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William Stephen Crossen

A former Catoosa County sheriff's deputy was handed a seven-year sentence during a hearing Thursday morning in Catoosa County Superior Court after pleading guilty to several sex crimes involving a minor female child that took place in early 2012.

"I ask the community to forgive me, and I ask you to please have mercy on me judge," said a teary-eyed William Stephen Crossen as he prepared to receive his sentence from judge Ralph Van Pelt Jr. around 11 a.m.

Crossen, 39, was sentenced to seven years — five to be served in prison, without the possibility of parole — after pleading guilty to 14 counts that included sexual exploitation of a child, dissemination of computer pornography, interference with custody, and sodomy.

The remaining two years of the sentence are to be served on probation with sex offender conditions, according to Lookout Mountain Judicial Circuit district attorney Herbert E. "Buzz" Franklin, who prosecuted the case.

Crossen was fired from the Catoosa County Sheriff's office in February 2012 following a Georgia Bureau of Investigation into allegations that he was involved in an inappropriate sexual relationship with a 16-year-old girl.

The crimes took place over a 10-day span in February 2012, which included Crossen picking up the teen, enticing her into a sexual encounter in a parking lot, taking photos of her, and distributing the photos, authorities said.

Crossen turned himself in to authorities in November 2012 following a grand jury indictment in the case. He pleaded guilty to the charges on March 7.

Thursday morning's sentencing hearing included testimony from members of Crossen's family speaking on his behalf.

“He’s already lost his career and his friends,” said Crossen’s wife Libby. “People won’t even talk to him when we’re out in public.”

She also added how she feels about having Crossen around her young daughter given the situation.

“There is no reason he shouldn’t be around my daughter,” she explained. “I’ve educated my daughter since she was very young about ‘good touch’ and ‘bad touch,’ and we had a private conversation after all this came out. I asked her questions, and she was adamant that nothing inappropriate had ever happened around him.”

Crossen’s twin sister also took to the stand and explained that many of her brother’s issues stemmed from early abuse as a child.

He then stated that he has been seeing a therapist over the course of the past seven months in an attempt to work through his issues.

“I was a victim... We have been working to make me accountable for my actions,” he said. “No one has been as hard on me as I’ve been on myself.”

Crossen’s attorney, McCracken Poston of Ringgold, pushed for the sentence to include special parameters so that Crossen could still be a contributing member of his family, citing a possible weekend-jail scenario given the fact that Crossen’s wife is currently battling cancer.

Judge Van Pelt, who then addressed Crossen before imposing his sentence, denied that notion.

“Having lost my mother to cancer, I can certainly understand what you’re going through,” Van Pelt said. “However, I have greater sympathy for your wife than I do for you, and I’ve got to do what I’ve got to do.”