

= Cheshire , Connecticut , home invasion murders =

The Cheshire , Connecticut , home invasion murders occurred on July 23 , 2007 . Jennifer Hawke @-@ Petit and her two daughters were raped and murdered , while her husband , Dr. William Petit , was injured during a home invasion in Cheshire , Connecticut . The Hartford Courant referred to the case as " possibly the most widely publicized crime in the state 's history " . In 2010 Steven Hayes was convicted of the murders and sentenced to death . His accomplice , Joshua Komisarjevsky , was found guilty on October 13 , 2011 , and sentenced to death on January 27 , 2012 . In August 2015 , the state of Connecticut abolished the death penalty , and both Hayes and Komisarjevsky had their death sentences commuted to life sentences .

= = Background = =

Late in the afternoon of Sunday , July 22 , 2007 , 48 @-@ year @-@ old Jennifer Hawke @-@ Petit and her 11 @-@ year @-@ old daughter Michaela Petit went to a local grocery store in Cheshire , Connecticut . They picked up food for Jennifer 's pre @-@ birthday meal that Michaela planned to prepare for her . During their trip to the grocery store , they attracted the attention of Joshua Komisarjevsky , who followed them home .

Steven Hayes messaged Komisarjevsky : " I 'm chomping at the bit to get started . Need a margarita soon . " Hayes then texted , " We still on ? " Komisarjevsky replied , " Yes . " Hayes ' next text asked , " Soon ? " , to which Komisarjevsky replied : " I 'm putting the kid to bed hold your horses " . Hayes then wrote : " Dude , the horses want to get loose . LOL . "

= = Home invasion = =

According to Hayes ' confession , the two men had planned to rob the Petit house under cover of darkness leaving the family bound , but unharmed . Hayes attributed the outcome to a change of plan . Upon their arrival in the early hours of July 23 , they found William Petit sleeping on a couch on the porch . Komisarjevsky struck William on the head with a baseball bat found in the yard and then tied him up at gunpoint in the basement . The children and their mother were then bound and locked in their respective rooms . Hayes said that he and Komisarjevsky were not satisfied with their haul , and that a bankbook was found which showed an available balance .

A gas station 's video surveillance shows Hayes purchasing \$ 10 worth of gasoline in two cans he had taken from the Petit home . After returning to the house , and unloading the gas , he took Jennifer to the bank . The prosecution later claimed that this was evidence of premeditated murder . Hayes convinced Jennifer to withdraw \$ 15 @,@ 000 from her line of credit when the bank opened . Bank surveillance cameras captured the transaction which shows Jennifer Hawke @-@ Petit , on the morning of July 23 , as she informed the teller of her situation . The bank manager then called 911 and reported the details to police while Jennifer was still with the teller . The manager reported to the 911 dispatcher , in real time , as Jennifer left the bank and was picked up by Hayes , describing his clothing as he drove away with her . The manager stated that Jennifer had indicated the assailants were " being nice " , and she believed they only wanted money .

The Cheshire police response to the bank 's " urgent bid " began with assessing the situation and setting up a vehicle perimeter . The police used up more than half an hour taking these preliminary measures while the assailants were raping and murdering the women inside the house . The police made no effort to make the assailants aware of their presence .

During this time , Hayes and Komisarjevsky escalated the aggravated nature of their crimes : Komisarjevsky raped the 11 @-@ year @-@ old Michaela . Komisarjevsky , who had photographed the sexual assault of the girl on his cell phone , then provoked Hayes into raping Jennifer . While Hayes was raping her on the floor of the living room , Komisarjevsky entered the room and announced that William Petit had escaped . Hayes then strangled Jennifer , doused her lifeless body and parts of the house , including the daughters ' rooms , with gasoline . While tied to their beds , both daughters had been doused with gasoline ; each had her head covered with a

pillowcase . A fire was started , and Hayes and Komisarjevsky fled the scene . Hayley and Michaela both died of smoke inhalation .

William Petit had been able to free himself , escape his confines , and call to a neighbor for help . The neighbor indicated that he did not recognize him due to the severity of Petit 's injuries . In court testimony , William Petit stated that he felt a " jolt of adrenaline " coupled with a need to escape upon hearing one of the perpetrators state : " Don 't worry , it 's going to be all over in a couple of minutes . " Petit then told the jury , " I thought , it 's now or never because in my mind at that moment , I thought they were going to shoot all of us . "

Hayes and Komisarjevsky fled the scene using the Petit family car . They were immediately spotted by police surveillance , pursued , and arrested one block away . The whole invasion lasted seven hours .

The scenario was revealed in a confession by Hayes just hours after the killings . Detectives testified that Hayes smelled strongly of gasoline throughout the interrogation . Each perpetrator blamed or implicated the other as the mastermind and driving force behind the spree . There were even attempts to blame William Petit as an accomplice . Komisarjevsky later kept a diary , entered into evidence , in which he chose to call Petit a " coward " and claimed that he could have stopped the murders had he wanted to .

= = Victims = =

Jennifer Hawke @-@ Petit (born September 26 , 1958) was a nurse and co @-@ director of the health center at Cheshire Academy , a private boarding school . She met her husband , William Petit , in 1985 on a pediatric rotation at Children 's Hospital when he was a third @-@ year medical student at the University of Pittsburgh and she was a new nurse . Their eldest daughter Hayley (born October 15 , 1989) had just graduated from Miss Porter 's School and was scheduled to attend Dartmouth College . Hayley had been an active fundraiser for multiple sclerosis research , following Jennifer 's diagnosis with that disease . Daughter Michaela (born November 17 , 1995) attended the Chase Collegiate School before her death .

William Petit , the sole survivor of the home invasion , is an endocrinologist in Cheshire . He survived when he escaped via a direct external exit from the basement despite his injuries . He has not returned to his medical practice since the murders , stating his desire to be active in the foundations set up to honor the memory of his deceased family . He contemplated running for Congress as a Republican , but later decided against it .

= = Perpetrators = =

Steven J. Hayes (born May 30 , 1963 , in Homestead , Florida) was found guilty on 16 of 17 counts related to the home invasion murders on October 5 , 2010 . On November 8 , 2010 , the jury returned with a recommendation for him to be executed . He was formally sentenced to death by Superior Court Judge Jon C. Blue on December 2 , 2010 .

Hayes is an inmate of the Connecticut Department of Correction . His criminal history shows him sentenced for his first offense at the age of 16 . He is incarcerated in the Northern Correctional Institution , which houses the state 's death row for men , in Somers , Connecticut . The method of execution employed by Connecticut was lethal injection , and the state execution chamber was located in the Osborn Correctional Institution in Somers . This sentence became an automatic life sentence when Connecticut abolished the death penalty in 2015 .

Joshua A. Komisarjevsky (born August 10 , 1980) was Hayes ' co @-@ conspirator in the home invasion and murders . He was born in 1980 to a 16 @-@ year @-@ old girl impregnated by a 20 @-@ year @-@ old mechanic and was adopted by Benedict Komisarjevsky , the son of theatrical director Theodore Komisarjevsky and dancer Ernestine Stodelle , and his wife Jude (née Motkya) . Komisarjevsky remained incarcerated at the Walker Reception Center in lieu of a \$ 15 million bond until his conviction . His trial began on September 19 , 2011 , and on October 13 , 2011 , he was convicted on all 17 counts . On December 9 , 2011 , the jury recommended the death penalty . On

January 27 , 2012 Judge Jon Blue sentenced Komisarjevsky to death by lethal injection . His sentence also became an automatic life sentence when Connecticut abolished the death penalty in 2015 .

= = Trials = =

= = = Hayes ' trial = = =

The jury in Hayes ' case was composed of seven women and five men . Following the completion of the trial , the jury deliberated for about four hours to reach its guilty verdicts .

The second phase of the trial began on October 18 , 2010 , during which the jurors had to decide if Hayes should be executed or imprisoned for life . The second day of these deliberations began on November 6 , 2010 . Attorney Thomas Ullman told the jury that a sentence of life in prison would be the harshest possible punishment for his client Hayes , because he was so tormented by his crimes and would be isolated in prison . " Life in prison without the possibility of release is the harshest penalty , " Ullman said . " It is a fate worse than death . If you want to end his misery , put him to death , " he added . " If you want him to suffer and carry that burden forever , the guilt , shame , and humiliation , sentence him to life without the possibility of release . "

On November 8 , 2010 , the jury returned with a recommendation that Hayes be executed . The jury recommended a death sentence on each of the six capital felony counts for which Hayes was convicted . In the sentencing phase , the jury had deliberated for about 17 hours , over the course of three and a half days , before reaching a decision .

Hayes had attempted to negotiate a life sentence in a plea bargain . After the verdict , his defense attorney stated : " Hayes smiled upon hearing the jury 's recommendation of a death sentence . " He then added : " He is thrilled . He 's very happy with the verdict . That 's what he 's wanted all along . "

For the first time in state history , the Connecticut state judicial branch offered post @-@ traumatic stress assistance to jurors , who served for two months on the triple @-@ murder trial , because they had been required to look at disturbing images and hear grisly testimony .

On December 2 , 2010 , Hayes apologized for the pain and suffering he had caused the Petit family and added that : " Death for me will be a welcome relief and I hope it will bring some peace and comfort to those who I have hurt so much . " Judge Jon Blue formally imposed six death sentences , one for each of the capital charges ; Blue then added a sentence of 106 years for other crimes Hayes committed during the home invasion , including kidnapping , burglary , and assault , before finishing with , " This is a terrible sentence , but is , in truth , a sentence you wrote for yourself in flames . May God have mercy on your soul . " The judge also gave Hayes an official execution date of May 27 , 2011 ; Blue said that this date was a formality , because if Hayes appealed his case , his execution could be delayed for decades . His death sentence became a life sentence in August 2015 when the state abolished the death penalty .

= = = Komisarjevsky 's trial = = =

Komisarjevsky was found guilty on October 13 , 2011 . On December 9 , 2011 , the jury recommended the death penalty . On January 27 , 2012 , Komisarjevsky was sentenced to death by lethal injection . During the hearing , Komisarjevsky insisted that he did not intend to kill anyone and spoke about the shame , hurt and disappointment he had caused : " I will never find peace within . My life will be a continuation of the hurt I caused . The clock is now ticking and I owe a debt I cannot repay . " He said that forgiveness was not his to have , " and he needs to forgive his worst enemy ? himself . " Blue set July 20 , 2012 as Komisarjevsky 's execution date . Like Hayes , Komisarjevsky 's death sentence was turned into a life sentence in August 2015 .

= = Subsequent developments in Connecticut capital punishment law = =

In 2009 , the Connecticut General Assembly sent legislation to abolish the state 's death penalty to Governor M. Jodi Rell ostensibly to be signed into law . However , on June 5 , 2009 , Rell vetoed the bill instead and cited the Cheshire murders as an exemplary reason for doing so . On November 8 , 2010 , Rell issued the following statement regarding the jury 's recommendation of a sentence of death for Hayes :

The crimes that were committed on that brutal July night were so far out of the range of normal understanding that now , more than three years later , we still find it difficult to accept that they happened in one of our communities . I have long believed that there are certain crimes so heinous , so depraved , that society is best served by imposing the ultimate sanction on the criminal . Steven Hayes stands convicted of such crimes ? and today the jury has recommended that he should be subjected to the death penalty . I agree .

On April 11 , 2012 , the Connecticut House of Representatives voted to repeal capital punishment for future cases (leaving past death sentences in place) . The Connecticut Senate had already voted for the bill , and on April 25 Governor Dan Malloy signed the bill into law .

In August 2015 , the Connecticut Supreme Court declared all capital punishment inconsistent with the state constitution , effectively commuting the killers ' sentences to life imprisonment .

= = Aftermath = =

In 2007 , John Carpenter , an employee of the Chase Collegiate School , ran the New York City Marathon , raising \$ 8 @ , @ 554 for the " Miles for Michaela " campaign - a scholarship benefit . The same year , William Petit established the Michaela Rose Petit ' 14 Scholarship Fund of the Chase Collegiate School . He also established the Hayley 's Hope & Michaela 's Miracle MS Memorial Fund .

On January 6 , 2008 , over 130 @ , @ 000 luminaria candles were lit in front of thousands of homes across Cheshire in " Cheshire Lights of Hope " , a fundraiser for multiple sclerosis and a tribute to the Petit family . Founded by a local couple , Don and Jenifer Walsh , the event raised over \$ 100 @ , @ 000 for Hayley 's Hope and Michaela 's Miracle Memorial funds .

The murder , and its aftermath , were featured on the news magazine show Dateline NBC , in a segment entitled " The Family on Sorghum Mill Drive " , and on December 9 , 2010 , William Petit appeared on The Oprah Winfrey Show in a full @ - @ hour episode about the murders of his family and the work of the Petit Family Foundation .

On August 5 , 2012 , Petit married Christine Paluf , and moved to Farmington , Connecticut . He met her when she was volunteering with the Petit Family Foundation .

HBO broadcast a documentary by filmmaker David Heilbroner called The Cheshire Murders about the murders on July 22 , 2013 . On August 1 , 2013 , Petit told station WFSB that he and Paluf were expecting a child together . The baby who was revealed to be a boy and named William Petit III was born on November 23 , 2013 . In October 2013 , Petit announced that he was considering running for Congress for the Republican Party after being approached by the National Republican Congressional Committee , who had asked him if he would be interested in running . Petit ultimately decided not to be a candidate .

Petit condemned the state 's decision to abolish the death penalty in August 2015 , saying he believed the court had overstepped its powers and urging it to give greater consideration to the " emotional impact , particularly on victims and their loved ones " that death penalty cases generate .