

Man convicted in brutal 1983 Broward kidnap-murder executed

John Richard Marek's last words were "Jesus, remember us sinners"



John Richard Marek, 47, during a court appearance before Broward Circuit Judge Peter Weinstein. (Lou Toman, File / May 7, 2009)

STARKE - After 25 years on Death Row, John Richard Marek was dead within 13 minutes of receiving a lethal dose of chemicals Wednesday evening for the murder of a widowed mother of two whose brutalized body was found in a lifeguard shack on Dania Beach.

As the poisons flowed into his arms, Marek, 47, a hulking, ashen man, did not flinch, twitch or spasm.

Strapped to a gurney and draped in a white sheet in the fluorescent-lit, white-walled death chamber at Florida State Prison, the convicted killer simply appeared to drift into unconsciousness, his eyelids growing heavy, his mouth agape.

"Jesus, remember us sinners," were his final words before reciting the Lord's Prayer.

It was the 68th execution in Florida since the death penalty was reinstated in 1979, but only the second execution out of Broward County in that time.

Marek, originally from Fort Worth, Texas, followed the botched electric-chair execution of Jesse Tafero, 43, a convicted cop killer, who had flames and smoke shoot from his head during his 1990 execution. It took three jolts of 2,000-volt electricity to kill him.

Twenty-six witnesses — including the victim's family and friends, prison officials and journalists — gathered to observe Marek's scheduled 6 p.m. execution.

Delayed by 20 long minutes to await word from the courts on Marek's final appeals, the observers, seated on metal-frame chairs and packed shoulder to shoulder, sat in solemn silence but for the heavy hum of a wall air-conditioning unit.

Meanwhile, about 20 death-penalty protesters gathered across the road from the prison. They sang songs. They rang a bell. They stood on the grass in a moment of silence.

At 6:20 p.m. the brown curtain rose from the large rectangular window separating the observation area from the death chamber, revealing Marek supine on the gurney, his arms at his sides, secured by padded brown wrist cuffs and intravenous tubes taped into place. His open-palmed hands were wrapped in white gauze.

A prison warden hung up the phone to the office of Gov. Charlie Crist, and gave the go-ahead.

Marek, who had testified that he was incapable of murder, lifted his head, smiled and mouthed a few words to an Episcopalian minister seated in the front row whom he'd met with earlier in the afternoon. He then uttered his final words.

Four minutes later, following the first injection, the warden tested Marek to verify that he had lost consciousness, brushing his hand across the condemned man's eyelashes.

Next came an injection to paralyze, followed by another to stop Marek's heart.

Marek — who was convicted of the first-degree murder of Adela Marie Simmons, a Barry University administrator, in 1983 — was pronounced dead at 6:33 p.m., 13 minutes after the first of the three injections entered his blood stream.

The nude, bruised, strangled and raped body of Simmons, 45, was found June 17, 1983. The night before she had left her best friend, Jean Trach, behind in her broken-down car on Florida's Turnpike in Martin County to take a ride with Marek and Raymond Wigley to get help.

Simmons' two daughters — Vivienne Yao, of Miami Shores, and Aileen Simmons Bantau, of Austin, Texas — did not attend the execution.

But Alan Bantau, a son-in-law Simmons never met, and Trach's son and daughter, Andrei and Tanya, watched Marek's last moments from center seats in the front row. Tanya Trach clasped

hands with a victim's advocate.

After the execution, Bantau, 48, read remarks prepared by his wife and her sister.

He spoke of the grueling 25-year wait for justice and closure, and the desire to have Simmons remembered as the vibrant woman she was in life, rather than a victim defined by the grisly circumstances of her death.

"Nothing prepares you for losing someone you love in such a horrible manner," Bantau said.

A native of Yugoslavia, who fled to Venezuela at age 9 with her parents after World War II, Simmons was a petite lover of the beach, parties, golf, football, dance and movies. Easy to make friends, a lover of laughter, an ambitious traveler. A friend and a mother.

"I have no pity for the animal that was executed this evening," Andrei Trach, 48, said afterward. "He got off easy. He's with his maker and his maker's wrath. I pray God show no pity on his soul."

Filing legal appeals up until the last minute, Martin McClain, the Wilton Manors attorney who spent 21 years trying to spare Marek's life, did not attend the execution.

For his final meal, Marek was given, at his request, a bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich with mayonnaise on wheat bread, onion rings, French fries, blueberries and strawberries with whipped cream, and a Dr Pepper.

His body was removed from the prison Wednesday in a white hearse. After an autopsy, it will be given to a friend for burial.

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