

Scott Peterson resentenced to life in wife's 2002 death

Don Thompson
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – Nearly 17 years after being sentenced to die, Scott Peterson was resentenced to life without parole Wednesday during an emotional hearing in which family members of his slain pregnant wife, Laci, called him out for the Christmas Eve killing in 2002 and his apparent lack of remorse.

“Scott, 19 years ago today, you were in the midst of planning Laci’s murder,” said her mother, Sharon Rocha, addressing Peterson directly as he sat expressionless, handcuffed in a red and orange jail uniform.

“I still feel the grief every day, after 19 years,” she said. “Your evil, self-centered, unforgiveable selfish act ended two beautiful souls. And for what reason? There was no reason other than that you just didn’t want them anymore. You didn’t want a baby nor the responsibility of being a father. You’re a coward.”

“I have dreams about her,” she added about her daughter, who was 27 and eight months pregnant when she was killed carrying the boy the couple planned to name Connor. “And sometimes when I wake up, I cry because they’re so realistic and I know I’ll never see her again.”

She also envisions what Connor would be like now, at age 18, had he lived.

The California Supreme Court ruled a year ago that Peterson’s jury was improperly screened for bias against the death penalty. Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager, who came to fame as one of three prosecutors in Peterson’s trial, opted this time to settle for life without parole.

Peterson’s attorney, Pat Harris, said his client has shown no remorse because he’s not guilty. He said, as he has in the past, that the defense can now prove that burglars were nearby on the day Laci disappeared, though investigators say they were ruled out as suspects.

Peterson was uniformly described



Scott Peterson was condemned to death in March 2005 after his conviction for the death of his wife, Laci Peterson. ANDY ALFARO/THE MODESTO BEE VIA AP, POOL

as a loving husband and expectant father, Harris said, until it became public that he was having an affair at the time of his wife’s disappearance.

Then “he quickly became the most hated man in America,” Harris said, with a billboard outside the courthouse during his trial asking if he was a “man or monster.”

Peterson was prepared to speak, which he didn’t do during his initial trial and sentencing, Harris said, but Superior Court Judge Anne-Christine Massullo didn’t allow it.

But Harris and Stanislaus County Assistant District Attorney Dave Harris sparred over Peterson’s pre-sentencing probation report.

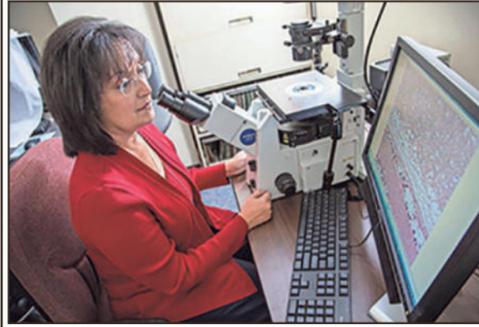
It was not made public, but the prosecutor said that in it Peterson “is claiming he’s wrongfully convicted, that he’s innocent, and that he has sorrow for the loss of his family.”

His defense attorney accused prosecutors of “insinuation” and taking incidents out of context. Where Peterson did lie, he said, it was to hide his extramarital affair because he knew it would derail any further investigation.

Prosecutors say Peterson took his wife’s body from their Modesto home on Christmas Eve 2002 and dumped her from his fishing boat into the San Francisco Bay, where they washed ashore in April 2003.



OU COLLEGE OF MEDICINE, DEAN MCGEE EYE INSTITUTE RESEARCHER EARNS \$1.8 MILLION GRANT TO STUDY STAPHYLOCOCCAL EYE INFECTIONS



Staphylococcus aureus, one of more than 30 types of staphylococcal bacteria, can be devastating to vision when it infects the eye. To better understand how the bacterium begins the infection process, a researcher at the OU College of Medicine and Dean McGee Eye Institute has earned a five-year, \$1.8 million grant from the National Eye Institute, a component of the National Institutes of Health.

During her career, Michelle Callegan, Ph.D., Director of Vision Research at Dean McGee Eye Institute, has investigated various pathogens that cause infections of the eye,

including *Klebsiella* and *Bacillus*. Her current focus on *Staphylococcus aureus* brings her full circle — when she was a graduate student, she developed the first-ever research model of staphylococcal keratitis, an infection of the cornea that can threaten vision if not treated promptly.

“Staphylococci live in and on us, and most of the time they don’t cause problems,” Callegan said. “But when *Staphylococcus aureus* is able to start an infection, it can cause serious complications anywhere in the body, including the eyes. In addition, *Staphylococcus aureus* is on the Centers for Disease Control’s list of serious threats because of antibiotic resistance.”

Researchers understand less about how *Staphylococcus aureus* begins an infection in the eye than they do subsequent parts of the infection process. Callegan decided to focus on that initial part of an infection, when *Staphylococcus aureus* is able to circumvent the eye’s immune defenses. *Staphylococcus aureus* is a very “sticky” bacterium because of its ability to adhere to tissue, she said. Once stuck to the surface, *Staphylococcus aureus* forms abscesses and secretes toxins that kill surrounding cells.

That is the case in *Staphylococcus aureus* keratitis, an infection that can result in corneal perforation and the need for a corneal transplant. Keratitis is common in contact lens wearers who do not take proper care of their lenses, Callegan said. The bacterium acts similarly in exogenous endophthalmitis, an infection inside the eye that can occur after surgery or an injury to the eye.

Staphylococcus aureus also displays unique behavior in endogenous endophthalmitis, in which an infection originates elsewhere in the body then travels to the eye via the bloodstream. Whereas some bacteria, like *Klebsiella*, can only cross the barrier between the bloodstream and retina if the vasculature is “leaky” (sometimes caused by conditions like diabetic retinopathy), *Staphylococcus aureus* can cross the barrier even when it has maintained its integrity. Callegan’s research team was the first to prove that aspect of *Staphylococcus aureus*’s behavior.

“*Staphylococcus aureus* isn’t stopped by the barrier — it will go across vasculature that is leaky or intact,” Callegan said. “We don’t know why *Staphylococcus aureus* ignores the ocular barrier. It will produce an abscess almost anywhere. The eye is just another place that, if the bacterium can find its way in, will create problems. And if such infections aren’t treated properly, people can lose their vision.”

With her new grant, Callegan aims to better understand why *Staphylococcus aureus* is able to circumvent the body’s ocular defenses and cause blinding infections. Although staphylococcal species share characteristics, *Staphylococcus aureus* is among the most dangerous for the eyes and the body.

“The more bacteria that we work with, the more we discover that they’re all very different. Different species have different ways of interacting with the immune response in the body. It’s worth investigating them individually, but if you can pinpoint aspects of these different organisms that are similar, you can target these factors and develop new treatments to fight them,” said Callegan, who is also a professor in the Departments of Ophthalmology and Microbiology and Immunology in the OU College of Medicine.

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