

A Life Sentence for Craigslist Killer

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By Andrew LaVallee

A 20-year-old Minnesota man who killed a woman he lured to his home with a fake Craigslist ad was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole yesterday.

According to news reports, in October 2007, the victim, Katherine Olson, 24 years old, responded to a help-wanted ad for a babysitter. She arrived to find Michael Anderson, who shot her in the back as she tried to leave. She was found in the trunk of her own car.

The prosecutor said that Mr. Anderson called himself “the Craigslist murderer” in conversations with other inmates.

Mr. Anderson pleaded innocent but was convicted on all counts, including first-degree murder. His attorney, Alan Margoles, argued that the shooting was accidental. He said he plans to appeal because he wasn’t allowed to use Mr. Anderson’s Asperger’s syndrome, a form of autism, as evidence in the case.

The conviction follows the late March killing of George Weber, a New York journalist whose attacker told police that they met through a Craigslist personal ad.

In a blog entry after Mr. Weber’s death, CEO Jim Buckmaster said “We are horrified and deeply saddened that Craigslist may have been associated with a violent crime.”

He added: “We take many steps to prevent criminal misuse of Craigslist and, in particular, to protect the safety of users. These measures include encouraging users, when meeting someone for the first time, to insist on meeting in a public place, to tell a friend or family member where they’ll be, to take along a cellphone, and to consider taking a friend with them. While violent crime is exceedingly rare on Craigslist, with only a handful of cases known out of billions of face-to-face human interactions facilitated through the site, sadly, there is a risk whenever meeting a stranger for the first time.”

UPDATE, 5:20 p.m.: Mr. Buckmaster has blogged his response, saying “We again extend our heartfelt condolences to the Olson family, and are thankful that justice has been served in the courtroom, so that the focus for all those who cared for Katherine can now rightfully return to the celebration of her life, and the inspirational example that she (and her entire family) have set for us all.”

– Geoffrey A. Fowler contributed to this article.