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Man convicted of killing daughter, keeping body in freezer

Clarence Butterfield, 57, tortured his 21-year-old daughter, tied her up and stuffed her in a motor home freezer, where she suffocated. He lived in the RV with her body for two years after the murder.

By Ann M. Simmons, Los Angeles Times

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An Orange County man was convicted Thursday of torturing and murdering his adult daughter and keeping her body in a freezer in his recreational vehicle.

Clarence Eugene Butterfield, 57, formerly of San Clemente, was found guilty by a Santa Ana jury of one felony count of special-circumstances murder during the commission of torture and mayhem, and one felony count of assault with a firearm, according to the Orange County district attorney's office.

On Oct. 8, he faces a sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Butterfield tortured his 21-year-old daughter, Rebekah Butterfield, in 2006 by repeatedly shooting her in parts of the body that would not immediately cause fatal injury, such as the leg, foot and knee, prosecutors said.

He then tied the naked woman's ankles together, bound her hands behind her back and stuffed her in a 5-foot-long horizontal freezer in his motor home while she was still alive.

She eventually suffocated in the airtight freezer. Butterfield lived in the motor home with his daughter's body in the freezer for two years after the murder, prosecutors said.

He was arrested in Orange County in 2008 for obstructing a police officer, and was subsequently sent to Nevada on an unrelated criminal warrant from that state.

Workers at a company that had towed Butterfield's RV discovered the corpse while they were cleaning the vehicle, prosecutors said. Orange County sheriff's deputies arrived to find a badly decomposed body wrapped in several layers of plastic.

Prosecutors said the investigation revealed Butterfield had a history of violence. He stabbed and shot his daughter several times in the years before the murder, but the crimes were never reported, they said.

He also beat and bound his ex-wife, sometimes forcing her to remain in a closet, prosecutors said.

Butterfield, who was indicted in December 2009, denied killing his daughter. He told investigators that he found her dead in the motor home and "kept her body in the freezer because he thought no one would believe him."