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Killer gets life behind bars after key issues with evidence, witnesses

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A man convicted of fatally beating and strangling his neighbor will spend the rest of his life behind bars after prosecutors decided not to seek the death penalty a second time because of new details that emerged in the case after his sentence was overturned in 2012.

Christian Edward Olsen, 28, of Bryan, [was convicted and sentenced to death in 2009](#) for killing 68-year-old Etta Jean Westbrook, [who lived across the street from Olsen](#) on Oak Hollow Drive near Bryan High School. [His death sentence was overturned by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals in 2012](#) and a sentencing retrial was scheduled.

In the time after he was convicted and sentenced, details emerged in the case that the top prosecutor in Brazos County called a "perfect storm" that led to a life without parole sentence as the only result.

The Brazos County District Attorney's office said in a news release that several pieces of evidence, including DNA evidence, had been mishandled by the court reporter, and a key witness had committed suicide in jail.

Prosecutors, defense attorneys and District Judge Steve Smith declined to comment specifically how it was mishandled.

"I don't think it was anything that's intentional, I think it was inadvertent," District Attorney Jarvis Parsons said. "But talking with our experts at the lab, there's no way that they could guarantee that there was no tainting of the evidence because of that."

The key witness, Kelly Sifuentez, pleaded guilty in 2009 to coaxing Olsen into killing her mother, Geraldine Lloyd, in 2007. [Olsen broke into Westbrook's house](#) about six months later and killed her, court records show.

Sifuentez, who was in her 30s at the time, admitted to starting a sexual relationship with Olsen when he was 14 and introducing him to methamphetamine when he was 16.



Eagle file photo

Defense attorney Billy Carter embraces a sobbing Christian Olsen (left) after a jury handed down a death sentence in March 2009 in the slaying of Etta Jean Westbrook.

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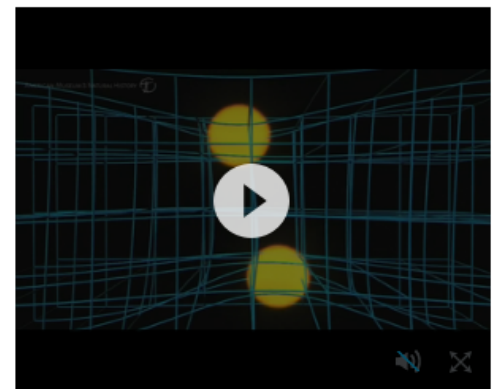
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Olsen was charged in Lloyd's death, but was never tried. During the punishment phase of his trial for Westbrook's death, prosecutors presented evidence Olsen killed Lloyd, who was found buried in her backyard.

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Sifuentez didn't testify in Olsen's first trial because she was [under indictment for solicitation of capital murder](#). [She committed suicide in prison in May 2015](#). Parsons said there was no way for them to cross-examine her on those details.

Olsen has spent the past several years at the Brazos County Jail. Jail administrator Wayne Dicky said he hasn't had a single disciplinary write-up.

One of the questions jurors have to answer before someone is given a death penalty is whether that person is a future danger to society. Considering Olsen's clean record in the jail, one of his attorneys, Steve Jackson, said prosecutors would have had a tough time proving he would be a future danger.

Parsons said life without parole was the best punishment given the new details.

"I feel that -- knowing what we know with the new details -- this is the only result that could have come up," Parsons said. "Do I think the jury got it right in 2007 with the evidence that they heard? Yeah, I do. With these new details, could we have that same sort of confidence that they would come to the same conclusion? No, I don't."

Another of Olsen's attorneys, Frank Blazek, said he was relieved by the ruling.

"When we think back about the event, all of us are full of sorrow," Blazek said. "This was a terrible tragedy and we only have prayers and hope the best for the family of Mrs. Westbrook -- that they can heal. And I hope that the finality of this sentence contributes to that healing."

[Westbrook's children were at the hearing Tuesday](#). The oldest, Debra Kette, told the court what kind of person her mother was. She said she loved to paint and never met a stranger.

Kette said as long as Olsen can never get out of prison, she's OK with the ruling.



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