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Howard Co. rapist sentenced to life in prison plus 25 years

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A Howard County judge -- seeking to give a convicted rapist a sentence that rivaled the scars he left on his teen-age victim a year ago -- sentenced Timothy B. Chase to life plus 25 years in prison yesterday.

With the victim sitting in the back of the courtroom, Circuit Judge Diane O. Leasure said she feared the long-term effects of Chase's attack on the honors student, then 15, and her younger sister, then 7, behind the county's central library in Columbia in March 1996.

Even now, Leasure said, the younger girl -- who was forced to lie on the ground an arm's length away while her sister was raped -- is afraid to be alone with her because it was just the two of them together the night of the attack.

"They were robbed of their innocence, of their childhood and of their trust of people," Leasure said in court before sentencing Chase. "There is no question their lives have been changed."

Under the sentence Leasure imposed, Chase -- who has two prior armed robbery convictions -- must serve 27 1/2 years of his sentence before he is eligible for parole.

The maximum he could have received was two life sentences plus 70 years, but judges rarely give maximum penalties in cases with multiple charges.

Until the end, Chase, a former janitor at Howard County General Hospital in Columbia, maintained his innocence. With an angry tone in his voice, Chase told Leasure that he was wrongly accused.

"I feel sorry for what happened to the victims, but I had nothing to do with it," Chase said to the judge before his sentencing. "I will continue to plead my innocence."

Chase, 29, was found guilty of 15 charges, including rape, kidnapping and robbery, after a weeklong trial before Leasure in February in Carroll County Circuit Court. The trial was moved because of pretrial publicity.

After the sentencing yesterday, Chase whispered intensely to his attorney as he was handcuffed in the courtroom and led away.

During his trial, Chase testified that he did not rape or rob the girls. That night, he told the jurors, he was buying crack with money earned in part from ironing his stepmother's nurse uniforms.

Police found two rings stolen from the rape victim in Chase's pockets days after the rape. Chase testified that he got the rings from a partial payment in a crack sale the night of the rape.

Prosecutors presented the rings and DNA evidence they said linked Chase to the crime.

According to testimony, Chase forced the girls -- who were waiting for their mother to pick them up outside a library after it closed at 9 p.m.-- into the woods behind the library.

After the attack, the girls ran through the woods half-naked and banged on the door of Toby's Dinner Theater, where cast members found them.

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