

Killer's history of child molest

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The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Convicted "Trailside Slayer" David Joseph Carpenter was abused by his mother and had been convicted of burglaries and molested small children by the time he was an adolescent, a prosecutor and a witness said.

Testifying at the penalty phase of Carpenter's trial Tuesday, social worker Joann Cook described an anguished childhood in which Carpenter was beaten by his mother, emotionally abused by his father and convinced by both parents that he was a failure.

Ms. Cook's testified before jurors who will decide if Carpenter, 54, should be punished by death in the gas chamber.

During a recent interview, she said, Carpenter's mother "acknowledged she hit him with a cane, that she once followed him up the stairs, hitting him all the way."

Asked about her son's good qualities Carpenter's mother said, "There's one thing I have to say for David — he takes his punishment," Ms. Cook testified.

Ms. Cook, drawing on Carpenter's criminal records going back to 1946, said he spoke of molesting children as young as 3 when he was 17.

Ms. Cook said Carpenter told her: "Sex with children seemed easier than finding a girlfriend his own age."

Santa Cruz County District Attorney Arthur Danner, cross-examining Ms. Cook, presented her with the records and sought to show that Carpenter's pattern of conduct continued into adulthood.

However, Superior Court Judge Dion Morrow refused to permit such questioning, saying that Ms. Cook had been called as an expert only on the issue of Carpenter's abused childhood.

Danner indicated in his questioning Tuesday that by the time Carpenter was an adolescent he had already been convicted of burglaries and engaged in other anti-social activity, including turning in false fire alarms.

On July 6, a jury convicted Carpenter of killing Heather Scaggs and Ellen Marie Hansen, both 20, in separate assaults on a

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hiking trial in Santa Cruz County during 1981. He also was convicted of raping Ms. Scaggs, attempting to rape Ms. Hansen and attempting to murder Ms. Hansen's boyfriend, Stephen Haertle, then 20.

A separate jury, which also sat through the trial, has been hearing testimony since Aug. 13 to decide whether Carpenter should be sentenced to death or life in prison without parole.

Carpenter also has been charged but not tried for five "Trailside Slayings" in Marin County.

While Danner tried to counter stories of

Carpenter's troubled childhood, two former acquaintances of Carpenter came forward as character witnesses, describing him as a pleasant, sensitive young man who often cracked jokes and tried to amuse others.

But Donald Van Iderstine of Novato, who knew Carpenter as a youth and was a coworker at a steamship line, said Carpenter was "a loner" who was teased because he stuttered.

"David wasn't mean," Van Iderstine said. "David was known for his one-liners. His timing was great. He probably would have made a great comedian."