

Hi Dan,  
I just wanted to send you a quick note to thank you again for everything you did to bring my son home. We are so happy. It has been a long hard journey and I am so glad it is finally over. Sonny is doing well, adjusting to his freedom and getting to know his kids again. He took last week off and is looking for a job this week. I truly believe that he would not be home if we didn't have you on the case. Having him home is a miracle and you are a part of that miracle. I don't know how to explain the appreciation we have for you. You saved his life and I will forever be in your debt. Thank you so much!!!

Thanks again for the great job you did!

Evelyn

**VALLEY & STATE**

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# Man acquitted in tot death

15-month-old had been left in his family's care

By Michael Kiefer

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Michael Maldonado was accused of killing a 15-month-old girl left in his family's care in December 2002, and he sat in jail for six years as his case crawled through the justice system.

Maldonado, 28, of Phoenix, faced the death penalty if convicted of beating Brianna King to death.

But on Thursday, a Maricopa County Superior Court jury found him not guilty of first-degree murder and six counts of child abuse.

Nonetheless, sheriff's deputies put him back in handcuffs and refused to let him talk as they led him back to jail to be discharged.

His family had plenty to say.

"They found him guilty before they found him innocent," said his father, Michael Anthony Maldonado Sr., who said he had sold everything he had to pay for his son's defense.

Maldonado's grandmother Virginia Romero said she took out her pension and mortgaged her house.

"We knew he was innocent," she

said.

On December 9, 2002, Melisa King dropped off Brianna at the house where Maldonado lived with his parents and his own children and his girlfriend, a friend of King's.

Then, according to court testimony, King went to score methamphetamine and party with a new boyfriend. She had a record with Child Protective Services, and that agency had sent police to check on Brianna's well-being with King just four days before King dropped the child off with the Maldonados.

Maldonado Sr. claimed the child was lethargic when she arrived, and that she spent most of her time there sleeping. On Dec. 11, 2002, Michael Maldonado Jr. found the child not breathing and performed CPR while waiting for paramedics.

Medical examiners found that Brianna had more than 50 bruises on her tiny body, and a head injury.

Maldonado was charged with seven counts of child abuse in the beating death of Brianna King. He first went to trial in 2007, but that jury acquitted him of one of the charges and hung on the others.

He went back to trial in April, and a record number of prospective jurors passed through Judge Rob-

ert Gottsfield's courtroom — 1,733 — between then and July, when the prosecutor and defense attorneys seated the final jury.

Deputy County Attorney Jason Kalish maintained that Maldonado beat the child to death and then hid her from the family for three days.

Defense attorney Dan Raynak claimed that King was hiding from CPS and had a history of abusing her daughter.

The trial ended in late October, the jury took a break, and started deliberating on Tuesday.

On Thursday, however, Gottsfield dismissed one of the jurors for doing his own investigation, which is against court rules. Barely 10 minutes after an alternate juror was called back, the panel arrived at the verdict: Not guilty on all counts.

King was not present. Brianna's paternal grandmother was irate at the acquittals.

"Can you imagine suffering for six years?" said Charlotte Mendoza. "There's no justice."

But the jury thought otherwise. And so did Maldonado's family. His father said that they repeatedly told police that they were mistaken.

"They didn't want to listen to us," he said.