

Statements issued following sentencing of a child-murdering couple, photos of them shown

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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JERSEYVILLE – After an emotionally-charged sentencing hearing in a Jersey County courtroom Wednesday morning, Mike and Georgena Roberts, both 43 and both of Jerseyville, were sentenced to 25 and 20 years in prison, respectively, for the murder of 6-year-old Liam Roberts by starvation after punishing him and his older brother by withholding food.

After the sentencing by Judge Eric Pistorius, Jersey County State's Attorney Ben Goetten and Jerseyville Police Chief Brad Blackorby issued a statement regarding the sentencing, which was near the minimum term of 20-60 years. Pistorius said the couple's lack of criminal history as well as their guilty pleas, which prevented a trial that would have inevitably included testimony from the other children, opening the door for even more trauma, as factors in what many considered leniency.

“We are all glad to see the conclusion of this case,” the statement said. “It has been a tireless disheartening process for the family as well as those involved in the investigation and prosecution. The two are solely responsible for the death of this beautiful child and will now spend the better part of their adult lives in prison, where they belong.

“While we will never forget Liam, we hope the family and community can now begin to heal from the trauma of this horrific crime. We have to remember by the actions of these

two individuals, Liam's siblings lost not only a brother, but two parents that won't be there to see them grow. We wish those kids the very best as they try to move forward with their lives.”

The defense for Georgena Roberts used that impact of the immediate and extended families with a mother in prison as an argument for a lesser sentence. She was tested to see if she were mentally fit to stand trial before the sentencing hearing. She was not found to be able to plead insanity, but could have filed to be tried with a mental illness. She declined that.

Her attorney painted a picture of Georgena Roberts being traumatized by men and male dominance her entire life, adding the abuse led to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and panic disorders. She told investigators she could have left the home to make sure this did not happen, or at least she did not play a role in the death of Liam Roberts.

“We were a family in a major crisis and it spiraled out of control,” she said, full of tears, in a striped jumpsuit and shackled at the hearing. “The five other children are going to have to grow up without the only parents they have ever known. The two extended families are completely shattered.”

Mike Roberts's attorney used the price of imprisoning Mike Roberts as a reason for a shorter sentence. She said his annual cost to taxpayers in prison would be around \$38,000. She also said Mike Roberts worked upwards of 80 hours a week, served his country in the United States Navy and paid his taxes. Because of this, she said he could leave prison and continue being a “useful citizen.”

In his own statement, which was barely audible due to Georgena Roberts's loud wailing, Mike Roberts took responsibility for the horrifying crime he admitted to committing.

“Not a day goes by that I don't regret my failures as a man,” he said. “Liam was my special, little buddy and constantly by my side. I failed at the most basic level, and Liam and my kids paid the unimaginable price that I didn't remove Liam and my kids from a toxic situation. How did I let my child suffer? I put my own life above my kids.”



While Mike Roberts described Liam Roberts as his “special little buddy,” testimony from Major Scott Woelfel of the Jerseyville Police Department painted a horrifying picture of the family situation Mike and Georgena Roberts created for their children.

Liam and his older brother were punished for allegedly defecating and urinating on the floor by withholding food. They were relegated to the basement, which had a door full of childproof locks. These forced Liam and his older brother to have to knock to be let out of the basement.

Liam Roberts had not eaten a full meal in a year at the time of his death. He and his brother were pulled from school for allegedly having an obsession with food and eating food from the floor of the classroom. One night, Mike and Georgena Roberts enjoyed a steak dinner while Liam and his older brother were only given meager amounts of baloney. The other children were given a nutritious meal of chicken patties and vegetables. Both Mike and Georgena Roberts said they sneaked the boys food, but each said the other would get angry when it was discovered.

When Liam Roberts was dying, Mike Roberts came home from work and placed him in a bathtub of warm water instead of calling for help. When that did not revive the boy, he was taken to Jersey Community Hospital. Police were called after the child was pronounced dead. He weighed 17 pounds, was covered in sores with his ribs and hip bones showing, and had thinning hair and sallow cheeks, Woelfel testified. These were obvious signs of starvation.

[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)