

U.S. Parents Guilty in Death of Adopted Russian Boy

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YORK, Pennsylvania — A U.S. couple has been convicted of involuntary manslaughter but acquitted of murder charges in the death of their 7-year-old adopted Russian son.

Two Russian TV stations covered Friday's court session, and a vice consul with the Russian Embassy was on hand. Russian officials closely watched the verdict, especially after a string of similar cases threatened adoptions.

The jury found Michael Craver, 47, and his wife, Nanette, 55, guilty of involuntary manslaughter, child endangerment and conspiracy.

Their adopted son, Nathaniel Craver, born Ivan Skorobogatov in Chelyabinsk, suffered from fetal alcohol syndrome, attachment disorders and regular injuries after he was adopted.

The parents said they took the boy to a string of doctors and therapists because of bizarre, self-abusive behavior that left him badly bruised. In August 2009, he suffered a fatal head injury that took his life five days later.

The Cravers insist that their son ran headlong into a stove the night before they found him unconscious.

Self-harm is a "hard concept to grasp if you haven't lived it, like Mike and Nanette did," defense lawyer Rick Robinson told jurors Friday.

But prosecutors said the skinny, blond boy's 19-kilogram body told a different tale, not one of self-abuse but of chronic abuse and neglect.

"Common sense tells you that he didn't do this to himself. Common sense tells you that they did this to him ... and they prevented him from getting medical care," prosecutor Tim Barker said in his closing arguments.

Prosecutors believe that Nathaniel died from repeated blows to the head, but never said which parent allegedly delivered them. For their part, defense lawyers presented something of a joint defense, calling friends and medical experts to testify for both spouses during the nearly two-week trial.

The case has drawn the attention of Russian authorities. They say that at least 17 Russian children have died in domestic-violence incidents in their American families. A Tennessee woman stoked tensions last year when she sent an allegedly violent 7-year-old boy she had adopted back to Moscow alone with a note about his problems.

Nathaniel and his twin sister, born prematurely, spent their first year in a Russian hospital and another six months in an orphanage.

Nathaniel weighed 1.6 kilograms at birth and never moved out of the fifth percentile in weight for boys his age. The prosecution's forensic pathologist, Dr. Wayne Ross, listed starvation as a factor in his death. But the defense disputed that, arguing that his weight never varied by more than 450 or 900 grams.

The couple, jailed since their February 2010 arrests, was released Friday night on \$50,000 bail each. Defense lawyers will ask for time served at the Nov. 18 sentencing, while prosecutors may seek more time on the multiple felonies. The involuntary manslaughter charge carries a 9- to 16-month prison term.

"They've lost their house. They've lost their jobs. They've lost their daughter, and their son. They've lost everything," public defender Clasina Houtman and other members of the defense team said after the verdict.

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