

Testimony cites abuse in C.R. toddler's death

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All-crucial in Matthew Lewis' first-degree murder trial is time.

Will the sometimes-conflicting testimony of medical experts be able to prove that 2-year-old Rylee Gray's head injury happened in the window of at-most 30 minutes the morning of Dec. 23 when her mother went to the store for milk and left the child alone with Lewis?

A University of Iowa medical expert who believes he can do just such pinpointing testifies today.

What was made clear Wednesday, in the second day of trial testimony in Linn County District Court, is this:

Rylee - all 35 pounds and 35 inches of her - had been abused, her head injury likely caused by both violent shaking and by having her head struck, smashed into something or injured when she was thrown down.

That disturbing conclusion, by Dr. Keith Krewer, the pathologist who performed the autopsy For updates on this story, call CITYLINE at 363-7000 or 337-7000, category 2551. on Rylee, ended the testimony Wednesday of a line of five Cedar Rapids physicians.

All provided grim medical details about the child's injury and the futile efforts to keep her alive as her brain swelled, jammed itself against the skull and then lost its blood supply to stay alive.

The child died Christmas Day, on her third comatose day at St. Luke's Hospital and despite last-ditch medical surgery that removed 10 percent of her brain.

Lewis, an oft-unemployed 23-year-old from Cedar Rapids, has been jailed since Dec. 28 on a charge of first-degree murder in Rylee's death.

Iowa law does not require Prosecutor Todd Tripp to prove Lewis acted with premeditation, usually an element of first-degree murder.

In Iowa it also is first-degree murder if someone dies during the commission of a forcible felony. Tripp alleges Rylee died when Lewis committed the forcible felony of child endangerment.

According to testimony:

Lewis came into Rylee's life just in the month before she died.

He met Rylee's mother, Elise Gray, at a bar in November 1994, took her to his northeast Cedar Rapids apartment and then set up house there with her and Rylee two days later.

By the morning of Dec. 23, Rylee twice had had falls, once in a bathtub five days earlier and once from a crib a couple of days later, the couple later told physicians.

At 8:48 a.m. Dec. 23, the couple arrived at the emergency room, a comatose Rylee being carried by Lewis.

Almost immediately, a team of four physicians and specialists determined the child likely had been the victim of abuse.

Brain scans indicated that trauma to the right side of her head was serious and likely consistent with shaken-baby syndrome.

In the trial's first day of testimony, Lewis' defense attorneys attempted to point the blame at Rylee's mother, portraying her as a poor parent and a mother who did not grieve after her child's death. She cared for Rylee for all but a 30-minute-or-less period of time in the crucial hours before the child's injury, defense attorneys have argued.

On Wednesday, though, it was Lewis' demeanor after the child's injury that was called into question by Rylee's pediatrician.

Dr. Mark Reinertson, who spoke with Lewis and Gray in the emergency room on Dec. 23, testified that Lewis' behavior was "unusually matter-of-fact" and "orchestrated."

Lewis had much to say, while the child's mother was quiet, Reinertson said.

Dr. Loren Mouw, the child's neurosurgeon, also testified to his surprise when Lewis volunteered new information about Rylee in the early morning of her second day in the hospital.

Lewis, said Mouw, reported that he had forgotten to say that any injury to Rylee's neck might stem from a stuffed animal inadvertently wrapped around her neck when he found her unresponsive in her crib. No stuffed animal contributed to Rylee's injuries, the neurosurgeon said.

Caption: COLOR PHOTO
Matthew Lewis Accused of murder

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