Roberts had been examined by mental health professionals to see if she was indeed fit to stand trial. Those professionals deemed she was in fact fit to stand trial and would not vouch that she could be found insane. She could have, however, filed to plead guilty with a mental illness, but instead waived that right.

Georgena Roberts's attorney said his client was traumatized at a young age and suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depressive disorder and panic disorders as a result of that. He also blamed her involvement in the death of 6-year-old Liam Roberts, who was a mere 17 pounds when he was pronounced dead at the Jersey Community Hospital, on Mike Roberts, adding Georgena Roberts was conditioned to “accept male dominance.”

Mike and Georgena Roberts faced 20-60 years in prison following the death of Liam Roberts. Jerseyville Police Officer Scott Woelfel said he was called to the hospital the night of Liam Roberts's death and found the dead child with Mike Roberts. Upon first inspection, Woelfel said Liam Roberts's ribs were entirely visible, as were the bones in his hips. He had thinning hair, sunken eyes, sores over his and sallow cheeks – all signs of starvation. He was also wearing pajama pants designed for children of 24 months old as a 6-year-old.

Once it was determined by investigators and medical professionals child abuse was a determining factor in the child's death, Woelfel said both Mike and Georgena Roberts cooperated with investigators, adding they had determined to withhold food as a method of punishment for Liam Roberts and his older brother for allegedly defecating and urinating on the floor.



During this time, Woelfel said representatives from the Jersey Community Unit School District met face-to-face with Mike and Georgena Roberts in regards to Liam Roberts and his older brother having “an extreme obsession with food,” adding they were so obsessed with food, they would eat it from the floor upon coming to school in the morning. The school suggested the couple seek medical assistance for their children's conditions. It was stated such medical assistance was sought at that time, even adding a Children's Hospital in St. Louis was consulted.

It was around that time, though, the two boys were pulled from the school district and placed into homeschooling. Multiple statements previous to sentencing said Mike Roberts would work upwards of 80 hours a week, leaving the five children Mike and Georgena Roberts shared between them in their Jerseyville home in the care of Georgena Roberts.

Woelfel remarked the home where the kids lived and were “schooled” featured a disturbing assortment of child-proof locks, which kept Liam Roberts and other children locked in the basement. This required them to have to knock to be allowed upstairs. Because of this, many witnesses, including family, neighbors, and co-workers, said they never saw the kids. Some of the neighbors told police they did not know Liam Roberts even existed.

Another witness told police Mike and Georgena Roberts once ate steak in front of Liam Roberts and his older brother while they were given bologna. The other children were allegedly fed chicken patties. Both Mike and Georgena Roberts claimed to have sneaked

food to the boys, and each claimed the other would get angry when this was revealed. During his testimony, which was barely audible due to his low volume of speaking as well as the cries of his wife, Mike Roberts said he was unsure how he slipped into such a “skewed” point of view. Woelfel said it was nearly one year before his death that Liam Roberts actually was able to enjoy an actual full meal.

When Liam Roberts fell seriously ill, leading to his death in the hospital, Woelfel said Georgena Roberts called her husband at work instead of dialing 911. When he returned from work Mike Roberts attempted to revive the young child by putting him in a bathtub full of warm water instead of contacting emergency authorities or going to the hospital. In fact, 911 was not dialed during the entire starvation crisis leading to his death, Woelfel said.

These details caused the boys' biological mother, Kim Roberts, who Mike Roberts blamed for being “addicted to drugs” during the infancy of Liam Roberts, to sob. Kim Roberts also took the stand at the hearing, accompanied by Jersey County State's Attorney Benjamin Goetten, who was prosecuting the case. She said she still has nightmares of her young son's death, adding she felt Mike and Georgena Roberts robbed her of her son, her family of their loved one and the young Liam Roberts of his entire life. She described the entire situation as “incomprehensible,” a word Pistorius also used to describe it when he announced the sentence.

Perhaps the most damning statements came from another of Mike Roberts's sons. The young man took the stand and said his father abandoned him when he was 12, which caused him to have depression and social anxiety disorder “before he even knew what those words meant.” He said he was able to conquer most of his mental issues by his junior year in high school, but said he has since lost his Christian faith. Despite that loss of faith, he said he believed his father could be “the Devil living with us.”

While these testimonies from family members and law enforcement painted a vivid image of a torturous hellscape in which two children were brutalized with hunger, the defense attorneys for the couple argued for the lesser prison sentence of 20 years, instead of the higher end of the spectrum of 60 years.

Mike Roberts's attorney used the financial burden of imprisoning Mike Roberts for an extended amount of time as well as the possibility he could return to being a “useful citizen.” She said imprisoning someone in Illinois costs between \$26,000-\$38,000 a year. She said it was more likely closer to \$38,000 a year, which would cost taxpayers \$760,000 to put Mike Roberts away for 20 years, \$900,000 for 25 and as much as \$1.1 million for 30. She also used Mike Roberts's dedicated work schedule and four years of

service in the United States Navy to prove he could be again a “useful citizen” upon his release. She also said his other children deserved to have a meaningful relationship again someday with their father upon his release.

Judge Pistorius took a short recess (around 15 minutes) before sentencing the couple. He said he took everything said into consideration when sentencing them, including everyone's statements, the law, and their guilty pleas. He said those pleas prevented the burden of a trial to prove guilt to fall on the state. He also commended the pleas, because they prevented the need for a jury trial, which would have inevitably required the testimony of the other children involved – something that would have undoubtedly incurred even more trauma for them.

Mike Roberts was sentenced to 25 years in prison with 440 days to his credit for time served in the Jersey County Jail. He will have no chance for parole and must serve the entirety of his sentence. When released, he will have another three years mandatory probation.

Georgena Roberts was sentenced to 20 years in prison with 440 days to her credit for time served in the Jersey County Jail. She will have no chance for parole and must serve the entirety of her sentence. When released, she will have another three years mandatory probation. She will also receive treatment for mental illness as well as drug and alcohol abuse while in prison.

[Steven Spencer also contributed to this story.](#)