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Evans expresses 'shame and regret' for toddler's death

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DOVER — A former Rochester man will spend from 28 years to life in prison for the November 2000 beating death of his girlfriend's daughter.



Chad E. Evans apologizes to Amanda Bortner. Foster's Daily Democrat staff photo - Steve Drozell

Chad E. Evans' voice shook as he addressed the court prior to learning his sentence. Dressed in an orange jumpsuit with shackles around his ankles, the dark-haired man fought tears as he spoke to a packed courtroom.

Since the fall of 2000, Evans said, "there's not been a minute when I've felt anything but shame and regret."

He stopped short, however, of admitting guilt for the death of 21-month-old Cassidy Bortner.

After nearly three hours of testimony, Strafford County Superior Court Judge Tina L. Nadeau imposed a sentence of 28 years to life in prison on the second-degree murder charge and suspended sentences on

each of the assault charges. If Evans is released from prison, she said, he will spend the rest of his life on parole.

Senior Assistant Attorneys General Simon Brown and N. William Delker had recommended a sentence of 60 years to life in prison, and a presentence investigation compiled by Steve Carlisle of the Department of Corrections recommended 45 years to life.

Brown said the state recommended the high sentence "to address the totality of the defendant's abuse...He allowed Cassidy to suffer without medical attention...He did absolutely nothing to curb his volatile tendencies."

who was just 2 feet, 9 inches tall and weighed only 22 pounds at the time of her death.

Alan Cronheim and Mark Sisti, who defended Evans in the case, requested a sentence of less than the 45 years, citing other second-degree murder cases, Evans' success as a businessman and the unwavering support of his family and friends.

"Even though he's in an orange jumpsuit. Even though he's been convicted of second-degree murder, you have someone who can reintegrate into society," Sisti said.

Describing Cassidy's death as a "totally senseless and incomprehensible murder," Nadeau referred to the two sides of Chad Evans.

Evans, 30, lived with Cassidy and her mother, 20-year-old Amanda Bortner, at his home on 191 Milton Road in Rochester for about three months prior to the toddler's death. He was found guilty in December of second-degree murder and multiple assault charges for repeatedly beating Cassidy while she resided with him.

At the time of Cassidy's death, Evans was on probation for assaulting his former wife. A few years earlier, he was hailed as a hero for pulling three people from a burning vehicle following a car crash outside his home.

Until Tuesday, Nadeau noted, Evans showed "a disturbing lack of remorse" for causing Cassidy's death. "Mr. Evans, I hope someday you will find the courage to tell your family, friends and Amanda Bortner what you did to Cassidy," Nadeau said.

In sentencing Evans she explained she had to weigh the factors of the crime with the New Hampshire constitution's assertion that sentences should focus on reforming rather than exterminating.

The positive qualities the defense and Evans' family cited are not mitigating factors, she said, but represent "a sign, an opportunity and a hope for rehabilitation."

"I stand here recognizing the significance of today...it pains me more than anything I can express in words to know I let so many people down — and especially Cassidy," Evans said prior to hearing his sentence.

Then, Evans turned to face Bortner who was seated with his family and friends in the courtroom.

"Amanda, I am so sorry for the emptiness and hurt you are going to feel for the rest of your life. You and Cassidy deserved a lot more. I'm really sorry," he said.

Bortner-Conley and other relatives sat on the opposite side of the courtroom with law enforcement officials and representatives from the New Hampshire Attorney General's office.

Bortner held a paper in her hands throughout the hearing, and was the last person to speak before Judge Tina L. Nadeau retired to chambers to decide Evans' sentence.

Dressed in black capri pants, a fitted black and white striped shirt and open-toe sandals, she showed little emotion as Brown described the "senseless... systematic" abuse that led to Cassidy's death. Bortner shook her head as her mother and other family members spoke of their love for Cassidy.

"I find it really strange that everyone cares so much about Cassidy now, and no one did when she was alive. She was just another kid. My mother has six kids. I was just another kid...I never knew what love was until Cassidy was born. I pray to God she forgives my lack of motherly instincts," she said when her turn came to address the court.

After breaking into sobs, Bortner regained her composure and told the court she is a "true Christian" and asked the court for leniency for Evans.

"He is a wonderful, caring father and a good man...I wouldn't be here today without Chad," she said.

Bortner, who faces two counts of endangering the welfare of a child for allegedly failing to protect Cassidy from Evans' ongoing abuse, is scheduled to stand trial in June. She testified during Evans' murder trial after receiving immunity for her testimony from the state.

"Everyone has to look internally. None of us are innocent. We're all to blame," she said Tuesday.

Several of Evans' friends and family members also spoke at the hearing.

Describing Evans as a mentor and friend, Jeremy Hinton asked Nadeau to consider his positive qualities in deciding a sentence.

"Chad Evans, you've made this world a better place," he said.

Hinton said Evans taught him the importance of putting other people first.

"He calls me from a place I couldn't even dream of being and he still says the same thing...He deserves the chance to be a father to his sons," Hinton said referring to Evans' son and stepson. "Don't take away his life," Hinton said.

about Evans' constant commitment to his family, friends and community.

"I have hundreds of examples because Chad is such a caring person...he inspires all of us to dig deeper, to try harder. We need Chad with us so badly," he said. He cited one story from their youth when he came home to find Chad crying over the death of his pet bunny. To find Chad crying because "his rabbit passed on...I cried with him because I could feel his pain," Jason Evans testified.

Vanessa Mansson, who assisted Evans and Bortner when they lived together last year in violation of his bail conditions, said she did so because of all Evans had done for her in their 26-year friendship.

"To say I owe Chad my life is an understatement...We love Chad, and we need him in our lives," she said.

Earlier in the proceedings, Cassidy's relatives addressed Evans about how the toddler's death has changed their lives.

"There's one thing I have to say to you, and that's why? I pray someday you will be sorry for what you did...but she is safe now, out of your reach in God's arms. Chad, may God have mercy on your soul," Conley said.

"We have a big, close-knit, middle-class family...Children aren't supposed to be beaten by successful businessmen. Mother's are supposed to protect their children at all costs," said Cathy Jackson, Cassidy's great-aunt.

Kassidy's only mistake "was to look to her tormentors for nurture and protection," said the child's grandfather, Paul Conley.

Jennifer Bortner-Conley was the last member of Cassidy's family to address the court on the toddler's behalf. Bortner-Conley's boyfriend, F. Jefferey Marshall, held her throughout the hearing as she wept at her mother's recollections of Cassidy — and at descriptions of the child's suffering.

"Well, Chad, no matter what the outcome of today is, remember a couple of things. First, this is not about you, me, Jeffe, Mandy, my parents, your parents. It is about one person. Cassidy. Please, Chad, remember her name — Cassidy — not 'that baby.' Why? Because you will see her again some day," Bortner-Conley said.

She was referring to a taped interview with police, shown during Evans' trial, in which he repeatedly referred to Cassidy without using her name.

"She will look down on you and she will ask you, 'Why, Chad, did you do this to me?' We just hope that you look up at her, look in her beautiful eyes and tell her why and tell her you are

she will forgive you because she is a better and bigger person than you ever will be."

Evans was remanded to the custody of the Strafford County Sheriff's Department. It was unclear whether he when he would be transported to state prison. As he was led from the courtroom, his family and friends called out, "We love you, Chad. Keep your head up, buddy."