

# No mercy for killer rapist

A Manenberg man, who admitted to raping and killing a two-year-old girl he was looking after, has been sentenced to two life terms in jail. Willie Simons, 34, murdered his friend's toddler daughter Zaakierah Hendricks in February 2016 while her mother was out at a party.

On Wednesday, Simons asked Western Cape High Court Acting Judge Murray Bridgman if he could address the court and he was led to the witness box handcuffed. A toothless Simons looked nervous as he glanced up at the gallery, the judge, and then down at his hands. Prompted by his lawyer, Michael Sebueng, he said haltingly: "I just want to say sorry for the thing that I did. If I could bring that person back... but I can't bring that person back." Asked by prosecutor Marésa Engelbrecht why he waited two years to confess, he said: "I was too drunk and scared. I don't know, sorry ma'am."

Sebueng said the fact that his client pleaded guilty, did not waste the court's time, did not give the family the agony of a prolonged trial, had no previous record, and showed genuine remorse should help the Judge deviate from the prescribed two life sentences for the rape and murder of a child.

He then asked for 25 years as whatever sentence his client gets "will not bring back the poor child".

Judge Bridgman asked Engelbrecht what she thought the sentence should be and said "two life sentences".

Addressing Simons, the judge said: "The accused raped the deceased in the anus, choking her which caused her death. DNA connected you to this crime.

"That is all that stood between you and walking away from this crime. It took the accused two years to come forward. The obvious thing that strikes me is he is a man who has feelings and is shocked at his own actions. We can even describe him as kind and decent.

"I do not think it was premeditated. You took the deceased into your care as a kind motive. You have betrayed the trust of society. Now you will have the time to think about what is good in yourself and what is bad in yourself." The two life terms will run concurrently.

Outside court, Zaakierah's father Marco Daniels said he is happy with the sentence. "It won't bring my child back, but it helps. We can try to move on. Even when he was arrested, I could not believe it was him. Even when he said it, I could not," he said. "We travelled on the train together, knew each other. He coached my son in soccer. Zaakierah is gone and we will never know why."