

# Rape gets Bright over 100 years

By ADAM HATCH and CHUCK HUBBARD

It took a jury in Wilkes Superior Court only 35 minutes to return a verdict of guilty on every charge against Ricky Allen Bright. He was given a sentence by Judge Julius Rousseau of 127 to 158 years in prison without possibility of parole.

Bright was convicted of the Oct. 8, 1995 rape and sexual assault of a 9-year-old Hays girl.

In all, Bright was convicted of three counts of first-degree sexual offense, one count of first-degree rape, first-degree kidnapping and first-degree burglary.

Bright sat attentive and emotionless as Rousseau read the verdict to the silent courtroom and passed sentences.

William Brooks, Bright's attorney, immediately filed an appeal to N.C. District Court of Appeals on the conviction.

District Attorney Randy Lyon said he was pleased with the verdict and sentence but was not surprised about the time it took the jury to make its decision.

He said the victim's testimony was the deciding factor in the case.

"She was the key," he said. "She is an observant, well-spoken child, and that came across to the jury as believable. She is believable because she was telling the truth."

Lyon said the victim's testimony and the forensic evidence in the case made the difference.

Part of that forensic evidence included detailed testimony from several SBI lab experts who said Bright's DNA (genetic material) matched semen located on the girl's clothing.

This expert testimony also showed that a pubic hair found inside the child during a medical examination after the rape matched samples of Bright's pubic hair.

Lyon said he had no reservations about putting the victim on the stand.

"I really didn't have any reservations about putting her on the stand because I talked to her and she was fine with it," said Lyon.

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LIFE TERM PLUS -- Ricky Allen Bright, 43, received a minimum of 127 years without parole after being convicted of first degree sexual offenses, kidnapping and burglary Thursday in Wilkes Superior

Court. He is being escorted by Wilkes County Deputy Sheriff Tammy Roundtree and Wilkes County Deputy Sheriff Sgt. Bob Carlton. (Staff photo)



## Ricky Bright is sentenced

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"Her memory was good, of the events, even after a year had passed. The only thing that concerned me was to make her relive it on the stand in front of a bunch of strangers. Taking the stand is really a pressure packed situation, even for an adult."

The victim's mother said the verdict was "a relief" to her family. "I'm relieved to know it's over and he got what he deserved," she said.

"We just want to be with her now (the victim) and help her to get through this. It has been real rough on her," she said.

One thing that the victim's mother said had helped her daughter was the support she got from Bright's previous victim.

In 1979, Bright was convicted of the abduction of a 7-year-old Gastonia girl who went with her parents to the bowling alley where Bright worked.

He served 15 years of the life sentence he received in that case before being paroled and settling in Wilkes County. But that has little impact because of the sentence without possibility of parole he received Thursday.

Authorities said today that the North Carolina Parole Commission is expected to revoke his parole also on that sentence.

The mother of the Wilkes victim said that her daughter spoke to Bright's previous victim, who is now 24, and that was a source of support for her daughter.

"She talked to the other girl from Gastonia before she went on trial and I think that helped her to understand what was going on and how to tell what happened to her," said the mother.

"He's a real sick man and I'm glad he got what he deserved," she said.

The victim from Gastonia took the stand and testified in detail late Wednesday afternoon after the jury was released for the day.

Lyon asked that Rousseau allow the testimony to be heard by the jury as a means of illustrating Bright's method of operation and prior demonstrated behavior as a pedophile.

But Rousseau upheld a motion by Brooks that the testimony not be allowed.

In his final argument to the jury Thursday morning, Brooks attacked the state's case against Bright, and said that the state hadn't proved beyond a reasonable doubt that his client had committed the crimes.

He called Bright's flight after the child was assaulted a case of bad judgment, but said the man fled because he was afraid of being unjustly accused.

He said the DNA evidence shouldn't be believed because a test conducted after the incriminating tests had no results.

He also pointed to the testimony of his lone witness, Vivian Smoot, a neighbor who said she saw the little girl walking down the road on the morning the child said the sexual assault had taken place.

On cross examination by Lyon, she admitted that the child's mother had previously filed a charge against her live-in boyfriend.

During his final arguments, characterized Bright as "a monster, a sexual predator."

On several occasions during this final address to the jury, Lyon raised his voice and walked toward Bright pointing his finger in anger.

"He is a pedophile," Lyon said. "He likes sex with little girls."

Lyon said the jury, through guilty verdicts, had an opportunity to provide justice for the abused child and to put Bright away.

### Investigator Comments

Det. Lt. Mike Farrington, supervisor over the juvenile investigations unit of the Wilkes Sheriff's Department, was a lead investigator in the Bright case and made the following comments after the verdict and sentence were given.

"Bright proclaimed to be a self-ordained minister and was involved as a speaker at several churches here in Wilkes. He liked to talk to youth groups. That's how he made friends with his neighbors - by using the Bible," said Farrington.

"To show how dangerous this man is, after kidnapping and brutally raping this child, some evening before leaving the state he attended church services one last time," he said.

"You know, the Lord was sitting in that jury box when the verdict was read. And then He got up and went over and sat down beside Superior Court Judge Rousseau and the judge began to sentence Ricky Bright and justice was served: 162 years, that's Bright's life. Hopefully, Bright realized he shouldn't have used the Bible to do the devil's work."

Farrington said he wanted to thank numerous people and agencies for their efforts to investigate, capture and prosecute Bright.

He said these include the "courageous" Hays child who was his victim; the prior victim of Bright in Gaston County; national and local media for assistance in getting Bright captured; the State Bureau of Investigation lab in Garner for its work on physical evidence and DNA evidence; the Federal Bureau of Investigation mobile crime lab in Memphis, Tenn., for processing the crime scene; and the FBI task force in Nashville, Tenn., for helping to capture Bright on a cold, snowy January night at a Nashville hotel.

Farrington said he especially wanted to thank FBI Agent Martin Reardon of Hickory for his work and dedication in capturing and prosecuting Bright and District Attorney Randy Lyon for his many hours of work in the case. He also thanked the jury.