

## Ex-Cop Convicted Of First-Degree Murder In Wife's Death

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### 2007 Cop Domestic Violence murder Blair Christopher Hall



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An ex-police officer accused of drowning his wife in their backyard jacuzzi was convicted Tuesday of first-degree murder.

Blair Christopher Hall, 52, was expected to be sentenced to 25 years to life in prison for the June 7, 2007, death of his wife, Cristi Lynne Hall, authorities said.

After a first trial ended in a deadlock, the Riverside County District Attorney's office chose to try the case again. This time, jurors deliberated just over two days, breaking for the holiday weekend, before returning with a verdict within

minutes of re-convening this morning.

Hall, who had been free on \$350,000 bail, was immediately taken into custody by Riverside County sheriff's deputies. He proclaimed his innocence to Superior Court Judge Gary Tranbarger before being led away, while his three adult daughters, who were at his side for both trials, cried.

Sentencing is set for July 22.

"I think the verdict shows that the jury was able to see through the defendant's lies and deception and to know that he brutally murdered his wife and deprived his daughters of their loving mother," Deputy District Attorney Burke Strunsky said.

Strunsky, who also tried Hall the first time, said this time they put two additional experts on the stand, including an expert in homicidal drowning. This expert was able to show why Cristi Lynne's injuries were "inconsistent with an accident," Strunsky said.

"Possibly its tougher for both sides. A feeling that somebody in law enforcement, less likely to commit any crime. Obv. Very sad, just being a member of law enforcement when someone has taken an oath to uphold the law and commits such unspeakable violence. A jury will take that into consideration and what their knowledge could be in covering up a homicide."

Defense attorney Steve Harmon told City News Service the verdict was difficult to accept.

"It's tough," he said, declining to disclose whether he and co-counsel Paul Grech intend to seek a new trial. Hall was first tried in May 2010, but jurors in that case deadlocked 8-4 in favor of guilt,

resulting in a mistrial. The current trial got under way on May 12.

Strunsky said that putting an officer of the law on trial is always difficult, for both sides.

“There’s a feeling that somebody in law enforcement is less likely to commit any crime,” the deputy district attorney said. “Obviously it’s very sad when a member of law enforcement -- someone who has taken an oath to uphold the law and commits such unspeakable violence. A jury will take that into consideration and what their knowledge could be in covering up a homicide.”

According to the District Attorney's Office, the former lawman attacked his 47-year-old spouse in their Jacuzzi, forcibly submerging her in the water until she died.

The defense maintains Cristi Lynne's death was accidental. She had an \$800,000 life insurance policy at the time.

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According to Strunsky, on the day the victim died, she and her husband were using the hot tub adjacent to the pool behind their Calimesa home to clean up because the master bathroom was being renovated.

Strunsky alleged that Hall grabbed his wife, slammed her head twice into the cement edge of the hot tub, “causing two deep lacerations,” then pinned her elbows and hands behind her back and plunged her underwater.

He said the woman managed to let out a scream, heard by her neighbor, then-24-year-old Lindsay Kay Patterson, who peered through a hole in the 6-foot block wall separating the two properties.

According to Strunsky, Hall had one hand on his wife's back and another on her head, with the victim face-down in the water in her bathing suit.

Patterson turned away, initially believing the couple was engaged in some kind of sex act, but a moment later looked again to make certain no one was in distress.

Patterson testified that the second time she looked through the hole, she spied the defendant leaning back in the water, seemingly relaxed. His wife was not in sight.

Hall would drag his spouse out of the Jacuzzi dead a few minutes later.

The defendant testified that he had gone into the house to use the bathroom and awaken their teenage daughter, returning to the spa to find his wife unconscious in the water.

He said he tried to perform CPR, but she was unresponsive. She was pronounced dead at a Banning hospital.

Dr. Mark Scott McCormick, a forensic pathologist, testified that the “constellation of injuries” gave every indication of foul play, pointing to the hemorrhaging in her eyes and mouth, as well as the lacerations, abrasions and contusions on her head, face and arms.

Hall described his nearly 29-year marriage as generally happy, testifying that he and his family were doing well financially.

The defendant was a San Bernardino police officer for 12 years before taking medical retirement. He was later hired to work as a police chief in two Idaho towns. Had a felony conviction for misuse of public funds for personal use and served nine months in Idaho.