Man sentenced to 30 years for causing death of unborn baby

Markham, IL — Sidney Alison Cook never got a chance to make her mark in the world.

Her father, Clinton Gillespie, was sentenced on June 4 to 30 years in prison for kicking his girlfriend in the abdomen during an argument when she was seven months' pregnant.

As a result of that blow, the child was delivered stillborn nearly two hours later. The girlfriend, Tracy Cook, 25, of Chicago, had planned to name the baby Sidney Alison Cook, according to court records.

Gillespie, 28, of 9121 S. Mackinaw Ave., Chicago, was charged with intentional homicide of an unborn child, which carries the same 20 to 60 year prison sentence as murder.

He was the first person in Cook County to be convicted of murdering an unborn child, officials said. In most cases when an unborn child is killed, the most serious charge involves the offense against the mother, such as attempted murder or murder, officials said.

"This child did not enjoy a moment of life as we know it," Judge Leo E. Holt said in Cook County Circuit Court in Markham.

"This child was at a stage, almost assuredly, absent some unforeseen event like what happened here, to have been born alive," he said. "The fact that this child never knew life as we know it doesn't mitigate this offense one bit."

Gillespie committed 17 prior incidents of physical abuse against Cook, but she refused to pursue charges in every case, according to trial testimony. The couple also has a 2-year-old son.

Gillespie was convicted by Holt based on statements Cook made to police and doctors at Trinity Hospital, where she was treated after she was kicked on May 24, 1990, and later to a Cook County grand jury.

In her statements at the hospital and before the grand jury, Cook said Gillespie kicked her in the lower part of her abdomen during an argument over money he wanted from her to buy a car.

Patricia Mangen contributed to this story.

CA court upholds "fetus" murder conviction

San Diego, CA — A state appeals court has concluded that the killing of a child at any stage of development is murder when the unborn dies as a result of a crime, such as armed robbery.

But some people are concerned that the unanimous opinion recently by the 4th District Court of Appeals in San Diego could be a move toward eroding a woman's "right" to have an abortion.

The court, in its published opinion, disagreed with 23 years of court precedent that deemed the killing of an unborn child to be murder only if the child could have survived independent of its mother.

The opinion focuses on a baby being killed by a third party. The appellate court's new interpretation of murder law came in the case of Robert A. Davis, a San Diego resident convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison without possibility of parole.

A jury convicted Davis of shooting Maria Trinidad Flores in the chest during the robbery of a check-cashing store in March 1991. Her 23-week-old baby was stillborn. The question of the baby's viability was central in the case.

The court acknowledged it had made a major change in the law by ruling that the viability of a baby need not even be addressed in future cases.

Judge refuses to consent to teen abortions

Grand Rapids, MI -- A 17-year-old who was 8 weeks pregnant came before Kalamazoo County Judge Donald Halstead seeking waiver of Michigan's parental consent law. Halstead refused to hold a hearing, as required by law, and dismissed her petition.

The case has renewed allegations that Halstead has let his personal beliefs about abortion interfere with his judicial duties almost since the start of his 13-year tenure on the bench.

In 1981, a decade before the parental consent law took effect, Halstead was confronted with the case of an 11-year-old who had been raped and impregnated by her mother's live-in companion. The girl's guardian didn't feel comfortable approving abortion and asked for a ruling from Halstead.

Halstead delayed. By the time a federal judge ordered him to rule, the girl was 24 weeks pregnant and Halstead said it was too late for a safe abortion. She gave birth at the age of 12.

"That child is now 12 years old himself," said one pro-life commentator. "I suggest the abortion promoters go and ask that child what he thinks of the judge's decision."

In the recent case, Halstead said he believed a provision in the law that allows girls 17 and under to seek permission from a judge, instead of a parent, for an abortion is "unconstitutional as a violation of the rights of the minor's parents."

Days after Halstead refused to hear testimony from the 17-year-old, Michigan's Court of Appeals removed him from the case. Another judge was appointed and granted the girl permission for an abortion.

The American Civil Liberties Union said it will ask Michigan's Supreme Court to bar Halstead from hearing more such cases and will also file a misconduct complaint with the Judicial Tenure Commission.

No action has been taken against him so far by the judicial conduct commission. After the 1981 case, 26 complaints against Halstead were filed with the commission. But the panel found insufficient evidence for a reprimand.

Halstead said he believed a provision in the law that allows girls to seek permission from a judge, instead of a parent, for an abortion is "unconstitutional"

Under the Michigan law, a judge must hold a hearing within 72 hours of the girl's petition and grant the waiver if the judge decides the girl is mature enough to make her own decision or that the abortion is in her best interests.

Halstead has refused to hold those hearings in so many cases that Planned Parenthood of South Central Michigan now advises many Kalamazoo County girls to go to court in other counties, executive director Louise Safron said. Three probate judges in the county handle cases on a rotating basis.

In 1991, Halstead contended parents have a right to be notified of hearings regarding their children, even in cases in which the child has been severely abused and neglected by a parent.

Halstead, who was re-elected last fall to a third six-year term, clearly has his supporters.

"Judge Halstead may be breaking one law, but he is fulfilling the basic law of the land -- the Constitution -- and parent's rights are the basis of that," said Dorothy Talanda, president of Kalamazoo Right to Life.

Activists launch One-by-One campaign

Snowflake, AZ — A company in Arizona that designed and marketed more than 7 million "Precious Feet" lapel pins has launched a new nation-wide campaign to stop the abortion holocaust — one person at a time. The company, Heritage House '76, has begun national advertising urging pro-lifers of all religious denominations to make a commitment to share the pro-life message, through a variety of four-color brochures, with five friends or acquaintances. The plan is for each person to distribute the literature to five people — either friends or strangers.

The name of the new campaign is One by One. According to Dianne Monahan, the national coordinator for the effort, pro-life activists long ago recognized that abortion cannot be stopped through government action alone. "Pro-lifers may have put too much faith in the Supreme Court or in a Republican president," Monahan said. "We have to get back to basics, to persuading people that abortion is the taking of a human life no matter what you call it. That can be done very effectively with personal, one-on-one contact."

Monahan added that many pro-lifers, startled by the ferocity with which the Clinton administration is persecuting the pro-life movement, have been moved to "do something." Bill Clinton, she explained, has made it clear that crushing the pro-life movement — through any means necessary — is a top priority of his administration even if it means losing the next election. But Monahan believes that radical pro-abortion advocates in the administration may win the legal wars but lose the ultimate battle.

"The Romans attempted to persecute the Christians out of existence," she said, "but all they succeeded in doing was to force the Church underground, where it grew and grew until one day there were more Christians than there were pagans. The same thing will happen with the pro-life movement."

The campaign was inspired by the experience of a young woman, Jacquelyn, who slipped Heritage House literature into letters to her friends. From that simple act, two of her self-avowed pro-abortion friends changed their minds and are now pro-life. Jacquelyn's experience convinced Monahan and others that ordinary people could spread the pro-life message effectively without going out of their way — or disrupting their daily routine.

Monahan believes that when people actually are exposed to the truth, whether through photographs or the Precious Feet pins, a majority change their stand on abortion.

Packets like this are being distributed by Heritage House for $2 to be used in the One-by-One campaign

GOP tries unity

Washington, D.C. -- After a sharp victory over President Clinton's so-called economic stimulus package, leading Republicans gathered to again tackle differences over abortion and other issues.

The Republican Majority Coalition, which hosted the session, was formed after the 1992 Republican defeat to "steer the party away from emotional social issues." The same liberal faction that lost its pro-abortion, pro-gay platform proposals and added so much rancor to the Republican Convention in Houston last year forms the core of the group.

Divisions in the party were as pronounced as ever, as former candidate, Patrick Buchanan stated bluntly: "For us, this is a slavery issue, a human rights issue. If you walk away from this issue, the right to life, you lose the presidential election, and I don't know what you gain."

Both the liberal and conservative wings of the party stood their ground on the issue of abortion. The session ended with the Republican Majority Coalition as the same splinter group as it was during the convention.

Griffin accuses abortionist

Pensacola, FL -- Reading a handwritten letter to the court, Michael Griffin, accused killer of abortionist David Gunn, charged both Gunn and President Clinton with being traitors.

During the May 10th hearing, Griffin cited the Declaration of Independence and added five current and two former U.S. Supreme Court justices, Florida Governor Lawton Chiles, U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, and Vice President Al Gore as being guilty of treason as well.

Griffin, who will defend himself at his June 21st trial, sought the hearing to make the charges and to move the court to declare the death penalty unconstitutional. He faces the death penalty if convicted.

The 31-year-old former chemical plant worker will base his defense on the Bible and will not use the insanity defense.

Doctors consider abortion pill

New York, NY -- More than three-quarters of doctors surveyed at a medical convention in May said they would prescribe the controversial RU-486 abortion pill, a poll released on May 16 said.

About 85 percent of the doctors surveyed said the drug, approved for use in France, Britain and Sweden, should be approved in the United States. The survey of 179 obstetricians and gynecologists was conducted at a convention in Washington D.C.

85% of the doctors surveyed said the drug should be approved for use in the United States

The drug causes a miscarriage and is used only in the first weeks of pregnancy. U.S. drug regulators, at the direction of President Bill Clinton, have approved testing the pill with the aim of allowing its use in the United States.

Some 77% said they would prescribe RU-486 instead of a contraceptive. Four percent of the doctos surveyed said they would prescribe both a contraceptive and RU-486.