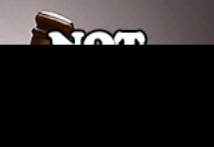


Jurors Acquit Man Of Molesting 9-Year Old Girl **News**

Posted by : Randy

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CLAYTON, Mo. (AP) - A Pennsylvania man who claimed he was drunk and went to the wrong hotel room has been acquitted of molesting a 9-year-old girl who was in one of the room's beds.



After just three hours of deliberation, a St. Louis County jury acquitted Daniel T. Hughes on Monday on all his charges — three counts of child molestation and one of sodomy — relative to an alleged incident at the upscale Ritz-Carlton in Clayton.

Hughes, of Conshohocken, Pa., was in the area on a business trip the night of March 6, 2011. Fresh off a night of drinking, he ended up in bed with a 9-year-old girl after a hotel clerk erred in giving him the wrong room key.

The girl woke up, ran to her parents in an adjoining room, and told them immediately that a man had touched her inappropriately. The parents found him still in the room, standing in his underwear.

The strange circumstances by which he arrived there could not be used as a defense. But they served as a looming backdrop.

In the more than weeklong trial, Hughes' lawyer, Scott Rosenblum, chipped away at the prosecution's version of events. He pointed out how the girl's description of what happened changed over time. He asked why authorities never delved into specifics.

And in what may have been a turning point in the trial, he had a retired Clayton police detective acknowledging that he overstated in a police report Hughes' supposed confession.

"We're thrilled," Rosenblum said after the verdict was announced Monday evening. "It's been a long three years for him."

Hughes' mother, who declined to give her name, said "the truth came out."

"My son is a good man," she said, while adding, "We're sorry for the (victim's) family in the worst way."

The girl's parents and other family quickly left the courthouse afterward, with a victim's advocate saying they were not ready to speak with the media.

In her closing argument, Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Kathi Alizadeh told jurors that the key piece of evidence was the testimony of the girl, now 12.

"This little girl immediately told her parents, 'He touched my pa cha cha,' and she has not wavered from that," she said.

Alizadeh said Rosenblum was introducing other issues to distract the jurors, and she reminded them that being drunk or confused about a girl's age are not defenses against child molestation.

Hughes, since fired from his job at Enterprise Fleet Management, told police he believed he was

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going to his own room and that the person in his bed was a young woman who his drinking buddies had brought back. He had been out with them earlier but arrived separately at the hotel around 3:30 a.m.

While Hughes did not take the stand in his own defense, jurors watched the video of the detective interrogating him. Hughes was slurring his words and demonstrably confused at points.

The detective left the room while Hughes called his father, but the cameras still rolled. Hughes insisted nothing sexual happened, and he gave the same account he would later give the detective.

Hughes eventually acknowledged cuddling and demonstrating interest in his bedmate. He said they never talked and the lights were off. He could not say whether the person was or was not wearing underwear.

It was only at the end of the interrogation that Hughes was told the girl's age. In obvious shock, he buried his head in his hands and started blurting out questions.

When the retired detective, Jeff Brinkley, took the stand, Rosenblum quizzed him on the supposed admissions that he ascribed to Hughes in the police report.

For many long, tense minutes, Brinkley tried to find those words in a transcript of the interview. He couldn't.

He was left trying to explain how he relied on Hughes' nonverbal gestures and nodding to what he himself suggested might have happened.

The officer asserted confidently: "He didn't say he didn't." It drew gasps from people in the courtroom.

"In 31 years of practicing law, that's one of the most frightening things I've ever heard a police officer say," Rosenblum told jurors in his closing argument.

Several could be seen nodding.

"He lied and you caught it," Rosenblum told the jurors. "If you can't trust the messengers, you can't trust the message."

Brinkley also insisted that Hughes did not seem intoxicated, when Rosenblum asked Brinkley whether he would stake his credibility on that.

"Brinkley appears to be the only man in the world who doesn't believe this man is intoxicated," Rosenblum told jurors. "Why?"

He pointed out Hughes' head nodding came at the end of three hours of questioning, while he was going on 27 hours without sleep. Police then took his blood-alcohol content about eight hours after the incident and six hours after being taken into custody. It registered a 0.079 percent, which is just about the legal limit for driving.

Earlier on Monday, a toxicologist testified that Hughes' blood-alcohol content would have been three times as high at the time of the incident, based on his 13 drinks that night.

Rosenblum also mentioned the civil suit that the family has pending against the hotel chain and its property owner. He said jurors have "5 million reasons" why they should question the family's account, making reference to the amount the lawsuits are seeking in punitive damages.

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Alizadeh questioned the methodology used in the toxicologist's estimates. And she said the civil suit was a separate matter and another example of Rosenblum trying to distract jurors.

To find Hughes guilty on the four counts, jurors had to believe beyond a reasonable doubt that he touched the girl's breasts and vagina for his own sexual gratification, both over and under her clothes. He faced a minimum of 10 years in prison.

Rosenblum warned, "We do not speculate people into the penitentiary."