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DOUBLE MURDER NETS 44 YEARS

District Attorney Larry D. Morse II announced today that Julio Cesar Bonilla was sentenced to 44 years to life in state prison for the 2009 murders of William & Maria Cisneros. Chief Deputy District Attorney John Goold prosecuted the case.

Bonilla, age 55 of Mexico, was convicted in February, 2011 by a Merced County Superior Court jury of the first degree murder of William Cisneros, a retired Merced City Schools employee and the second degree murder of William's wife, Maria Clara Cisneros. The jury also found that Bonilla had personally used a knife in the commission of the offenses and that he had committed theft of a vehicle and a firearm by taking the victims' Jeep Cherokee and a .30-06 hunting rifle when he fled to Southern California. Bonilla was caught by Sheriff's detectives in Louisiana where he was living with a relative.

During the investigation, detectives uncovered evidence that Bonilla had married Maria Clara Cisneros while they were both in Mexico and then travelled with her to the home she shared with her existing husband, William Cisneros in Merced County. Despite being married to Maria Clara, Bonilla represented that he was her cousin. After living with the victims for three years, Bonilla stabbed both people to death and loaded up their car with various items that he took to Victorville, California where he stayed with relatives a short while before fleeing to the state of Louisiana.

During trial testimony it came out that Bonilla told detectives he had been held in Merced against his will, a fact disputed by the prosecution. Bonilla also testified, that he stabbed William Cisneros in self-defense after William killed Maria in a jealous rage. A Merced County jury did not believe the testimony and convicted Bonilla of the murders after several days of deliberations. Chief Deputy Goold called the case, "One of the strangest set of facts I've ever seen in a murder case."

Superior Court Judge Ronald Hansen sentenced Bonilla to 26 years to life in prison for William Cisneros murder and a consecutive 16 years to life for the murder of Maria Clara Cisneros. Two more years of state prison were added for the vehicle and firearm theft. In total, Bonilla must serve 44 actual years in state prison before he is eligible for parole, at around age 99.