

Stutter haunted killer since boyhood, says expert

By LINDA DEUTSCH 8-30-84

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LOS ANGELES (AP) — Convicted killer David Carpenter's intellectual and emotional development was impaired by a severe speech impediment, a psychologist testified.

Michael Healy, called by the defense Wednesday in the penalty phase of Carpenter's murder trial, said the defendant had been haunted by his stuttering problem from the time he was a very small child.

He said that by the time Carpenter entered school "he had been identified as hyperactive, inattentive and a bed-wetter."

The witness said that from viewing pictures taken of young David at that time,

"He had an extreme frightened look on his face...If I were to walk by this youngster on the street, I would say there was something wrong with him," Healy testified.

Other witnesses have testified about Carpenter's speech impediment. But Healy, who said he himself stuttered for a good part of his life, told of the impact of such a speech problem on the life of a young child.

In almost all cases, he said, stuttering is symptomatic of anxiety and stress, and those problems were extreme in Carpenter's case.

"There was a pervasive atmosphere on the part of his parents that they were ashamed of him as a human being," said Healy.

He said they rejected any efforts to correct the young boy's stuttering and his mother, to this day, does not acknowledge that the problem was serious.

When he interviewed her, Healy said, the mother told him: "I believed that I could cure the stuttering by violin practice."

Healy, who interviewed Carpenter for some 20 hours, declared, "he is one of the most severe stutterers I have ever encountered."

As a result of the impediment, he said, Carpenter became isolated from social contact and lost confidence in himself.

On cross-examination, the prosecution attempted to show that Carpenter had friends, interacted with others in social situations and was not abnormal.

But the psychologist disagreed. By the time Carpenter was 17, he said, "He was a seriously disturbed human being."

Asked whether Carpenter was ever criminally insane, he responded, "Not by the legal definition of insanity."

The defense team, fighting to save the 54-year-old Carpenter from the gas chamber, has focused on his abuse by his parents during his youth, portraying him as a victim of an abnormal childhood which turned him into a killer.

Carpenter was convicted of murdering Heather Scaggs, 20, and Ellen Marie Hansen, also 20, in Santa Cruz County as well as raping Scaggs, attempting to rape Hansen, and attempting to murder Hansen's boyfriend, Stephen Haertle, then 20.