

Sec. 1

## Jury Awards Woman \$350K In Insurance For Husband's Death

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After just more than an hour of deliberation Thursday afternoon, a jury found for the plaintiff, Michelle Torrez, awarding her \$350,000 from the American Life Insurance Co. for the death of her husband Daniel Torrez.

Ms. Torrez said she had no idea how she stood when the jury left the courtroom, but she is just glad the trial is over and hopes to put the situation behind her.

Testimony in the trial began Wednesday in the U.S. Courthouse in Tyler before a jury of four men and four women with U.S. District Judge John H. Hannah Jr. presiding.

The problem arose on Dec. 21, 1996, when her husband was fatally shot in the head at their Palestine residence.

Almost two and a half years later she found her future resting in the hands of eight people she had never even met.

The defense alleged Daniel Torrez committed suicide, and therefore, the insurance would not be paid. Defense attorney William H. Blair brought in four witnesses to try and convince the jury that this death was not an accident.

The victim's father, Joe Torrez took the stand Wednesday. Testifying that he and his son were very close and often shared their problems, the elder Torrez

testified that his son revealed some problems he and the plaintiff were having. The younger Torrez then told his father that Ms. Torrez had threatened to leave him if the problems continued, the father testified.

"I felt that he may have actually committed suicide, but there was nothing to prove that he did," jury member Kathy Duke said.

James Hankins, Ms. Torrez' lawyer, used his witnesses to prove that Daniel Torrez did not express any suicidal characteristics at the time of his death and that the victim had no reason to take his own life.

Key testimony for the plaintiff came when several of Daniel Torrez' friends labeled him as a cheerful man, but one who was often careless with firearms. Additional doubt toward suicide surfaced when information from Hankins revealed the victim's blood-alcohol level was .06 at the time of his death, well below the legal limit of intoxication.

The late Torrez paid his life insurance payments for more than 20 months leading up to his death.

Hankins said Torrez invested in the insurance so his children would be taken care of in the future. "The idea of him taking his own life and leaving his kids with nothing after paying all of that money is preposterous," he said.

"Now I will finally be able to go home and tell my children that their father did not kill himself," Ms. Torrez said.