

Jefferson Parish jury convicts ex-Westwego cop of aggravated rape of young girl

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Even as he wore a Westwego Police Department badge and ran a campaign for public office in that city, Michael Richoux maintained a secret life of sexually abusing a young girl, a Jefferson jury concluded today in convicting him of aggravated rape. Richoux, 50, wept as a clerk read aloud the jury's unanimous verdict: Guilty of two counts of aggravated rape, sexual battery and indecent behavior with a juvenile. The crimes began in 2005 when the girl was 6 years old and continued periodically until she was 10 and revealed her secret while playing a game of "truth or dare" with two teenage girls in June 2009.

He faces mandatory life in prison, a sentence Judge Hans Liljeberg of the 24th Judicial District Court will hand down Sept. 1.

Richoux, who was awaiting trial in jail in lieu of a \$1.65 million bond since his June 2009 arrest, denied the accusations. His court-appointed attorneys Renee Bourg and Tricia Ward argued the girl fabricated stories of abuse during a child's game and became stuck with them after adults and authorities intervened.

The girl, whom The Times-Picayune is not identifying, was acquainted with Richoux and frequently visited his homes in Westwego and Gretna during gatherings that at times involved Saints games, according to testimony.

"He would touch me in an inappropriate place," the girl, now 12, said Tuesday in testimony in which she shied away from discussing anatomical details. "To me, it's embarrassing, what happened."

She also discussed the abuse at the Jefferson Children's Advocacy Center, in an interview whose recording was played for the jury.

"I did it because I was scared," she told interviewer Erica Dupepe. "I did what he told me to do."

The girl testified that in addition to the touching with his hands, Richoux touched her with a sex toy and had her wear a woman's thong underwear so he could photograph her. She also alleged he showed her nude photos of himself.

Detectives found in his home about 500 sexual photographs of Richoux and of his wife, and a sex toy - the jury saw a sampling of the photographs and the toy.

Richoux, according to other witnesses, behaved inappropriately with them, too, when they were children.

Bourg argued the girl's claims were implausible, in part because Richoux's home was crowded with people attending various parties when she said he abused her. One of the incidents, she said, happened on a recliner chair in his living room, while visitors were in the home.

The state attorney general's cybercrimes unit searched 637,000 images on Richoux's home computer and found nothing illegal or of the girl, according to testimony. And the girl was aware of Richoux's sex toy because other children found it during one party, she said.

The girl's claims originated in a game, "a tale that went awry," Bourg said.

Assistant District Attorney Scott Schlegel, who prosecuted the case with Jennifer Rosenbach, said the girl has been consistent in her retelling of what happened.

"There's no doubt here, none whatsoever," Schlegel told the jury.

Richoux had been fired several times from the Westwego Police Department since the 1990s, but was reinstated under civil service rules. He resigned for good in May 2006, amid an internal investigation of his alleged neglect of duties.

In 2009, he placed last among four candidates for Westwego's 4th District council seat.

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