

Judge sentences baby-killing mom

*'Poor little child was
flushed down toilet'*

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Five years ago, Kristine Sue Westin gave birth to a baby in a Las Vegas hotel room and then left the infant to drown in a toilet.

"This poor little child was flushed down a toilet," District Judge Joseph Bonaventure said during a sentencing hearing for Westin on Thursday morning.

"I don't know how anybody could do that."

But moments after Bonaventure sentenced Westin to five to 24 years in prison, Westin's mother said her daughter is intent on seeking salvation behind bars. She is already taking Bible study classes and consulting with other inmates about God as she grieves over her regrettable actions.

"God is already using her," Mignon Westin said, crying in a hallway of the Clark County



GARY THOMPSON/REVIEW-JOURNAL

Kristine Sue Westin appears for sentencing before District Judge Joseph Bonaventure on Thursday in the death of her infant, who was found in a toilet in Las Vegas in 1997.

Courthouse.

The sentence caps a prolonged criminal case dating to 1997, when the then 23-year-old Kristine Westin gave birth to an infant boy in a toilet at the Lady Luck. She and her

▶ SEE **BABY** PAGE 9B

▶ **BABY:** Killing occurred in 1997; mother caught in 2003

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

boyfriend, Kevin Dale Woo, were questioned in the death but could not be arrested because authorities weren't sure if the baby was born alive or dead.

While Las Vegas police awaited the autopsy results, Woo carjacked a vehicle in Henderson and he and his girlfriend fled Nevada. The autopsy eventually determined the baby was born alive and drowned, possibly when someone flushed the toilet.

Las Vegas police pursued Kristine Westin and Woo for much of the next six years. The case was featured on the national television show "Unsolved Mysteries" and documented on "America's Most Wanted" Web site.

During the pursuit, Kristine Westin was in and out of custody at least twice in California and Washington on shoplifting and theft charges. She used an alias, preventing authorities in those states from discovering her true identity until after her release from local jails there.

Despite the setbacks, Las Vegas homicide Detective Don Trammel said police remained confident they would eventually apprehend the pair.

"We never gave up on it," Trammel said, adding the crime was "the most disgusting thing I've ever seen."

Police finally caught up with Kristine Westin and Woo in March in a Seattle suburb. She was arrested on a shoplifting charge, prompting police and the FBI to track Woo to a nearby hotel room. Woo committed suicide during a stand-off with police several hours later.

Kristine Westin was extradited to Las Vegas and pleaded guilty to child abuse neglect and involuntary manslaughter in September. In court Thursday, she expressed an optimism for the future.

"I want to get my life in order ... and finish my college degree," the defendant told

Bonaventure in a barely audible voice.

Deputy Public Defender Drew Christensen said Kristine Westin feels great remorse over her actions. He said at the time of the killing, his client was dominated by Woo. The attorney said he could not risk taking the case to trial and face the possibility his client could end up with a potential life sentence on a charge of second-degree murder.

"The emotions of a case like this, having the death of an infant in a toilet, it may have ended with the harshest penalty possible," Christensen said.

Outside of court, the defendant's mother said her daughter was a good kid who met Woo — a violent drug dealer — while in college. She ended up leaving school one class short of her degree in environmental sciences and endured years of emotional and physical abuse afterward, Mignon Westin said.

"He had threatened to kill her and all her family if she left him," Mignon Westin said. "He would have done it."

Mignon Westin said she saw her daughter for the first time in eight years Wednesday at the Clark County Detention Center. She broke down in tears outside court Thursday, saying her daughter would never have been involved in the slaying of her baby without the involvement of Woo.

"I had heard the love for that baby in her voice," Mignon Westin said.

"He held her down on the toilet, told her not to look and flushed it," Mignon Westin said of Woo.

Trammel said he believes both Woo and Kristine Westin are equally responsible for the child's death.

"She was old enough to make her own decisions," the detective said.

Clark County prosecutor Doug Renton said the sentence is appropriate.

"We are talking about someone who caused the death of a child," he said. "She needs to go to prison."