

## **Rodriguez sentence brings resolution to Rogers family**

By Logan Carver | Avalanche-Journal

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CANYON - When a Randall County jury on Tuesday sentenced Rosendo Rodriguez III to death for killing Summer Baldwin, Joanna Rogers' family finally saw the justice they've been waiting nearly four years to see.

"It's not exactly closure, but it's resolution," said Joe Bill Rogers, Joanna's father.

Joanna, 16, went missing from her Lubbock County home in 2004.

Her case had hit a dead end until officials began investigating Baldwin's death. They found a connection between Rodriguez and Joanna.

Rodriguez confessed to killing Baldwin and Joanna, but the jury was not permitted to hear any of the details in Joanna's case.

The confession was inadmissible and with only circumstantial evidence, the Lubbock County Criminal District Attorney's Office does not plan to pursue charges in Joanna's case.

The jury knew only that Joe Bill last saw Joanna alive on the night records show she met with Rodriguez.

"You gotta understand how close we were to never getting this solved," said Matt Powell, Lubbock County criminal district attorney.

If not for finding Baldwin and tracking the suitcase she was stuffed in to Rodriguez, Joanna might still be missing.

Investigators used information Rodriguez gave them to find Joanna's body in the same landfill where Baldwin was found.

Powell said eventually finding Joanna's remains was worth bargaining with Rodriguez.

"That made me sick at my stomach to have to make a deal with that guy," Powell said. "When he backed out, we got the best of both worlds."

Rodriguez was scheduled to confess to killing Rogers and Baldwin in return for life in prison, but he withdrew from the plea at the last minute.

Powell then decided to pursue the death penalty.

Rodriguez's conviction afforded the Rogers family the opportunity to address him in court.

"He's not a man," Rogers told a packed courtroom. "Men don't do things like that; he's not an animal because animals do it to eat or to protect territory - he did it because he's plain evil."

Powell cried as Rogers thanked him and assistant criminal district attorney Tray Payne for the work they did.

Sometimes good things happen from bad things, Rogers said in reference to Baldwin's death allowing him to find his daughter's remains.

Baldwin's family and the Rogers family insist the Lord intervened.

Uvah Robak, Baldwin's mother, said maybe Baldwin gave her life so Joanna could be found.

Robak said God had brought the families together before.

One night Joe Bill was out searching for Joanna when he came across Baldwin, who needed a ride, and he drove two hours to take her to Robak in Roswell, N.M., Robak said.

United again, the families rejoiced together Tuesday when they saw justice for both their daughters.

"Thank god it's happened," said Kathy Rogers, Joanna's mother. "I'm so thankful for the jury doing what they did."