

# In murder case without a body, man gets life sentence

By MARTHA DELLER  
[mdeller@star-telegram.com](mailto:mdeller@star-telegram.com)

FORT WORTH — Cautioned to curb their emotions, more than 20 friends and relatives of Glenda Gail Furch sat silently Thursday as a Tarrant County jury returned to the 371st District courtroom to pronounce punishment for the man convicted of killing Furch, whose body has never been found.

As the jury foreman read the panel's life prison term for Rodney Owens, however, one woman quietly uttered, "Yes!," affirming the jury's maximum sentence for Furch's slaying on Sept. 28, 2007. Owens, 41, will be eligible for parole in 30 years.

After Judge Mollee Westfall formally sentenced Owens, one of Furch's daughters addressed Owens on behalf of her family.

"Mr. Owens — who is this person who turned our lives upside down?" Shimon Furch asked. "Talk about you being rehabilitated starts with you being honest with yourself and this family. You'll be haunted until you do this. You'll never have peace. You'll see her face when you close your eyes and when you wake up.

"Justice for Gail came today. You'll never be able to harm anyone else again."

Owens looked back at Shimon Furch but showed no visible emotion as she addressed him from behind a rail separating spectators from lawyers and defendants.

After being taken to a holding cell, Owens was returned to the courtroom to sign papers stating that he could not afford an attorney or court transcripts for his appeal. He seemed nonchalant, smiling as he asked a court clerk how long his appeal would take.

Owens had no family members at the trial. Defense attorney Mark Rosteet, who called no witnesses at either phase of the trial, declined to comment after the verdict because Owens still has six pending

felony charges brought out by witnesses during the punishment hearing Thursday.

### **A tough case**

Prosecutors Bob Gill and Rainey Webb were quietly pleased with the outcome of a tough case. They introduced DNA, fingerprints and other evidence to persuade jurors that Owens murdered Furch even though she has not been seen — dead or alive — since she left her job at the Arlington General Motors plant just after midnight on Sept. 28, 2007.

"It's certainly an unusual case," Gill said. "It's a situation we don't come across very often. But I think we were convinced that she was dead."

Webb and Gill called 30 witnesses, including a DNA analyst who testified that Owens' saliva was found on two soft drink cans and his semen on a bath towel found in a trash bin outside Furch's Woodhaven apartment complex.

A fingerprint expert testified that Owens' fingerprint was found on one soft drink and on a roll of duct tape that authorities believe was used to restrain Furch. The items with Owens' DNA and fingerprints were found inside the same trash bags as clothing and other items linked to Furch by her daughters' DNA.

Webb said Furch's work history, devotion to her family and consistent lifestyle made it easier to convince jurors that the 51-year-old woman was dead. She had worked at GM for 28 years, lived in the same apartment complex 20 years, talked to her daughter daily and saw her daughter and grandson every Sunday.

"If there was ever a case to be tried without a body, this was it because there was no doubt in anyone's mind that if she was still alive they would have heard from her. That's not always the case with missing persons," she said.

### **History of violence**

It took the jury of eight women and four men about three hours and 15 minutes Wednesday and Thursday to convict Owens of murder.

After hearing seven witnesses testify about Owens' violent and

criminal behavior before and after the slaying, the jury took about 1 1/2 hours to assess the maximum prison term.

Punishment witnesses included Owens' girlfriend, Nekisha Baldwin, who described 12 years of violence and threats by Owens against her, her 84-year-old grandmother and other relatives. She said Owens threatened to kill her with a shotgun and tried to force her car into oncoming traffic by ramming it so hard his car's tire print was left on her car.

A co-worker of Baldwin's, Reggie Lucien, described a similar incident in which Owens rammed his car from behind, sending it spinning over six lanes of traffic on Pioneer Parkway in Arlington and into a Kroger parking lot.

Prosecutors told jurors that Owens' escalating violence demanded a life prison sentence.

Rosteet asked jurors to consider a fair and appropriate sentence.

"I'm pleading for rehabilitation and reason so that he can overcome a wasted past and a wasted future," he said. "Incarceration for life leaves no hope for the future."

Gill said the life sentence didn't surprise him once jurors overcame the lack of a body — the central issue in the case.

"Once you convict someone of a case like this, 99 out of 100 juries will give the life sentence," he said.

=0 D

Furch's daughter said the family still hopes to find her mother's body.

"Of course we'd like to find her and put her to rest," Shimon Furch said. "We know that something horrible happened to her. We know she's in a better place. We'd like to see her in an even better place. If that happens someday, it happens."