

Killer sentenced to death in murder of 16-year-old

By Michael Kruse, Times Staff Writer
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NEW PORT RICHEY — One night more than six years ago, Phillip Alan Partin picked up 16-year-old hitchhiker Joshan Ashbrook on U.S. 19 and bound her ankles and wrists, stabbed her and strangled her, beat her head until her brain bled and broke her skull from her spine.

On Monday afternoon, for all those things, Partin was sentenced to death.

Partin, 43, sat in the jury box in Courtroom 3B in a red jail jumpsuit with his wrists handcuffed together and fastened tight to a heavy chain around his waist.

Circuit Judge William Webb said in his ruling that this crime was "especially heinous" and "atrocious."

After the hearing, out in the hallway, Tara Lynn Ramsdell, Ashbrook's mother, called Partin "a sick person" and "a lowlife."

Partin picked up Ashbrook on July 31, 2002, in his maroon pickup. Ashbrook lived with her family in New Port Richey and was a habitual drug user and runaway.

Her body was found the next morning in some brush off Shady Hills Road. She had been stabbed twice in her right arm, five times in her left hand and six times in her face. Partin's DNA was found in a cut on her thumb.

He fled Florida. He was arrested more than a year later in North Carolina.

He was found guilty of first-degree murder in a trial this past March. The jury recommended death.

The state needs to know who it might execute. A trial tries to establish what happened. Testimony in the penalty phase of a homicide case tries to get at who the killer is and why.

Partin set fires when he was a child. He hit his mother. He sexually assaulted his sister. He stole cars. He was abused by his stepfather with cigarettes and pliers. He dropped out of school in the ninth grade.

He killed a man in Miami by strangling him with a phone cord and was convicted of second-degree murder in 1989. He served 5 1/2 years of a 17-year sentence.

In court for hearings in this case, over the last five years, he has been foul-mouthed and defiant. In depositions, court records and psychological evaluations, he has been described as hostile, impulsive, explosive, aggressive, moody, mistrusting, vicious, sadistic and mentally ill but not unintelligent.

Eight sheriff's deputies watched him in the courtroom Monday.

Partin sat still and said nothing as the judge read the ruling. He got up. He was fingerprinted. He stood by the door and stared at the ceiling and looked impatient.