

..D0624 OTX--R N AM-TX--DELUNAEXECUTION BJT 12-06 0420 AM-TX--DELUNA
EXECUTION, BJT,530

EDS: WILL BE TOPPED. EXECUTION SCHEDULED FOR AFTER MIDNIGHT CST.

TEXAS INMATE AWAITS EXECUTION FOR 1983 CORPUS CHRISTI SLAYING

LASERPHOTO

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HUNTSVILLE, TEXAS (AP) - A CONVICTED CAR THIEF WITH A LONG HISTORY OF JUVENILE OFFENSES FACED EXECUTION EARLY THURSDAY FOR THE ROBBERY-SLAYING OF A CORPUS CHRISTI WOMAN WHOSE PLEAS FOR MERCY WERE RECORDED BY A POLICE EMERGENCY DISPATCHER.

TEXAS PRISON OFFICIALS WERE PREPARING A LETHAL INJECTION FOR CARLOS DELUNA, 27, SENTENCED TO DIE BEFORE DAWN FOR THE 1983 ROBBERY-SLAYING OF WANDA JEAN LOPEZ, 24, A SERVICE STATION CLERK.

A REQUEST TO HALT THE EXECUTION WAS PENDING BEFORE THE U.S. SUPREME COURT. ON TUESDAY, THE 5TH U.S. CIRCUIT COURT OF APPEALS REFUSED TO BLOCK IT.

MS. LOPEZ, ALERTED BY CUSTOMERS THAT A MAN WITH A KNIFE WAS SEEN OUTSIDE THE STATION, WAS ON THE PHONE WITH POLICE WHEN DELUNA CAME IN FOR A PACK OF CIGARETTES FEB. 4, 1983.

"ON THE TAPE, SHE'S TALKING TO THE COPS... AND THEN YOU HEARD THAT SCREAM," STEVE SCHWETZ, THE ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY WHO PROSECUTED DELUNA, SAID. "HE WAS JUST REAL BELLIGERENT, THIS WAS TOTALLY UNCALLED FOR. THERE WAS JUST NO REASON TO KILL THIS GIRL. HE DIDN'T KNOW HER.

"THE LAST THING SHE WAS SAYING WAS, 'I'LL GIVE THE MONEY.' BUT HE JUST WANTED TO STICK HER WITH THE KNIFE. IT'S REALLY A BAD DEAL."

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DELUNA, ON PAROLE FOR ABOUT SIX WEEKS AFTER SERVING PART OF A THREE-YEAR SENTENCE FOR ATTEMPTED RAPE AND CAR THEFT, WAS ARRESTED WHILE HIDING UNDER A TRUCK NEAR THE SLAYING AREA. EYEWITNESSES IDENTIFIED HIM AT TRIAL.

HE HAS INSISTED ANOTHER PERSON COMMITTED THE CRIME BUT HAS REFUSED TO ELABORATE.

"I'M NOT GOING TO TALK ABOUT IT," HE SAID. "I TOOK THE STAND. THE JURY DIDN'T BELIEVE ME."

"HE'S LYING," MARY VARGAS, MS. LOPEZ'S MOTHER, SAID. "HE WON'T ADMIT IT. I HOPE THIS IS THE DAY HE GETS IT. HE'LL LIE LIKE HE'S BEEN LYING AND NOW HE'LL HAVE TO PAY FOR WHAT HE DID TO MY DAUGHTER."

DELUNA, ONE OF NINE CHILDREN IN HIS FAMILY, DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL IN THE 10TH GRADE AND BLAMED ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE FOR HIS PROBLEMS AS WELL AS GETTING MIXED UP WITH "THE WRONG CROWD."

"I'M THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE FAMILY," HE SAID.

SCHIWETZ SAID DELUNA'S JUVENILE RECORD INCLUDED NUMEROUS THEFTS.

"THIS GUY STOLE EVERY CAR IN CORPUS CHRISTI BEFORE HE WAS 16," THE FORMER PROSECUTOR SAID.

DELUNA, IN HIS LAST INTERVIEW A WEEK AGO, SAID HE WAS AFRAID OF DYING AND COULDN'T ENVISION IT.

"I DON'T THINK ANYBODY CAN PREPARE YOURSELF FOR DYING," HE SAID. "I CAN'T IMAGINE MYSELF LYING DOWN ON THAT GURNEY. I TRY TO BUT I CAN'T. I'M SCARED TO FACE THIS - I'LL BE HONEST. I DON'T WANT TO DIE, BUT IF THAT'S WHAT IT GETS DOWN TO, I DON'T HAVE MUCH OF A CHOICE."

THREE CONVICTS WERE EXECUTED EARLIER THIS YEAR IN TEXAS, BRINGING TO 32 THE NUMBER OF EXECUTIONS IN THE STATE SINCE THE SUPREME COURT ALLOWED CAPITAL PUNISHMENT TO RESUME IN 1976. THE TOTAL IS THE HIGHEST OF ANY STATE.

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