

# Man not guilty of molestation

## Jury acquits Orchards stepfather of charges

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The Columbian

A 49-year-old Orchards man has been acquitted of charges that he molested his young stepdaughter hundreds of times over a 6½-year period.

A jury of 11 women and one man deliberated for five hours Thursday night before delivering not guilty verdicts on each of nine charges in the case.

Prosecutors alleged that the man had his first sexual contact with the girl, now 17, in 1984 when she was 8 years old.

She told the jury that her stepfather then told her, "You better be quiet and not say anything to anybody."

The girl testified coolly that her stepfather forced her to perform an increasing variety of sex acts as the years progressed, most often on the living room floor or in his bedroom, oftentimes while her brother was sleeping in the next room. She said he occasionally

forced her to watch pornographic movies and then duplicate the sexual acts depicted in the film. Police confiscated some 10 sexually explicit films from the family residence.

The girl estimated the two engaged in sex an estimated 650 to 1,300 times between 1984 and 1990.

Prosecutor Walt DePuy called the girl a "burden-carrier" who accepted the sexual abuse in secret rather than endanger her mother's marriage to the man.

She finally told a co-worker at a local fast-food restaurant of the alleged abuse and then ran away from home in July 1990. She has been living in foster care ever since.

The stepfather was charged with a series of crimes: Two counts of first-degree statutory rape; two counts of second-degree statutory rape; three counts of third-degree rape of a child; and two counts of first-degree incest.

But defense attorney Steven Thayer told the jury that the girl and stepfather were the central players of a "family in conflict."

He said the girl desperately wanted out of the home and away from her stepfather, whom Thayer described as "strict and dominating." The attorney pointed out what he claimed were inconsistencies in dates and circumstances in the teen-ager's story. He said she falsely accused the man of molesting her so she could escape.

The stepfather testified Thursday — often tearfully — that he never molested the girl. "Did you ever have sexual contact with her?" Thayer asked. "No I did not," the man replied.

In closing arguments, Thayer told the jury that the stepfather "may be a lot of things. He may be ignorant. He may be uneducated. He may have been abusive to his stepchildren. But he wanted them to grow up to be good kids."

He said the girl's story was "preposterous," in part because there was no testimony that anyone else ever suspected or stumbled in on the hundreds of sexual encounters.

The jury left the courtroom about 5 p.m. Thursday and returned with a verdict at 10 p.m.