



STEPHEN B. RUSSELL
Office of the State Attorney
20th Judicial Circuit

Serving Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry and Lee

October 18, 2017

Guilty for the Murder of Pilar Rodriguez

Today Keith Wilson, 46, was found guilty of Second Degree Murder for the death of 4 year old Pilar Rodriguez in February 1999. The jury deliberated for approximately two hours following the 8 day trial. Wilson faces life in prison when he is sentenced.

It was initially a cold case but as new information, including new witnesses, came to light in 2009, the case was able to be solved. Pilar's body has never been found.

Wilson was the boyfriend of Melissa Cooper, now known as Melissa Harding-Jones, who had been babysitting Pilar. Harding-Jones testified that Wilson became increasingly violent to both her and Pilar. She also testified that Pilar was punched in her head with a closed fist. She then fell into a wall and grew increasingly ill following the abuse and then died several days later. Harding-Jones testified that Wilson put Pilar's body in a garbage bag and she never saw her again.

Another witness, a relative of Wilson's, came forward to law enforcement in 2009. He testified during the trial that he saw the foot of a small child sticking out from within the trunk of the defendant's car. Other witnesses testified that Wilson made comments about the State not being able to prove murder without a body and that alligators will eat anything.

Melissa Harding-Jones is a co-defendant in the case. She has a plea agreement for one count of Accessory after the Fact. She faces up to 30 years in prison when she

is sentenced. Part of her agreement was to testify truthfully as a witness in Wilson's trial.

Assistant State Attorney Dan Feinberg of our Homicide Unit and Assistant State Attorney Cynthia Rebholz-Rubin handled the case.

Sentencing is scheduled for December 4th at 3 p.m.

Samantha Syoen
Communications Director
State Attorney's Office
239-533-1125
ssyoen@sao.cjis20.org