



# Kindergarten kidnapper gets 40 years to life in 'horror show'

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THE LITTLE GIRL, dressed in a long-sleeved pink shirt with a black T-shirt with stars and peace signs over it, walked with her mother to the jury box yesterday to give a victim-impact statement.

"I think what she did to me was wrong, and I think she shouldn't do it to anybody else," the girl, now 8, said in a soft voice, as she sat next to her mother.

The girl was 5 years old in January 2013 when she was taken out of her class at Bryant Elementary School in West Philadelphia by a woman dressed in Muslim garb who pretended to be the girl's mother. She was taken to a home and sexually assaulted.

Yesterday, Christina Regusters, 22, the petite woman whom a jury convicted last year of charges of kidnapping, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated assault and related offenses, contended she played only a minor role in the incident.

"I'm not a monster, I'm a very good person," Regusters, her hands cuffed in front, said in a soft voice.

She claimed that she didn't kidnap the little girl or sexually assault her, but that her only role in what happened was that she left the girl in an Upper Darby park the next morning, where the girl was found by a good Samaritan.

But Common Pleas Judge Jeffrey Minehart, prosecutors and a jury found that Regusters kidnapped and sexually assaulted the girl - and did it alone.

The judge yesterday sentenced Regusters to 40 years to life in prison, plus 20 years' probation.

"This is a terrible case," he said. "It's like a horror show."

Recalling the evidence at last year's jury trial, Minehart said the victim was "taken away . . . stripped naked, placed under a bed, tortured."

Regusters knew the girl from the Heaven's Little Angels day care in West Philly, where she was working at the time of the abduction, and where the little girl attended an after-school program when she was in kindergarten.

Evidence in the trial showed that on the morning of Jan. 14, 2013, Regusters, then 19, dressed in Muslim clothing similar to that worn by the girl's mother, and took the girl from her class at Bryant Elementary, on Cedar Avenue near 60th Street.

Regusters then walked the girl a few blocks away to a home on Walton Avenue, near 62nd Street, where Regusters lived with an aunt. During a span of 19 hours, Regusters blindfolded the child, convinced her that other people were

present, forced her to lie naked under a bed and used an unknown object to sodomize the child so severely that she would have to wear a colostomy bag for several months.

Regusters then took the girl to an Upper Darby park, where a good Samaritan found the child cold and clad in a T-shirt, just before dawn on Jan. 15, 2013.

Yesterday, when the little girl's mother spoke from the jury box, she looked directly at Regusters. "She was a child," the mother said of her daughter.

"She was a baby. If you cared about her, you would never have done what you did."

Added the mother: "You saw [my daughter] every day" at the day care. "You watched me every day. You never said anything," but were all "smiles," the mother said, wiping away tears.

The mother said her daughter is "still confused about what happened. . . . You should be ashamed of yourself," she told Regusters, who wiped away tears with the sleeves of her maroon sweatshirt.

"She's always going to have that space where there is always a gray area, where nobody can shine a light on," the mother said of her daughter.

Earlier in the hearing, Regusters' mother, Dorothea Regusters, and Regusters' older sister, Latasha Moore, both said the defendant is "not a monster" and asked for forgiveness.

Dorothea Regusters told the victim's family: "If there are any words I can say in Arabic or English, I am sorry."

The defendant, when it was her turn to speak at the end of the hearing, looked back to the courtroom gallery searching for the victim's mother. When she saw her and the little girl sitting in the second row of the gallery, she said: "I'm asking you for forgiveness."

The victim's mother, though, said she didn't find the apologies from Regusters' mother or sister to be sincere. Before Regusters spoke, the girl's mother told her: "I do not accept your apology."

Defense attorney W. Fred Harrison Jr. contended yesterday, as he had previously, that evidence did not link Regusters to the kidnapping or sexual assault. "She does not in any way take responsibility for the sexual crimes that she was charged with [or the kidnapping]. . . . She indicates there was somebody else who did that," he said after the hearing.

But Assistant District Attorney Erin O'Brien said that evidence showed that no one but Regusters was involved in the girl's abduction and assault.

"We have absolutely no evidence to suggest that anybody else was involved in this case from the very beginning," O'Brien said as she stood next to co-prosecutor Jessalyn Gillum.

"We believe that the mentions of other names were the defendant trying to mislead a small child," O'Brien said. "And we are completely confident that the sole person involved in these crimes has now been convicted and sentenced and will be in custody for most of the rest of her life."

O'Brien asked the judge for a life sentence for Regusters.

**Tom Kline, a civil attorney who is representing the victim's family in a federal lawsuit filed against the Philadelphia School District, and who was at yesterday's hearing, told reporters that the girl "has been horribly, physically and emotionally damaged," but called her a "remarkable child" who had helped police solve the case.**