

Remarks: Erin Runnion  
Sentencing Hearing: 07/22/05  
Re: Death Sentence in People v. Alejandro Avila

Your Honor, please bare with me. I have a lot to say, but I think it will only take about five minutes. I hope it is okay if I do this first. I have to thank you Judge Froeberg for the way you managed and set the tone in this courtroom. This system seems so contrary to human nature and you made it as humane and tolerable as possible. You were fair and careful and I was less burdened because I was confident that you would uphold the integrity of the process.

I want to thank the jurors for your time and attention, but really for treating this case with so much respect. You too were careful and diligent and you did the right thing. This was not about me and my family vs. this man, it was our community, the “people” vs. him ... because when someone hurts and kills an innocent child it is a crime against all of us. And I am sorry that you had to be a part of this, but I feel like you went through this part with me and I’m glad it was you who were here.

For mitigating to the greatest extent possible, the impact of this horrible crime, I want to thank everyone at the DA’s office, David Brent, Camille Hill, Jim Mulgrew and all of your awesome staff, Minerva Hidrogo, our victims advocate. You were so wonderful to my family. Combined with my friends from the OC and Riverside County Sheriff’s Departments, Sheriff Mike Carona, Captain Christine Murray and Investigator Gary Jones in particular, you all made an incredible team. You did a fantastic job.

It seemed that everyone who was involved from the day Samantha was taken did their difficult jobs with such care and thoroughness that the sincerity of their intentions was obvious. Thank you for caring. You treated Samantha and this case with the respect and diligence she deserved and it is by your intent and wonderful work that justice was done for her.

Ms. Gragg and Mr. Zelweski, I feel badly that you had to defend this man. It just seems so wrong that we put people in a position to pretend someone is innocent when *no one* wants this man on the streets.

I don’t imagine he has given any thought to what you all went through, personally. I know you were fulfilling the duty set out in the Constitution that is truly the absolute backbone of our democracy; that is a judicial process that ensures that innocent people are not falsely imprisoned or murdered to satisfy a popular demand. That very thing is happening in so many countries around the world today that in spite of how

mad you made me, watching the process made me appreciate its intent. I was very frustrated by the posturing and convolution of facts, and you must know that a few of the tactics you employed crossed the line from defense to distortion. I understand that our adversarial system perpetuates that dilemma and I'm not qualified to suggest any alternatives. I just wish that we could find a way to infuse the system with more common sense and decency.

I also want to acknowledge all of the strangers who watched this story and let it touch them because it really helped me to know that so many people saw this for the truly heinous crime that it was; for acknowledging how important my daughter's life was. Every child deserves that kind of love and advocacy.

I have written and re-written what I would say today to you. Part of me doesn't want to speak to you or acknowledge you in any way, but I've decided that I have to address you because I hope to never see you again. I never want to hear your name or see your face. You don't deserve a place in my family's history. And so I want you to live. I want you to disappear into the abyss of a lifetime in prison where no one will remember you, no one will pray for you, no one will care when you die. Since Samantha's death I have felt more hate and rage than I ever thought possible, but I love that little girl so much that it would be a horrible insult to her to let my hate for you take more space in my heart and head than my love for her.

I am supposed to speak to the impact of this crime on my life. There is no describing the impact and I am not sure you're intelligent enough to ever comprehend it anyway. I wrote this statement on the third anniversary of the night you took my baby and hurt her and scared her and crushed her until her heart stopped. She fought. I know she fought. I know she looked at you with those amazing, sparkling brown eyes and you still wanted to kill her. I don't understand it. I never will.

It's like you never learned to think. You have absolutely no concept of how heinous, how egregious your crimes were. I can't help but wonder how it is you survived as long as you did being so stupid.

You killed a child with a loving and passionate heart. Samantha was outrageously bright and funny. She wasn't demanding, she didn't ask for everything under the sun, just to play and have fun as much as humanly possible. Why would you want to take that away? I have researched and really thought about pedophiles and your psychology and blah blah blah...you're a human being, you've known pain and fear...Did you pretend that she wasn't real?

I want an apology. Someday I want *you* to feel the impact of what you did to Samantha. I want you to realize how much you stole. I have to take family photos and my little girl isn't there; she will always be missing. Every happy moment of my life has a moment of gut-wrenching agony because she's not there. And I have to stop and acknowledge how much it hurts to live without her.

Samantha made me feel like I had a purpose on this planet. She was so incredible that I felt sure that if I just did what I could to give her every opportunity to become the best person she could be and I didn't mess her up in the meantime, she would have done something truly wonderful for this world. She wanted to be a dancer, a teacher and a mother. She was a wonderful storyteller and she wrote all the time. Who knows what she would have become?

But you just don't care. You have no idea of what it is to love someone...you have no concept of what life is about and yet you were so arrogant as to think you had a right to take it.

For me and my family - our lives were shattered. For the past three years we've been trying to paste it back together, but there's this huge void and the lack of her laughter, of art on the walls of her dancing and singing and running and jumping and swinging and smiling --- the lack of Samantha is actually a part of our life now. The pain is impossible to describe, the guilt I feel for bringing that sweet baby into the world only to be tortured and terrified...I am so sorry I let her down.

And you should be sorry you took her away. You should be so sorry. Not sorry you got caught; not sorry that your wasted life will be taken (as if it's worth could ever compare) but sorry that you took a life – the life of a very special little girl.

While everything in me wants to hurt you in every possible way when I'm very honest with myself what I want more than anything is I want you to feel remorse. Everyone feels alone in our pain and confusion. There is so much misery built into being a human being that I can't fathom what would make you want to add to it.

In choosing to destroy Samantha's life you chose this...You chose to waste your life to satisfy a selfish and sick desire. You knew it was wrong, but you chose not to think about it. Now you have a lot of time to think about it. Don't waist it. Write it down so that the rest of us might learn how to stop you people. You are a disgrace to the human race.

