



Pinellas Park man gets life in prison for killing 3-month-old daughter

By **Laura C. Morel**

LARGO — Linda Schroll remembers the way baby Olivia cooed when she had her bottle, how her dark hair, in those last few days, looked like it was fading to auburn. She weighed 8 pounds, a bit more than a bag of sugar.

"She had just started to look at her brother. When he came into the room, she lit up," Schroll told Pinellas Circuit Judge Michael Andrews on Tuesday morning. "She was just starting to recognize him."

The only thing she has left of her 3-month-old granddaughter, Schroll said, are memories.

Schroll spoke moments before Steven Dykes, Olivia's father, pleaded guilty to first-degree murder for killing his daughter last year as her mother slept in their Pinellas Park home.

Dykes, 46, was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

On the night of Feb. 18 last year, Olivia's mother, Melissa Schroll, went to bed early because she was starting a new job, the Pinellas Sheriff's Office said at the time.

While Schroll and Dykes slept, the baby woke up. Schroll nudged Dykes to check on the girl.

Dykes got out of bed, grabbed Olivia, and struck her head, prosecutors said, against the kitchen counter.

The next morning, Dykes approached Schroll, their daughter's limp body in his arms. Olivia died of blunt head trauma, said Assistant State Attorney Kate Alexander.

Days after the baby's death, Pinellas Sheriff's investigators placed a wiretap on Schroll, according to court records. The audio captured Dykes apologizing to her, explaining that he was on pills.

"I could have accidentally hit her head against the kitchen counter several times," Dykes told her. He was arrested Feb. 21.

Prosecutors were seeking the death penalty if Dykes went to trial, which was scheduled for next week.

"In Steven's mind, he wanted to preclude any possibility of the death penalty," said Assistant Public Defender Edward Abare. "So this is the only way that he could do that."

At the hearing Tuesday, Olivia's grandfather, Gary Schroll, said Dykes has taken "something that we will never be able to get back."

"We won't be able to ask her, do you like this movie, do you like to go McDonald's?" said Schroll, his voice breaking. "He just took something from us that we'll never be able to hold and cherish."

"God may forgive you," he told Dykes, "but I can't."

The family brought photos of the little girl to court. In one, she wore a shirt with cupcakes on it. In another, a small teddy bear rested in her arms.

"You stole my baby," said Olivia's mother, Melissa Schroll, in court. "She will live on forever in my heart, and you're dead to me."

"You died the day I found out you killed my baby."

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