

Carpenter was 'damned' early

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The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Runty and taunted by classmates, beaten into submission by domineering parents, David Carpenter was "damned at a young age."

This, defense attorney Larry Biggam said, may help jurors understand what led a middle-aged Carpenter to kill two young women along a remote trail in Henry Cowell State Park in 1981.

Jurors must decide in the penalty phase whether Carpenter, 54, spends his life in prison or dies in the gas chamber for two of the so-called "Trailside Slayings."

Biggam told the jurors Wednesday that they will hear an "unabridged" version of Carpenter's life — "not as an excuse, but as an explanation."

Biggam, whose dramatic admission that Carpenter killed the women surprised prosecutors during the guilty-innocent portion of the trial, acknowledged that his client has committed some "very bad acts."

But he pleaded with jurors to keep "an open mind" and resist passing judgement until all the evidence is heard in what is expected to be a month-long phase to determine Carpenter's fate.

Biggam described Carpenter as a "damaged human being — damned at a young age," severely beaten by his parents as a child and ridiculed by classmates because he was small and "awkward."

"Neither parent ever gave him love, affection or praise," Biggam said.

Frances Carpenter was a "socially ambitious, domineering woman" who pressed her son into studying ballet, violin and piano at a young age, the attorney said.

"While other children were out playing, David would be practicing and practicing, all according to his mother's rigid and inflexible schedule," Biggam said. "Occasionally, she would stand over the boy

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