

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
AUSTIN COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
MARCH 16, 2020

An Austin County jury has found Blas Tierrablanca, 66, guilty of the 29-year-old Murder of Brenda Smith after a 6-day trial.

The jury convicted Tierrablanca on March 12, 2020. The jury then sentenced him to life in prison on March 13, 2020.

The jury deliberated approximately 33 minutes for guilt and 40 minutes for punishment.

First Assistant District Attorney Brandy Robinson presented the State's case, with assistance from Assistant District Attorney Ben Nystrom and Legal Assistant Lisa Tobola.

Attorney James Rivera presented the Defense's case, with assistance from Attorney John Anderson.

Investigator Brad Murray and Deputy Joe Villarreal responded to a murder scene at the Stephen F. Austin Hotel room on May 11, 1991 in Sealy, Texas. Both men served as patrol officers with the Sealy Police Department at the time.

Their diligent investigation, along with information provided by former Sealy police officer Andrew Weido, helped them identify the main suspect, Blas Tierrablanca, that same day.

Unfortunately, he crossed the border into Mexico mere hours before officers could apprehend him.

Villarreal and District Attorney Travis Koehn worked with the federal government to extradite Tierrablanca back to Texas if caught in Mexico. The District Attorney's Office coordinated with the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs of the Department's Criminal Division to keep the warrant open over the years.

The FBI's Bryan Resident Agency, the FBI's Mexico City Legal Attache office, and the FBI's International Violent Crimes Unit located Tierrablanca in Mexico in 2017. He was apprehended, with the collaboration of Mexican law enforcement, more than 25 years after the crime.

District Attorney Koehn, Assistant District Attorney Robinson and Legal Assistant Tobola coordinated with the Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs to gain Tierrablanca's extradition, which was granted in 2018.

Federal agents then flew Tierrablanca to Houston and handed him over to Texas Rangers Noe Diaz and Louis Owles.

The Rangers provided invaluable assistance in interviewing and obtaining additional evidence from Tierrablanca. Diaz currently works as Chief of Katy Police.

After Tierrablanca's extradition, Tanya Dean, with the Texas Department of Public Safety Crime Lab in Houston, retrieved the old lab case file and evidence for DNA comparison, which provided additional evidence.

John Moran, a former crime scene analyst with D.P.S. came to Bellville to testify to evidence samples he received from Sealy police and preserved almost thirty years ago.

The D.P.S. lab lacked the ability to perform DNA testing in 1991, but Moran preserved the samples in the hopes they would be useful one day.

D.P.S. forensic analyst Jennifer Young testified about the crime lab testing process and the results she obtained on those samples in 2018.

DNA evidence and witness testimony connected Tierrablanca to the crime scene.

Investigator Jason Manies served as the evidence custodian and brought physical evidence from Sealy Police Department's custody into court to serve as exhibits.

"When I first began working at the District Attorney's Office in 2005, I inherited the Tierrablanca file," Brandy Robinson said.

"It sat in my office for years as we hoped that he might be found, apprehended, and brought to justice one day. That day finally came."

"We're grateful to the jurors for their diligence and their service to the community," Robinson stated.

"It's amazing that so many lawyers, lab personnel, civilians and local, State, and Federal law enforcement officers worked together through almost thirty years to make sure Tierrablanca was brought to justice," District Attorney Koehn said.

"Austin County citizens should be proud of its justice system and its jurors for bringing this case to conclusion and providing closure to the victim's family, who continue to mourn her loss," Koehn added.