

Executive Summary: Mercy for Christa Pike

Christa Endured Rape and Sexual Assault as a Child and Adolescent.

- Christa was repeatedly raped as a toddler by Ernest Johnson, her grandmother's boyfriend, who forced his penis into her mouth.
- Upon entering school, Christa drew a man with a huge penis and demonic face to explain what happened in her home. Her parents were called, but no one investigated what happened to this child.
- Christa was raped as an 11-year-old child by Claude Davis, who pled guilty to a lesser offense.
- Christa was thrown to the ground, her body bruised, scraped, and raped at age 17, almost a year to the day before her crime.
- The State does not dispute Christa's history of sexual victimization.
- Child rape is a capital offense in Tennessee, which recognizes that the rape of a child permanently destroys innocent lives and leaves unimaginable scars. Tennessee now seeks to punish Christa in the same way it would punish her rapist.

Christa Endured Unimaginable Abuse, Neglect, and Violence as a Child and Adolescent.

- Dr. Jonathan Pincus testified to Christa's almost unbearably abusive background.
- Dr. Brand described Christa's history as extraordinarily severe extreme trauma. Christa experienced more severe adverse events than 99% of the US population.
- Christa grew up with constant abuse, violence, and abandonment, with no protection. Decades of being brutally raped, molested, beaten, humiliated, emotionally abused, ostracized and screamed at profoundly damaged her, leaving her with a multitude of untreated psychological disorders.

Christa Suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Bipolar Disorder that Deeply Affected Her at the Time of Her Crime and for Years After.

- While Christa was still in utero, Christa's mother drank so much alcohol that Christa suffered frontal lobe brain damage and heterotopia.
- Such brain damage highly correlates with the development of Bipolar Disorder, a Severe Mental Illness which would exclude her from a death sentence in Ohio and Kentucky.
- Mental health experts and TDOC have diagnosed Christa with Bipolar Disorder and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder which resulted from her horrific childhood and rapes.
- Unmedicated and untreated, Christa's PTSD, Bipolar Disorder, and brain damage played a major role in Christa's crime. She was not able to "put the brakes on" when what was intended to be a beating of Colleen Slemmer spiraled out of control.

Christa Was 18 Years Old at the Time of Her Crime Far Younger Than Anyone Tennessee Has Executed in the Modern Era.

- The adolescent brain at age 18 is less mature, more impulsive and emotional, more susceptible to peer pressure, and less able to make rational decisions—all because the adolescent brain is still developing.
- There is no meaningful difference between the brain of a 17-year-old—like Christa’s co-defendant Tadarly Shipp—and an 18-year-old.
- Of the 200+ people sentenced to death in TN in the modern era, only eight were 18 years old at time of offense. All seven male offenders have had their death sentences vacated. No 18-year-old offender has been death-sentenced since Christa.
- The average age at time of offense of the 17 people executed in the modern era is 28.94. The youngest offenders who were executed were 23 years old at time of offense. This significant age gap mirrors what we now know about adolescent brain development and why many do not support execution of those younger than 21.

Christa’s Trauma and Death Sentence Were the Product of Failed Systems.

- Christa was a bright child who, despite her damaging childhood and mental illness, had potential for a productive life helping others—with support.
- Christa’s family failed her.
- The North Carolina and West Virginia juvenile justice system and social services failed her.
- Christa’s trial attorneys failed her. The DA offered life and lead counsel Talman’s biggest regret was not spending time with Christa to counsel her.
- The justice system failed her. The post-conviction court did not consider Christa’s rapes/sexual abuse as mitigating because her family members didn’t believe her. The jurors who sentenced Christa to death never learned of the sexual abuse and rapes and the post-conviction court found that did not matter.

Christa’s Life Has Value and She Is Not the Same Person as She Was at 18.

- While incarcerated, Christa worked to heal the impact of childhood rapes, abuse, and neglect.
- After years of psychotherapy and medications to treat her mental illness, Christa is thoughtful, even-tempered, bright, funny, and hopeful.
- She exhibits deep remorse for her actions that resulted in Colleen Slemmer’s death.
- Christa has become a comfort and support to newly incarcerated women on her unit, providing encouragement, supplies, and hope.