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BROOKLYN MAN SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON
FOR STRANGULATION DEATH OF HOWARD BEACH JOGGER

Defendant Convicted of Sex Abuse And Murder

Chief Assistant District Attorney John M. Ryan, on behalf of Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown, today announced that 22-year-old Chanel Lewis has been sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for the August 2016 killing of Karina Vetrano, who was pulled from a park running path, sexually abused and strangled to death near her home in Howard Beach, Queens.

Chief ADA Ryan said, "For more than two years, the family of Karina Vetrano has been wrought with grief and heartache. They endured her violent death, a trial and then a second trial seeking justice for the 30-year-old victim. This young woman's life was tragically cut short. The defendant in this case has shown not an ounce of remorse for this heinous killing. The Court has ordered the 22-year-old defendant to prison for the rest of his days. It is my hope that this sentence gives the family some comfort knowing their loved one's killer will never see freedom again."

Earlier this month, Lewis was convicted following a nearly three-week-long trial. A jury found the Brooklyn man guilty of first-degree murder, second-degree intentional murder, second-degree felony murder and first-degree sexual abuse. Today, Queens Supreme Court Justice Michael Aloise, who presided at trial, sentenced Lewis to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

According to trial testimony, Ms. Vetrano was alone as she jogged along a path in Spring Creek Park in the Howard Beach neighborhood of Queens shortly before 6 p.m. on August 2, 2016. The defendant was also in Spring Creek Park. Angry that a neighbor was playing loud music, Lewis was on the pathway where the nearly five-foot-tall victim was running. As the victim jogged past, Lewis punched and grabbed her. Without uttering a single word, Lewis punched the victim in the face, breaking her teeth. He pulled at her clothes exposing both her breast and genitals.

Continuing, according to trial testimony, the six-foot-tall defendant straddled Ms. Vetrano and pressed his knees into her torso and grasped her neck with his hands and squeezed until she could breath no more. At some point, Lewis dragged her in the weeds and left her body there.

Chief ADA Ryan stated that evidence presented at trial included DNA analysis which showed the defendant's DNA was present on Ms. Vetrano's neck, her cell phone - which was recovered about 80 feet from the woman's body - and there was a mixture of Lewis' DNA on the victim's fingernails. The defendant's cell phone records also showed that Lewis' mobile device pinged from phone towers in the vicinity of the park around the same time that the victim was killed.

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Furthermore, according to trial testimony, the defendant confessed twice - once to police and a second time to prosecutors. In those recorded interviews, Lewis stated that he was angry at his neighbor and when he saw Ms. Vetrano he grabbed her and struck her. "I lost it," he said. In both recorded confessions, the defendant said he punched the young woman to the point that he broke her teeth and he sustained an open gash on his right hand near his knuckle from hitting the victim repeatedly in the face. Medical records from a doctor's visit the next day including an x-ray of the hand injury, and a photograph of the hand injury taken from the defendant's phone were also presented as evidence during the trial.

According to trial testimony, the defendant denied sexually assaulting Ms. Vetrano. However, the medical examiner's autopsy showed bruising and tearing of the victim's vaginal area as well as bruising to her anus. Further evidence presented during the trial, showed that before Lewis was considered a suspect and after the defendant was interviewed by police, he had done internet searches on his cell phone about the victim, the crime and legal information regarding Miranda rights, the Fifth Amendment, double jeopardy and death sentences.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives Barry Brown, of the Queens South Homicide Detective Squad, and Christian Quezada, who was then assigned to the New York City Police Department's 106th Detective Squad. Also assisting in the investigation, detectives with the Queens South Homicide Squad, the 106th Precinct Detective Squad, the Crime Scene Unit, the Forensic Investigation Division, detectives from the Detective Bureau Queens South and the Technical Assistance Response Unit.

Also assisting in the investigation was the District Attorney's Homicide Investigations Bureau – namely, Assistant District Attorney Michael J. Curtis, Senior Assistant District Attorney Robert S. Ciesla and Deputy Bureau Chief Peter J. McCormack III – under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Peter T. Reese, Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Daniel A. Saunders and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Brad A. Leventhal.

The Queens District Attorney's Office would like to express its appreciation to the Office of the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York and the Federal Bureau of Investigation for their assistance in the investigation.

Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Brad A. Leventhal prosecuted the case with the assistance of Assistant District Attorney Michael J. Curtis, of District Attorney Brown's Homicide Investigations Bureau, under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Daniel A. Saunders.

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Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted at www.queensda.org.