

*** NEWS RELEASE ***

GONZALO CURIEL CONVICTED OF MULTIPLE COUNTS OF MURDER AND TORTURE OF SALINAS CHILDREN

April 24, 2018

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Monterey District Attorney Dean D. Flippo announced today that on April 23, Gonzalo Curiel, age 20 of Salinas, was convicted by a jury yesterday of two counts of first-degree murder and two counts of torture in the November 2015 deaths of Shaun Tara, Jr., age 7, and Delylah Tara, age 3. The jury found true special circumstances that the murders were committed by torture and that Curiel committed multiple murders. Curiel was also convicted of one count of torture and one count of child abuse causing great bodily injury for abuse he inflicted on the children's half-sister, called "Jane Doe," who was rescued by a Plumas County deputy at age 9 and lived to testify against Curiel at his trial.

Shaun, Delylah and Jane Doe moved into the Salinas apartment of their father's cousin, Tami Huntsman, in April 2014. The children's mother was killed in a car accident in December 2013 and their father was subsequently incarcerated, leaving him unable to care for them. Huntsman, then age 38, lived with her husband and their three biological children in a small apartment on Fremont St.

In November 2014, then-16-year-old Curiel, a friend of Huntsman's oldest son, moved into their apartment. Shortly after moving in, Curiel began a sexual affair with Huntsman. Huntsman's husband left her when he discovered the affair. In April 2015, Huntsman's oldest son was arrested and placed in a juvenile facility, leaving Curiel and Huntsman in charge of the household. Jane Doe told the jury how things changed after Huntsman's son's incarceration. She testified that while the children were previously treated well, received enough food, and were not beaten, Curiel and Huntsman both began to physically abuse and starve them following Huntsman's son's arrest.

Jane Doe told the jury that she and her siblings were punched, choked, kicked, hit with belts and other objects, refused food, zip tied to their beds or chairs, and locked in a dark, cold, cement bathroom, often without their clothes, for hours or even days. The children did not understand why they were being punished. When the children were locked in the bathroom, they were forced to sit still in a corner that Curiel selected for them, and were prohibited from moving, crying, or huddling together for warmth. If they were caught, Curiel and sometimes Huntsman would beat them or spray them with cold water.

Jane Doe testified that she tried to run away twice because of the abuse. On one occasion, after Curiel caught her trying to escape out the bathroom window, he and Huntsman pulled her into a bedroom and Curiel beat her with a belt while Huntsman held her down. During the beating, Jane Doe's forearm and shoulder were broken. Huntsman and Curiel refused to get medical treatment for Jane Doe's displaced shoulder and arm fractures, which caused them to heal improperly. A doctor testified that Jane Doe's broken shoulder bone was almost about to pierce through her skin at the time she was rescued.

Curiel and Huntsman also broke Jane Doe's jaw and several of her fingers, which also healed improperly. Jane Doe saw her younger brother and sister with bruises and cuts all over their small bodies. Jane Doe said that Curiel and Huntsman started feeding them less and less, and eventually stopped feeding Jane Doe altogether, but she never knew why. She testified that the children were often beaten for urinating on themselves, because they were scared to ask Huntsman and Curiel for permission to use the bathroom.

The evidence presented at trial suggested that Shaun and Delylah died around Thanksgiving 2015, from a combination of blunt-force trauma and severe malnutrition. Jane Doe testified to a severe beating in the bathroom, at which point she saw Shaun and Delylah unable to walk, talk, or open their eyes. She overheard an argument between Curiel and Huntsman that night where Curiel said it was all his fault and that he should just leave. Huntsman begged him to stay. Jane Doe never saw her brother or sister alive again.

Huntsman and Curiel would tell the other children, and family members who asked, that Shaun and Delylah had been put up for adoption. In fact, Huntsman and Curiel placed their dead bodies into a 35-gallon blue plastic storage container, put the container in the trunk of Huntsman's SUV, and abruptly packed up and moved in the night to Northern California, never telling anyone that they planned to leave.

Curiel and Huntsman traveled to several cities in the following weeks, including Dunnigan, Shingletown, Redding, Salinas and ultimately Quincy in Plumas County, where they stayed with a relative of Huntsman. That relative ultimately discovered that Jane Doe was a severely abused child, and she and another friend who verified the abuse called Plumas County Child Protective Services to report it.

On December 11, 2015, a deputy from Plumas County Sheriff's Office discovered Jane Doe locked in Huntsman's SUV, on the floor of the backseat, covered in a pile of clothing. She was bruised from head to toe, and her arm, shoulder, jaw and fingers were broken. Jane Doe also had pressure sores on her back and legs that a pediatric specialist testified she never sees in children who are able to walk. The deputy arrested Huntsman and Curiel for child abuse.

Two days later, Huntsman's mother called Plumas County Sheriff's Office to inquire about Shaun and Delylah. The detective sergeant who spoke with her said that his office had no knowledge of who those children were. After a frantic, daylong search, authorities discovered that Huntsman had rented a storage unit at a Redding self-storage company on December 4, 2015. It was inside that storage unit where Redding police officers found the decomposed bodies of Shaun and Delylah, still inside the blue storage container. Fingerprints on the container matched both Curiel and Huntsman. Curiel's fingerprints were found on a roll of duct tape in Huntsman's SUV that matched duct tape on the container.

Curiel's jury trial began on April 2 and ended on April 23, following more than two weeks of testimony from 56 different witnesses. The jury deliberated for approximately one hour and 20 minutes before finding Curiel guilty on all counts.

Huntsman pleaded guilty to all charges in February and will be sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole on April 25. Curiel's sentencing date will be selected on April 30. Although Curiel will technically be sentenced to life without the possibility of parole, recent legislation will allow him a mandatory parole hearing after serving 25 years of his life sentence because he was under the age of 18 at the time the murders were committed.

The successful prosecution of Curiel and Huntsman would not have been possible without the cooperation of Shasta County District Attorney's Office, Plumas County District Attorney's Office, Salinas Police Department, Plumas County Sheriff's Office, Redding Police Department, Shasta County Sheriff's Office, Butte County Probation Department, and Yuba City Police Department. The lead investigators on the case were Christina Gunter of Monterey County District Attorney's Office and Gabriel Gonzalez of Salinas Police Department. The prosecutors would also recognize Detective Sergeant Steven Peay, Detective Christopher Hendrickson and Deputy Tyler Hermann of Plumas County Sheriff's Office for their extraordinary efforts to save Jane Doe and locate her siblings.