

# Jury to Get 1978 Murder Case of Child, 5

■ **Trial:** Panel must decide whether Marcos and Beatriz Morales killed daughter Lisa during a ritual to exorcise demons 14 years ago.

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SANTA ANA—Jurors were asked Tuesday to decide whether Marcos and Beatriz Morales killed their 5-year-old daughter Lisa during a ritual to exorcise demons from her body 14 years ago, or, as defense attorneys argued, the child died or disappeared in some other way.

The Tustin couple face first-degree murder charges in a trial short on physical evidence, since arrests were made more than a decade after her 1978 disappearance and the little girl's body has never been found. Charges against the parents were filed in 1991 after Beatriz Morales Quintero, 22, recalled through psychotherapy that her parents had killed her sister and then buried the body, wrapped in plastic, at a Mexican beach.

After hearing from 12 witnesses, including Quintero and Lisa's sister Monica Morales McLellan, Deputy Dist. Atty. Lewis R. Rosenblum said in his closing argument Tuesday that the only reasonable conclusion from the evidence is that Marcos Morales, 56, abused Lisa over many months and ultimately tortured and killed her in the family's bathtub, and that Beatriz Morales, 47, assisted her husband in the crime.

But defense attorney Salvator Chulla maintains that all the stories conflict and that Lisa may well have died in an accident, of pneumonia, or not at all.

Orange County Superior Court Judge Richard L. Weatherspoon will instruct the jury this morning, and a verdict is expected early next week in the trial that began Oct. 1.

The prosecution contends that



Lisa Marie Morales, 5, in a family photo taken in 1978 or earlier.

**'No. 1: is she dead? If she's dead, how did she die? Did she choke on something? Did she slip and fall in the bathtub? Was it an accident? Was it on purpose? You can't have any question in your mind. You can't speculate, and you can't take the prosecutor's word.'**

SALVATOR CHULLA  
defense attorney

upon returning from state prison in 1977, Marcos Morales launched a pattern of abuse against Lisa that included beatings, burning with cigarettes, locking her in the car and in a darkened bathroom, and calling her the devil. Rosenblum on Tuesday called Marcos Morales "a vindictive little man" who hated Lisa because he believed that she was not his child, and said Morales persuaded his wife to assist with his torture of Lisa by saying she

had evil demons inside her.

"It is unreasonable to believe that child died in any other way but at the hands of another," Rosenblum said, citing the disappearance of the body, the other signs of physical abuse, and the sisters' testimony that both parents were in the bathroom screaming about demons the night Lisa died. "This isn't about religious fanatics, this isn't about people who believe in Satan. This is a man who has taken vengeance on a little child."

But Chulla tried to cast doubt on the story, pointing out that Lisa's two sisters differed as to when the bathroom incident occurred and offering dozens of possibilities as to what might have really happened to Lisa.

"No. 1: is she dead?" Chulla asked the jury. "If she's dead, how did she die? Did she choke on something? Did she slip and fall in the bathtub? Was it an accident? Was it on purpose?"

"You can't have any question in your mind. You can't speculate, and you can't take the prosecutor's word."

Further complicating the case was a third lawyer, representing Beatriz Morales, who said that the case was about "domination and control" and that if his client was guilty at all, it was only of involuntary manslaughter.

Neither Quintero nor McLellan attended closing arguments, but the couple's youngest daughter, 15-year-old Erica, sat behind her parents during part of the court session.

"They say a lot of different things. Everything's all mixed up," Erica Morales said in an interview. "I want my parents to be free."

"I don't even know if she's dead," Erica said of Lisa, positing that Beatriz Quintero made up the entire story out of anger at their father. "I know I have a sister named Lisa, and I don't know where she is."