

Breaking News

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Hickman gets life without parole in teen's murder

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JONESBORO — Caffian Hyatt sobbed angrily Friday morning as she confronted the man who killed her daughter and left her body undetected in the woods under a mattress for seven months.

"What gives you the right to do that?" said Hyatt, her voice rising as she fought back tears from the witness stand. "You took her from her family. She was loved. I loved her, I wanted her, she wasn't just here. She was my gift from God. You never gave her a chance to survive, to learn to drive, to get a job, graduate high school or college. What makes you God?"

Marshae Hickman, 21, sat unmoved and showed no reaction as Hyatt berated him. Hickman was convicted earlier this month in the death of Candice Parchment, 15. He and Jermaine Christopher Robinson were also convicted of trying to rape Parchment in January 2010 before she was killed three months later.

Robinson was not charged in the murder but defense attorney Ashley Palmer made no secret of her belief he was involved. Palmer became emotional as she addressed Chief Judge Deborah Benefield to ask for leniency for Hickman, noting that she, too, is a mother.

"I would ask that you consider a life sentence with parole because there are still many unanswered questions," said Palmer. "Jermaine Robinson plays a large part in this, I think. I maintain that he had some involvement although he wasn't charged. There's still more that took place."

Prosecutors Mike Thurston and Bill Dixon presented evidence to show Hickman killed Parchment out of fear she would report him for trying to rape her. Thurston asked for life without parole.

In her impact statement, Hyatt told Benefield how she and Parchment came to live in Clayton County. They visited in December 2005 from their native Jamaica and Parchment was so taken with the area they moved here a year later, she said. Parchment was her

baby, born 11 years after her first daughter.

"I was having problems and the doctor told me if I was going to have another child, I needed to have it soon," said Hyatt. "So Candice was loved and wanted."

Parchment easily assimilated into American culture.

"She loved clothes, she spent all her money on clothes and earrings and her hair," she said. "She never passed a mirror without stopping to brush her hair and put in lip gloss. She told me, 'Mommy, not one of my hairs needs to be out of place.' She wanted to be a fashion designer."

Hyatt said once she broke Parchment of talking on the phone so much, she became an honor student making A's and had plans to attend a summer art school.

"Her father was getting ready to teach her how to drive and we got her into an art school that summer," said Hyatt. "Her father was trying to get her her first job. She never made it. She never came back home. Candice can't come back home."

She also noted that Sunday is the third anniversary of the last time she saw her daughter before she went missing. Her body was found seven months later. Hickman was charged a year later after Hyatt found her daughter's diary describing the rape attempt and naming Hickman and Robinson.

Hyatt showed off holiday cards Parchment made for her and a newspaper clipping from when she placed first in a school art show. She also showed a photo from the last Christmas they spent together, one of Parchment in her JROTC uniform and a poignant depiction of Parchment taken during a mother-daughter walk.

"She wanted to go for a walk so I grabbed my camera and we went," said Hyatt. "I took a picture of her standing in the middle of the street."

The photo shows the girl standing on the yellow centerline of an empty street, blue sky overhead.

"She told me, 'Mommy, this is my road to Heaven,'" she said.

Benefield made note of that photo when she sentenced Hickman to life without the possibility of parole.

"It's what will never happen that is so hard," she said. "She never got to graduate high school or college, never even learned to drive or get a job or go to art school. She will never get to meet 'the boy' and make her mother a grandmother. She got to take that road to Heaven because she didn't get to do any of those other things."

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