**The First Woman Executed in Virginia in 100 Years**

She had an IQ of 72 but they called her a ‘mastermind’.



Teresa Lewis via findagrave.com

Teresa Wilson Bean Lewis was born on April 26, 1969, and grew up poor in southern Virginia. Her parents both worked at the Dan River textile mill in the small town of Danville, in Pittsylvania County, about 150 miles from the capital of Richmond.

She left this world under poorer circumstances, on September 23, 2010 — the [first female executed](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/10/19/lisa-montgomery-execution/) since 1912 in the State of Virginia. State prosecutors [called her a mastermind](https://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/22/us/22execute.html?_r=0), but the theory was shaky and the evidence supporting it inadequate.

Her crime was terrible but several facts about Teresa’s case would sway most people toward a sentence commuted to life imprisonment. The facts did not sway the authorities, particularly the Governor of Virginia.

**Marriage and a baby**

Teresa Wilson was in a hurry to grow up. She’d never done well in school so at 16 she dropped out. A man in her church named Bean took a liking to her, and she began keeping company with him. At 16, she was pregnant and after a shotgun wedding, became Teresa Wilson Bean. She had her only child, a daughter named Christie Lynn, in 1984.

Her marriage didn’t last. Finding herself divorced and out of work, Teresa began using both alcohol and painkillers. Christie grew up in an unstable home with a mother who was, according to her former mother-in-law, “not right.”

After years of struggling with addiction and moving between a series of menial jobs, Teresa found both a stable job and a husband in 2000. The Dan River mill, where her parents had worked, was hiring. She took a job turning fiber into yarn and became attached to her recently widowed supervisor, Julian Clifton Lewis, Jr.

**A second marriage**

Within three months Teresa had moved in with Julian and his three grown kids — Jason, Charles, and Kathy. She now had three stepchildren, a teenage daughter, and a household to run. She quit her job at the mill and married Julian in 2000, about six months after they first met.

In December 2001, fate handed a horrible blow to Julian Lewis. His oldest son, Jason, died in a car accident. Jason, 27, was a US Navy veteran.

For Teresa, however, Jason’s death was the catalyst for a series of poor decisions that eventually led to deceit and murder. Julian, devastated by the loss of his son, received a small consolation. Since Jason had been in the service, he’ purchased a life insurance policy for $200,000 and all of it went to his dad.

Julian Lewis put the money to good use, purchasing a manufactured mobile home and five rural acres.

Less than a year after Jason’s death, the second son, Charles, was preparing to leave for active duty in Iraq. He took out an insurance policy for $250,000 and named his father the primary beneficiary. Teresa, who had a good relationship with all the children, was named a secondary beneficiary.

**Sex, lies, and greed**

Just a couple of months after Charlies had gotten quarter-million-dollar life insurance policy, Teresa was shopping at Walmart when she met two young men. Matthew Shallenberger, 21, and Rodney Fuller, 19, began seeing more of Teresa and the relationship quickly became sexual. She was 11 years older than Matthew.

Teresa got together with both men in various places for sex, but she was in love with Shallenberger. On one occasion, she met them in the Walmart parking lot and brought her daughter, Christie. They went to separate cars where Teresa had sex with Shallenberger and Christie hooked up with Fuller.

On October 23rd, she handed over $1,200 to her new boyfriends, Shallenberger and Fuller, in a murder-for-hire scheme. The two first tried to assassinate Julian on the road but failed.

Charles, who had been training with the US Army Reserves not far away in Maryland, came home for a visit in October 2002. He stayed with his dad and stepmom in their new manufactured home.

The day before Halloween, the two would-be killers tried their murder scheme again — this time with some help. In the evening, Teresa let them into the mobile home by unlocking a back door.

**The home invasion**

Matthew Shallenberger found Julian in the bedroom and shot him multiple times. Meanwhile, Fuller located Charles in a second bedroom and raised his shotgun. He fired multiple rounds, hitting the young man in the face, shoulder, leg, torso, and arms. Charles died instantly.

Julian, despite being shot at close range in several places, did not die right away. He held on for 45 minutes until he eventually bled to death. Teresa did not call for help during that time but instead rifled through her husband’s wallet, taking $300 and dividing it with Matthew and Rodney.

The police arrived at the bloody scene just moments before Julian died. His last words were, “My wife knows who done this to me.”

Teresa told the police she didn’t know the killers. She maintained that it had been a home invasion by strangers.



Teresa Lewis at her trial. Photo: murderpedia.org

**Follow the money**

Teresa wasted no time, trying to access her late husband’s accounts within days of his death. Her actions were amateurish and clumsy. The police had a confession from her within a week and quickly located her accomplices: Shallenberger and Fuller.

It soon became apparent the motives were as old as the hills: lust and greed.Teresa had seen how wealthy Julian became with the first life insurance policy and decided that with both Charles and her husband out of the picture, she could have everything.

Her accomplices had separate trials and were given a merciful sentence: life imprisonment. Teresa was not so lucky. She was sentenced to death for first-degree murder with aggravating circumstances (more than one murder within three years). Under Virginia law, her crime carried an automatic death sentence.

**Whose idea was this?**

The jury found Teresa guilty, agreeing with the prosecution that called her the “mastermind” behind the murder scheme.

There were several problems with this tidy story, however. Teresa has a full-scale IQ of 72. Shallenberger, her new boyfriend, had an IQ of 113. The 21-year old admitted that Teresa was in love with him and he could easily manipulate her.

A 72 IQ is not mentally challenged, but it is close. Although Teresa had been able to maintain employment at low-paying jobs, she lacked the basic intelligence to cover her tracks after the murder. She immediately began asking everyone, from the insurance company to her husband’s employer, for money.

She was sentenced to die, despite 7,300 appeals for clemency from citizens, including author John Grisham. As a lawyer and activist, Grisham noted that Lewis would never have been called a mastermind and thatShallenberger put the idea in her head.

Lewis’s father also testified, explaining that Teresa was a kind person who had taken over the duty of caring for her invalid mother for years. Psychiatrists concluded that in addition to a low IQ, Teresa had dependent personality disorder.

On the other side, the Virginia Attorney General, Ken Cuccinelli, concluded that, “the brutal nature of the crimes …[and] Lewis’ callous, manipulating, adulterous, greedy, egregious behavior” were the reason she deserved the death penalty.

It is not clear why adultery would play any part in the decision to put someone to death, and several onlookers following the case noted the state (and Cuccinelli in particular), judged Lewis more harshly because she was a female who was unfaithful to her husband.

**‘I love you, and I’m very sorry’**

The arguments against sending Teresa Lewis to the execution chamber were strong.

She was mentally incapacitated, showed a great deal of remorse, and was a born follower. She was also the victim of an ambiguous law that stipulated the [death penalty](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/10/19/lisa-montgomery-execution/) for “more than one” killing within a short period. Furthermore, her co-conspirators who pulled the triggers received life sentences.

Her actions were horrible, and she deserved life in prison. But Teresa Lewis was no mastermind.

She was put to death at the age of 41, at the Greensville Correctional Center in Virginia.

Her last words were to her stepdaughter, Kathy Lewis, who was there to witness her death on the other side of a two-way mirror. Teresa looked over as the poison flowed into her veins and said, “I just want Kathy to know that I love you, and I’m very sorry.”

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