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Death row inmate Willie Crain seeks new trial

TAMPA -- Willie Crain, the crab fisherman on death row for the 1998 murder of 7-year-old Amanda Brown, is back in court this week seeking a new trial on the grounds that his attorneys were ineffective.

Chief among his complaints: Detectives didn't give him an attorney when he asked for one and questioned him even though he never signed a consent form.

"I asked (for an attorney) two times, and they told me I didn't need one," Crain said in court this morning. "And I asked them a third time, and they told me I wasn't getting one."

Amanda Brown disappeared on Sept. 9, 1998. The second-grader's body has never been found, but prosecutors alleged that Crain snatched Amanda from her bed, murdered her and disposed of her body in one of his crab traps in Old Tampa Bay. He had spent the night at her Seffner home just hours after meeting her mother.

Roy Brown, the girl's father, sounded resigned outside the courtroom. The Florida Supreme Court has already upheld Crain's conviction and death sentence, but the appellate proceedings continue. Frustrated by the delays, Brown said he doesn't care about Crain's death sentence anymore.

"I want to know where Amanda is," he said. "Give him a life sentence, and tell me where my daughter is."

Crain's daughter said she visits her father once a month in prison. She prays every night that both families might find closure.

"For the past 10 years, he's claimed that he's innocent," Patricia Davis said. "You tend to want to believe him, but there's always that doubt."

The hearing could take all week. Crain's current defense team will argue that the trial attorneys failed to challenge the state's circumstantial case, failed to get certain evidence excluded, didn't call a medical witness who could challenge DNA evidence and didn't do enough to help their client at sentencing.

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