

FRIDAY, JUNE 9, 1995 THE TIMES-TRANSCRIPT

5

Child had symptoms associated with psycho-social dwarfism

(Continued from Page 1)
The condition involves a problem with the child bonding with one or both parents usually the mother. Often, the child does not receive the attention it needs.

A child with psycho-social dwarfism may fail to grow, have poor posture, experience speech delay, fail to interact with other children, sleep poorly, refuse to eat, have repetitive play activities and cause self-mutilation such as biting.

According to testimony, John Ryan seemed to have most of the symptoms, including failure to bond with his mother.

He was also in a home with what the experts consider contributing factors. Lorelei Turner suffered from severe depression and both she and Steven Turner were described as having poor parenting and communication skills, as well as financial problems and marital discord.

Psycho-social dwarfism children often come from families where one parent is away a lot, and such was the case with the Turner home with Steven being a military mechanic.

The key feature of the condition is deprivation of contact with other people, particularly nurturing from parents, and Ferguson pointed out that young John Ryan Turner had very little contact with the outside world.

He also referred to testimony from Dr. Meek who suggested when Steven Turner started ignoring his son in the fall of 1982, attempts for John Ryan to bond closer with his mother, the child became greater at risk in psycho-social dwarfism.

Ferguson claimed Steven Turner was the lifeline for his son, and when he failed to be, John Ryan began to die in the mind.

"The Turners deliberately cut that lifeline in the fall of '82. John Ryan Turner then began a free fall to death," he said.

Ferguson alleged there were many incidents where Steven and Lorelei Turner showed no emotion, love or respect for their boy.

He referred to various testimony and stories from neighbors and friends who remembered the shy, timid boy next door.

The court heard on one occasion Steven Turner was mowing the lawn and John Ryan was terrified. According to the testimony, when Steven told Lorelei to take the child in the house, she told Steven to cut the grass because she didn't want John Ryan to grow up to be a "f---king wimp."

The neighbor claimed Steven went on cutting the grass, including next to the child's playpen, where his little son cried in horror.

Ferguson said this incident illustrates "a deep, disturbing other side" of Steven Turner because the man described by some as a kind and caring father showed no emotion to his son whatsoever.

"John Ryan had no escape. He was just a little kid in a playpen," said Ferguson.

He cited other incidents of Lorelei "cursing and yelling" at the boy as well as name calling. Neighbors testified she called John Ryan "a wimp, a klutz, a prick."

Ferguson said it wasn't the name the child would understand; it was the tone and expression, the emotional degradation.

He noted the Turners lived in a small 800 square-foot duplex, and that Steven Turner always lived here, other than when he was away on exercise, so if something was wrong between Lorelei and his son, he not only had to know, but also had a responsibility to correct it.

Ferguson also argued that although Lorelei suffered from severe depression, she was offered help from various community support groups, doctors, mental health, public health, Red Cross and other social agencies.

Ferguson said Lorelei failed to accept help for herself and for her son, and Steven Turner didn't try to help the boy either.

An autopsy showed an emotionally troubled John Ryan had mutilated his own wrist by biting through the skin, and this was one of the many issues raised by the Crown.

"If a reasonable parent saw a child self-mutilated, wouldn't they take the child to a doctor?" he asked.

Several doctors, including Dr. Charles Gardner who spent 10 months in Zimbabwe in Africa, testified at the trial they never saw such an extreme case of starvation.

John Ryan weighed 20.5 pounds when he died. On his second birthday, he weighed three pounds more than that.

Criminologists on socks found in the boy's room showed both saliva and blood from the victim.

"If you believe this child was gagged based on the testimony, it takes away any reasonable chance that common sense prevailed," Ferguson said.

He pointed out that only two people who knew the exact medical treatment of John Ryan Turner were his parents.

Meanwhile, the defence argued that most of the Crown's case is based on circumstantial evidence and speculation because nobody saw John Ryan tied or gagged — and even if it did happen that didn't kill him. It was severe malnutrition and starvation.

Doctors testified that sometimes a child with psycho-social dwarfism will refuse to eat even if they're offered food, and the defence reminded the court of this.

"There is no doubt when John Ryan Turner died on May 28, 1984, it was a tragedy," Wynnot said, but he said there is no room for emotion or public opinion in the court room.

The young Moncton defence lawyer also noted it would have been "very difficult" for the Turners to get a fair trial on the Miramichi from any jury because of the graphic autopsy photos and that's why the decision was made to prefer trial by judge alone.

The photos show a skinny, frail John Ryan Turner with horrible sores on either sides of his mouth, a black eye, bruises, burns and scars.

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Wynnot painted Steven Turner as "a good guy" using testimony from the Crown's witnesses. He quoted Dr. Gardner as saying Steven was "genuinely distraught" the morning of John Ryan's death, that he was "weeping."

He objected to Ferguson's suggestion that the Turners showed grief the morning of their son's death out of fear rather than sympathy or remorse.

Wynnot said witnesses were "very fair" to his client, noting only two implied that Steven Turner acted improperly with his son.

One testified Steven swore at John Ryan and Wynnot agreed it was inappropriate, but not a crime. Another witness testified Steven grabbed his son then aged one and a half years and slapped him hard across the face.

"That's not criminal behavior," said Wynnot. "Parents can use reasonable force to discipline their children."

He quoted Clair LeBlanc as saying Steven "was a great dad to his son." He also said "Regardless of the outcome of this trial, Mrs. Turner is going to have pain. They're lost a son and possibly a daughter."

John Ryan's little sister, Amanda, was placed in a foster home immediately after the boy's death. His parents fought to keep her, but failed.

Wynnot agreed Steven made a couple of mistakes, but said: "They're all human. Let's give the guy a break."

He described Dr. Meek as "unscrupulous and fair in his evidence," noting the doctor admitted that although there's only one trial, there are two cases being heard concurrently and any conversations Lorelei had when Steven

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Wynnot also reiterated a couple of times "the issue is on the Crown to prove beyond a reasonable doubt (the Turners committed manslaughter), not the other way around."

"This whole case is by inference, circumstantial evidence and inference," he said.

He described evidence from Doug Orr at the RCMP crime lab as "worthless" because Orr said point on a chair in the child's room matched that on the closet, but agreed it also could have matched other sources.

Wynnot raised questions about the crime lab's analyses of the socks said to have been used to gag the boy. There was evidence the blood was in the middle.

"Shouldn't there have been two spots of blood with saliva in the middle?" he asked.

The Crown didn't confirm how long the socks were used, or who used them, he said. "Was it Mr. Turner — Mrs. Turner?"

Wynnot suggested the Crown has also failed to prove the Turners failed to provide the necessities of life to John Ryan.

"Psycho-social dwarfism is something new to all of us including the Turners," he said. "Lorelei never intentionally rejected her son. She had post partum depression" and Steven didn't know that was going on, he said.

"The Turners were as confused about what was going on as every one else," he said.

Ridion interjected and asked if the psycho-social dwarfism they look after another child.

Wynnot replied that research of psycho-social dwarfism in this isn't uncommon. There can be six children in a family and only one affected, he said.

"The question is, can you stand on the same river twice?" This is a complicated syndrome, he added.

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unique. It's interesting."

Wynnot reiterated starvation caused the boy's death and "the Crown does not prove that our clients intentionally withheld food from their son."

Wynnot and Doucet both insisted that what happened in John Ryan Turner's life between January and April 28, 1982, is all speculation because nobody saw him.

In his defence, Wynnot also said John Ryan's wasting away was a gradual process and that even Dr. Meek testified the child may have improved during periods of his illness — which he suggests explains why he was out with his mother a week before his death to a local draughtsman.

He noted several people simply described John Ryan as a thin child and there was no evidence presented which proved Steven Turner saw his son unclothed. He said there was also only one incident in 1982 where there was evidence Steven knew the boy was harassed.

Meanwhile, Doucet agreed psycho-social dwarfism is rare and said: "This is the most bizarre case I've ever been associated with."

He took no exception to the diagnosis of John Ryan Turner by doctors Meek and Anderson, and reiterated the boy only had superficial wounds, none of them were life threatening.

Doucet was annoyed with what he said was the Crown's attempt to have everyone think the child was tied in a closet or bed from January to April 1983. "There is no evidence to support that inference," he said.

The Crown has, in fact, never mentioned the boy being put in the closet, but there has been inference of it. Apparently, that is why the paint on the chair was matched with that on the closet, and the chair was moved to see if marks on the door matched up.

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mother with "simple, unopisthicated thinking." He said he thought she was "unable rather than unwilling" to bond with her son, and "this was part of her ongoing mental illness."

Again Ridion asked why she was able to look after a second child. Doucet gave the same answer as Wynnot, noting it's not uncommon for a mother to fail to bond with one child, but not an other.

The Sackville defence lawyer also suggested witnesses who were concerned about the child could have taken action, but didn't.

Ridion interjected: "They didn't see the overall picture probably the way the parents should have."

Doucet, however, went on to say a lack of communication between health care agencies on the Miramichi needs to be improved. He noted one doctor hadn't heard from Lorelei in months, but assumed everything was "better."

In the end, Doucet summed up by saying: "There was no premeditation" about John Ryan Turner's death.

He asked when the parents "ought to have known" he needed medical care, and Ridion unexpectedly replied: "Anyone who had seen his body ought to have known."

Ridion argued the Turners showed "no wanton or reckless disregard" for the child's life and said they should be acquitted.

Twins die in car
COLLEGE PARK, GA. (AP) — Three-year-old twin girls were found dead Thursday in a car parked in a swimming pool area near their suburban Atlanta apartment.

The girls, whose mother had reported them missing, may have died from hyperthermia, or overheating, authorities said.

It was not immediately clear why the children were in the car.

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