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Jury deadlocks in case of man accused of throwing daughter off cliff in Rancho Palos Verdes [Updated]

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(<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/.a/6a00d8341c630a53ef0120a61783c1970c-pi>)

A jury has deadlocked 6-6 in the case of a former airline baggage handler accused of throwing his 4-year-old daughter to her death off a cliff in Rancho Palos Verdes in 2000.

[Updated at 3:21 p.m.: On Monday, six jurors favored finding Brown guilty of second-degree murder, while six others favored involuntary manslaughter.]

Prosecutors alleged that Cameron John Brown, 48, killed his daughter, Lauren Sarene Key, because he was upset at having to pay child support to his ex-girlfriend, the girl's mother.

It was the second time a jury had been asked to determine whether Lauren's death was murder or merely a tragic accident, as he contended.

A trial in 2006 ended in a mistrial after the jury was unable to reach a unanimous verdict. During the seven-week retrial, prosecutors alleged that Brown never wanted his child and initially urged her mother, a British immigrant, to get an abortion after he learned she was pregnant.

When she refused, he tried to have her deported and fired from her job, prosecutors said. As Brown later struggled to pay \$1,000 a month in support payments, he concluded that killing the girl would hurt her mother and ease his money troubles, Deputy Dist. Atty. Craig Hum told the jury during closing arguments.

Defense attorney Pat Harris said his client initially harbored suspicions that the baby was not his, but later, after a paternity test, embraced his daughter. He even sought a court order to allow him to spend extra time with her, Harris said.

Other than Brown, there were no witnesses to the girl's fall on Nov. 8, 2000. Brown told authorities that his daughter slipped and fell while throwing rocks off the 120-foot cliff at Inspiration Point. Sheriff's investigators became suspicious of him when he seemed to lack emotion after the incident.

They questioned why a father would take his child to such a secluded, dangerous spot and let her roam. Hum and Harris both argued that the physical evidence supported their different version of events.

-- Jack Leonard

Photos: (Top) Sarah Key-Marer holds back tears while she is comforted by jurors outside the Criminal Courts Building in Los Angeles after the case against ex-boyfriend Cameron Brown, who is accused of murdering their daughter Lauren, ended in a hung jury. (Mark Boster/ Los Angeles Times) (Bottom) Cameron John Brown listens to attorney Lara Yeretisian during closing arguments Sept. 15 at his murder trial. (Al Seib / Los Angeles Times)

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