

Victim's nephew testifies in South L.A. serial killing case; Witness' aunt, Anita Fishman, was the third victim. Chester Turner is accused in the deaths of 10 women, one of whom was pregnant.

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In a halting, pained account, a man told jurors Wednesday about his last conversation with a loving but troubled aunt hours before she became the third victim of one of Los Angeles' worst serial killers.

"She was upbeat, happy," Jason Sulzbach said of Anita Fishman, who was killed in 1989.

Sulzbach was 10 years old. He described his aunt as hooked on drugs, part of the crack cocaine epidemic that swept the nation in the late 1980s. She lived erratically, staying with the boy and his parents, then disappearing without warning for weeks on end.

"She was a troubled soul. She had drug issues," Sulzbach testified. "You could see it in her eyes."

The testimony came on the second day of the trial in Los Angeles County Superior Court of Chester Dewayne Turner, who is accused of killing 10 women, one of them pregnant, in South L.A.'s Figueroa Street corridor. Drug addiction and its degrading legacy of life on the streets dominated the testimony, which settled into a routine: Prosecutors called relatives, those who found the corpses and investigating officers to describe each crime scene.

Turner has denied killing anyone.

His defense is expected to argue that he was a drug dealer who sold to street prostitutes, many of whom paid in trade.

He has been linked to each victim by DNA evidence, and he faces the death penalty if convicted.

Turner allegedly preyed on most victims in a 30-block area around Figueroa Street known for drug crimes and violence. He is charged with strangling each one, and leaving their partially naked bodies in vacant buildings, alleys and stairwells in the 1980s and '90s.

Det. Victor Pietrantonio, who helped investigate the crimes, testified that the area where Turner allegedly operated was

"fairly active with narcotics and prostitution activity."

Several other police detectives testified about the early investigation into the Fishman case, all sitting beneath projected blow-ups of gruesome crime-scene photos. Det. Joe Callian testified that the body was bloated when it was found in an alley near 98th and Figueroa streets.

The prosecutor, Deputy Dist. Atty. Truc Do, at one point turned to Sulzbach, who remained in court after he testified, and asked if he was all right. In obvious distress, Sulzbach responded with a sigh and an affirmative nod.

One row back in the courtroom of Judge William R. Pounders, Mildred White, who had the day before identified one of the victims as her daughter, sat quietly, occasionally making notes. At one point, Lynette Ernest, White's granddaughter, wept silently, convulsing as emotion overcame her.

"I don't care what they say my mom did. She didn't deserve what she got," she said.

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