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'Precious Doe' mom pleads guilty in Mo.

AP Associated Press

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The mother of a young girl known as "Precious Doe" pleaded guilty Thursday to second-degree murder in the death of her 3-year-old daughter, whose decapitated remains were found in a park and left unidentified for four years.

Michelle Johnson, 32, of Muskogee, Okla., also pleaded guilty to child endangerment, abandoning a corpse and tampering with evidence. She admitted that she knew her daughter, Erica, was badly injured but did nothing to help her as she lay dying after allegedly being abused by her stepfather.

As part of the plea agreement, Johnson will testify against her husband, Harrell Johnson, in his February trial for first-degree murder, assistant prosecutor Tim Dollar said. Prosecutors plan to seek the death penalty against him.

Prosecutors allege Harrell Johnson was high on drugs when he kicked his stepdaughter, Erica Michelle Marie Green, in the head because she wouldn't go to bed. They say he left her to die, then later decapitated her.

Michelle Johnson also acknowledged that she helped put the child's body in a park and moved part of the body to throw off investigators.

Erica's body was discovered in a Kansas City park in 2001, and her head was found several days later. The child was dubbed "Precious Doe" and activists kept attention on her case.

The couple was arrested in Muskogee, Okla., after police got a tip from a family member linking them to the death. The girl was identified in May 2005.

In exchange for Michelle Johnson's plea, prosecutors will recommend she serve a total of 25 years, Dollar said. If she had been convicted of second-degree murder at trial, Johnson could have been sentenced to life in prison. Her sentencing hearing is set for March 20, 2008.

She was in prison in Oklahoma for larceny when Erica was born in 1997, reports show. Erica almost immediately went into foster care and remained there until Johnson took her to Kansas City while looking for work.

A funeral was held for the child in December 2001, drawing hundreds of people who didn't know her name. The body was exhumed in July 2003 so experts could make a lifelike bust of what she may have looked like. She was buried again.

(This version CORRECTS mother's age)

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