

ABUSER GUILTY IN TWO SLAYINGS

North Bay Shore man convicted of first-degree murder in 2004 killing of wife, mother-in-law

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Christopher Reynart's slaying of his wife and mother-in-law was not the impassioned act of a man out of control, but rather the tragic, final dose of domestic violence doled out by a chronic wife beater, a jury decided Friday in convicting Reynart of first-degree murder.

A Suffolk jury deliberated for about four hours in Riverhead before finding Reynart, 36, guilty of murdering his wife, Karina Reyna, 30, and her mother, Azucena Villegas, 63, at their North Bay Shore home Easter morning in 2004.

Reynart, who was unshaven and wore an untucked, white button-down shirt over blue jeans, dropped his head and closed his eyes upon hearing the verdict. About a dozen relatives and supporters of the victims quietly wept and held hands in the courtroom.

Assistant District Attorney Nancy Clifford said she will recommend life in prison without parole when Suffolk County Court Judge Barbara Kahn sentences Reynart on March 8.

"Whatever sentence they give him, I will still carry the pain inside," said Shirley Rivera, Reyna's sister, who is raising the couple's two young sons.

Rivera said she will wait until the boys are older to explain the verdict to them. "They've already lost their mother, so I don't think it's the time to give them the news that they basically lost their father today," she said outside court.

Reynart's attorney, Michael Brown, of Central Islip, had argued that Reynart suffered an extreme emotional disturbance at the time of the killings and was therefore guilty of the lesser charge of manslaughter instead of murder.

Brown said it was an "extremely difficult" defense that jurors may have had difficulty grasping. "Generally, the people in this county think if you did something wrong, you've got to pay for it," said Brown, who called the case a tragedy. "There's no winners in this type of scenario."

One juror, who declined to give his name, said Reynart's history of abusing Reyna - including a January 2004 whipping with a computer cord that forced Reynart out of the couple's home because of an order of protection - showed a "pattern of violence" that they felt led to the murders.

"I just don't think there's any justification for what he did," said the juror, 44, of Setauket. "He'll probably spend the rest of his life trying to justify what happened."