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Convicted killer Anthony Sowell, 51, took the stand to apologize to the families of the 11 victims and the jury. Sowell has been tearful all week during various testimonies that could result in a death sentence.

The man who murdered 11 women and dumped their remains around his Cleveland property said he was sorry and can't explain what happened. During his 30-minute statement, Sowell stopped short of a direct appeal to the jury to spare his life.

The defendant at first was hesitant, but his gravelly voice became stronger as he discussed his life. He smiled lightly when he described the best job he ever had as a cook at the Cleveland Indians' stadium.

The statement was Sowell's first public comment since the investigation into the bodies at his house began nearly two years ago. It came after a social worker Lori James-Townes testified that Sowell had an "extremely horrible" childhood marked by abuse, an absent father, and seeing nieces whipped almost daily – saying it "had a horrific cumulative effect" on him.

The jury that convicted Sowell last month must decide whether to recommend the death penalty or life in prison without chance of parole. The sentencing phase of his trial began last week and could wrap up in several days.

James-Townes, a social worker in Baltimore, testified about Sowell based on her interview with him and her review of thousands of family records.

She narrated a family tree going back generations that includes sexual abuse, promiscuity, absent fathers, epilepsy, heart problems, drug abuse and mental illness.

Recapping an abusive home situation that was highlighted by defense witnesses last week, James-Townes said Sowell told her that he had been sexually abused as a youngster and saw young nieces whipped almost daily while naked and tied to a railing for minor infractions such as dishes left dirty.

"This was an extremely horrible house to grow up in," James-Townes testified.

Under cross-examination by assistant Prosecutor Pinkey Carr, the witness said there was no documented evidence of abuse, sexual or otherwise, of Sowell as a youngster.

The report that Sowell had been sexually abused came from him, James-Townes testified.

Police said Sowell lured the 11 women to his home with the promise of alcohol or drugs. Police began finding the remains, including a skull, just before Halloween 2009 after officers went to investigate a woman's report that she had been raped there.

Many of the victims had been missing for weeks or months and some had criminal records. Their remains were disposed of in garbage bags and plastic sheets, and then dumped in various parts of the house and backyard.

Two women from Sowell's past told very different tales of their interactions with the convicted serial killer, as testimony continued in the sentencing phase of his trial. Sowell's niece, 50-year-old Leona Davis, testified that she and her siblings lived with Sowell and his family in East Cleveland after their mother's death.

They did not live in the Imperial Avenue home where the dead bodies were discovered.

Davis told jurors that on a nearly daily basis she was sexually assaulted by Sowell. She was testifying on behalf of the defense in what appears to be an attempt by attorneys to show the bizarre conditions of Sowell's childhood.

Davis went on to say she was physically abused by Sowell's mother and grandmother, who at times tied her naked to a banister and beat her with an extension cord.

Sowell sat motionless as Davis testified that after the sexual assaults by Sowell began, her older brother and another uncle also began having sex with her on a daily basis.

Sowell's high school sweetheart, and the mother of his now 32-year-old daughter, took to the witness stand to describe a much different scene. The woman, who is not being identified by Fox 8 News, told jurors she and Sowell met during their high school years at Shaw High. The

woman told jurors that she was 17 and he was 18 when they began a relationship.

Defense attorney John Parker asked the woman, “How did he treat you?”

“Very good,” the woman replied.

“Did you enjoy each other?” Parker continued.

“Yes,” the woman answered.

The woman went on to say how she discovered she was pregnant when Sowell went away to serve in the Marines. The woman moved into Sowell family’s house on Page Avenue when their daughter was two-years-old.

“Did he act the same after he came out of the Marine Corps?” asked Parker.

“No,” replied the woman. “He always stayed upstairs and became quiet.”

When asked about her reaction to the bodies being found at his home, the woman told jurors, “It still really hasn’t sunk in. I don’t think... it’s just unbelievable.”

The jury must decide if Sowell will spend the rest of his life in prison without the possibility of parole or be given the death penalty.