

Illinois teen gets life for killing sleeping neighbors

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ST. LOUIS (AP) -- A judge sentenced a southern Illinois teenager to life in prison on Friday for sneaking into his neighbors' home and shooting them dead while they slept, rejecting his attorneys' pleas for a punishment that could have allowed the teen to taste freedom again in his late 60s. Fayette County Judge Michael McHaney sentenced 16-year-old Clifford Baker to life in prison without the possibility of parole for killing John Mahon, 60, and Debra Tish, 53, on Aug. 4, 2010 while they were asleep in bed. After Baker killed the two he broke into another neighborhood home and punched a woman there in the eye. He fled after the woman's husband confronted him by name and was arrested a short time later. The judge handed him additional 30-year prison terms for the home invasion charges. Baker, who was convicted in August, apologized in court Friday for the pain he caused to his victims' families and to his community, Loogootee, which has roughly two dozen residents and is about 80 miles east of St. Louis. "Basically, he said he was accountable for what went on, and that he didn't mean to cause the families that kind of pain and anguish," Baker's lead defender, Monroe McWard, told The Associated Press afterward. "He gave a sincere apology." Mark Wykoff, another of Baker's attorneys, said they plan to appeal the conviction or to try for a new sentence that would give Baker the "opportunity to show he reformed his ways." "There was an opportunity to treat Mr. Baker other than an adult perpetrator of a double-homicide crime. The judge rejected any consideration of that," Wykoff said. "I don't disparage him for doing that. But I think Mr. Baker is a juvenile, and there should be other factors taken into consideration." Stephen Friedel, Fayette County state's attorney in Vandalia, did not immediately return telephone messages seeking comment. At trial, Friedel offered no explanation for jurors as to why Baker attacked his neighbors.

But McWard said Baker was in a haze the night of the attack because of a drug for depression he had been prescribed two weeks earlier. He was put on the medication after he shot himself in the torso and killed his family's dog.