

Virginia executes killer who sent taunting letter

By **Bill Mears**, CNN Supreme Court Producer
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Paul Warner Powell was sentenced to death after a second trial in the murder and attempted rape of Stacie Reed, 16.

Washington (CNN) -- A killer who sent a prosecutor a taunting letter about killing a 16-year-old girl died in Virginia's electric chair Thursday night, the Richmond Times Dispatch reported.

Paul Warner Powell was pronounced dead at 9:09 p.m. ET, the newspaper reported.

Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell had denied clemency and the U.S. Supreme Court in January refused to block the execution.

Powell was convicted in the 1999 murder of Stacie Reed and the rape of her 14-year-old sister in their Manassas, Virginia, family home.

Powell claimed double jeopardy after state prosecutors put him on trial for a second time in the killing. The high court in July delayed Powell's [execution](#) while considering the broader constitutional claims, which were finally rejected. The killer rejected lethal injection, the state's usual method of execution.

"I'm hopeful this is the last legal chapter in the long history of this case," said Powell's prosecutor, Prince William County Commonwealth's Attorney Paul Ebert. "The survivors -- Stacie's mother and [her sister] -- have really been traumatized by delay after delay. Hopefully they're going to get some peace and closure after all these years."

CNN does not identify sexual assault victims without their permission, even though the surviving victim, now 25, has talked publicly about the case.

The crime shocked the Washington area. Stacie Reed knew Powell, then 20 and an admitted racist. The state's highest court eventually threw out the 2000 verdict in the first trial, saying prosecutors had not proven other necessary death-eligible offenses were committed against the

16-year-old. Such "aggravating" factors could include, rape, attempted rape or robbery in commission of the murder.

The sexual assault and attempted murder of Stacie's younger sister was upheld, and Powell was given a long prison sentence.

Powell, believing he was free from execution, proceeded to write a taunting, profanity-filled letter from behind bars to Ebert, laying out explicit details of the [crime](#) unknown to investigators at the time.

"Since I have already been indicted on first degree murder and the Va. Supreme Court said that I can't be charged with capital murder again, I figured I would tell you the rest of what happened on Jan. 29, 1999, to show you how stupid all of y'all ... are," wrote Powell, who is white.

He said he had gone to the Reed house to confront Stacie for dating a black boyfriend. He admitted pinning the victim, threatening to rape her, then stabbing her in the heart when the girl resisted. He then stomped on her throat.

"I guess I forgot to mention these events when I was being questioned. Ha Ha!" he wrote in 2001. "Do you just hate yourself for being so stupid ... and saving me?"

The killer also said that after that crime, he waited in the house until the younger girl returned from school, then attacked her, leaving her for dead. In the meantime, he drank iced tea from the family refrigerator and smoked a cigarette, part of the forensic evidence that investigators used to place Powell at the scene of the crime.

With this firsthand account from Powell, he was indicted again and charged with [murder](#) and attempted rape of Stacie -- a capital-eligible crime. He again was convicted, and federal and state courts subsequently upheld the conviction on appeal.

The [Supreme Court](#) appeal is [Powell v. Kelly \(09-21\)](#).