

\*I/V Mercer, Theodore 10/09/09

Interview by Detective Ross Diskin:

On 10/09/09 I interviewed Theodore Mercer at Angel Valley. The following is a transcript of that interview:

Det. Diskin: What's your full name?

T. Mercer: Uh, Theodore Mercer. Martin, Theodore Martin Mercer

Det. Diskin: M-e-r-c-e-r?

T. Mercer: Yea, M-e-r-c-e-r

Det. Diskin: Okay. What's your date of birth?

T. Mercer: [REDACTED]

Det. Diskin: Okay. (Inaudible) was telling me that you, you're the guy that sets all this stuff up?

T. Mercer: Yea, my wife and I do that.

Det. Diskin: Let me get you out of the sun so you're not standing right by the (Inaudible). Here just sit there

T. Mercer: Okay, this way

Det. Diskin: I'll stand in the sun. So what's the gentleman's name that you set this up for?

T. Mercer: Michael Hamilton

Det. Diskin: Michael Hamilton

T. Mercer: Yea he's the owner of Angel Valley

Det. Diskin: Okay and do you work here?

T. Mercer: Uh no I don't

Det. Diskin: Okay

T. Mercer: I live on the property. I used to work for Angel Valley and now they just hire me to do the sweat lodges and set that up.

Det. Diskin: Okay. How many times have you set up a sweat lodge?

T. Mercer: Six or eight times now, maybe more, I don't remember you know right off hand

Det. Diskin: Okay.

T. Mercer: I'm usually involved with being a fire tender too.

Det. Diskin: So you're the, the fire guy?

T. Mercer: Yea

Det. Diskin: Okay. Uhm and the fire, my understanding was outside the, the sweat lodge?

T. Mercer: Yea

Det. Diskin: And then you heat up the rocks with the fire and then bring the rocks in the

T. Mercer: into the lodge and then they pour water on it which create the steam and the heat

Det. Diskin: Okay, okay. So you've done this six or eight times? Have you been involved with the process every time?

T. Mercer: Yes

Det. Diskin: Okay. How many times have you seen there be a problem? Like

T. Mercer: Uh, three times now and it was only with James Ray. There were people that do sweat lodges, uh we thought a whole different energy, a whole different thing

Det. Diskin: Okay

T. Mercer: this is so intense and, and they open the door a little more often it seems like

Det. Diskin: So it's not as hot in there?

T. Mercer: Well it does get as hot I think yea we, we try to make it as hot as possible

Det. Diskin: Mmm Hmm

T. Mercer: but it's just how many rocks they call in is how hot it gets so if it gets too hot then they only get two or three and if they want it real hot they get ten or twelve

Det. Diskin: Okay. And the three times with James Ray, what specifically does he do different than the other people?

T. Mercer: Uhm I think he stays in a bit longer. He, he has a bit longer of a sweat lodge and it starts in the middle of the afternoon and then uhm as far as I know that uh people aren't on a vision quest before they go in the sweat lodge. They usually go on a vision quest so they fast for two days and they don't drink enough water and uh so and that's what these guys do, they go on a vision quest and then at the end they come into the sweat lodge the next day.

Det. Diskin: Okay. And that's different than the other, the other guys don't have to fast first where

T. Mercer: Uh no they usually don't eat anything that day

Det. Diskin: Okay

T. Mercer: But not two days ahead of time. You know usually they just drink lots of liquids and eat lots of fruit and stuff to prepare themselves (Inaudible) they don't have a big, heavy stomach so they'd throw up a lot and after the sweat lodge they eat

Det. Diskin: Okay. And is there, any of the times that you've done this with Mr. Ray or anybody else, is there ever any kind of like a safety plan if somebody gets sick, what you're gonna do or

T. Mercer: No there isn't

Det. Diskin: Okay

T. Mercer: and that's what really concerned me about these guys because they're, they're, it's so intense, you know. It gets, there's so many people in that, and uh you know they, if there was somebody qualified I would believe they would have called the ambulances the other two times people were here but you know, nobody knew what to do I don't think. At least that's my opinion. And my wife and daughter were talking last night that they heard somebody tell James that there's two people passed out in the back but he said there's only one more round; they'll be okay. Nobody pulled them out.

Det. Diskin: So he was, he was told; your wife and daughter heard

T. Mercer: They were sitting at the door and heard that. If you talk to my wife that's, that's what they told me.

Det. Diskin: Okay.

T. Mercer: But yea, there's, there's a bit; you know they don't say that you have to stay in the lodge or you know that you can't come out but they, you know, do encourage you to tough it out because this is gonna bring you to the next level of consciousness or something, I don't know.

Det. Diskin: Okay. Uhm, what is your wife's name?

T. Mercer: Uh Debra, D-e-b-r-a, Mercer

Det. Diskin: And what's a good phone number for her?

T. Mercer: Uh [REDACTED]. That's a house number.

Det. Diskin: Okay. And what's your daughter's name?

T. Mercer: Sarah Mercer.

Det. Diskin: How old is she?

T. Mercer: She's 17.

Det. Diskin: Okay. And can she be reached at the same phone number?

T. Mercer: Yes

Det. Diskin: And uhm obviously you can be reached at that phone number?

T. Mercer: Yea

Det. Diskin: Okay. Okay. Uhm

T. Mercer: The only thing different that happened on this sweat lodge than the other sweat lodge is we used this wood that was here that they cut out; see the wood that's over there? We used that instead of natural tree wood, that's, and but we when we have

Det. Diskin: Some of its pressure treated?

T. Mercer: Yea and we have

Det. Diskin: I see that one is

T. Mercer: yea and we have, well no it's, it's, see the logs over there that we use for log cabins?

Det. Diskin: Oh I see, yea

T. Mercer: That's, that's what we used and we've use it before but in mixture with other wood too but this time

Det. Diskin: Is that treated with anything?

T. Mercer: I have no idea

Det. Diskin: Okay

T. Mercer: I, I don't know what that wood is. Uh Michael, the owner of the place, he's a, he's a, he's a contractor so he should know what, you know (Inaudible)

Det. Diskin: Okay. I'll check into that. Uhm but there, was there, is there ever a flame inside of there?

T. Mercer: No

Det. Diskin: One of the, I talked to uhm one of the people this morning, I was in there, and he said there was something that James threw on there that was, he said it was Sandlewood and it burned, I mean there was a flame briefly

T. Mercer: Yea, there was

Det. Diskin: Have you, did you see that or have you ever seen anybody actually start an open flame in there?

T. Mercer: No, no

Det. Diskin: Okay, uhm, what do you think happened, what do you think went wrong?

T. Mercer: Uhm, my opinion is these people are from the city and they're not used to being in Arizona for one thing and uhm so they came out here, they spent two nights outside without food or wat; well I don't know how much water they had but I'm sure there wasn't enough. You need to drink a lot of water out here and they uh dehydrated.

Det. Diskin: Okay

T. Mercer: They just, you know they; to be in a sweat lodge for that long you need to be in fairly good condition

Det. Diskin: I would think so

T. Mercer: Yea

Det. Diskin: what, how long were most of the people in there?

T. Mercer: Well some of them were in there the whole time.

Det. Diskin: Which was how many hours?

T. Mercer: Oh from three to about two hours, two and a half hours maybe. I kinda lost track of time.

Det. Diskin: So it was still during the day when this happened?

T. Mercer: It started at 3:00

Det. Diskin: But when, you know, the, the (Inaudible)

T. Mercer: Ambulances (Inaudible)

Det. Diskin: Yea

T. Mercer: Yea uhm it was about five or so I think, that's when I was talking to this guy we figured out it was right around 5:00

Det. Diskin: Okay

T. Mercer: But what happened is after the sweat lodge was over everybody came out and you know everybody's exhausted cause of the heat so they're laying around and my wife looked in there and saw there was three people still laying in there so we ripped open the back of the lodge, pulled, pulled them out and saw that their faces were blue so I had told her to call the ambulance, you, you know call 911 right now; we started CPR on the two in the back and then, so I stayed with those guys and

Det. Diskin: Let me back, let me make sure I understood that. Everybody got out but there was still

T. Mercer: Three people left laying in there

Det. Diskin: And they were unconscious?

T. Mercer: They were unconscious. One of them I don't know if was completely unconscious but he couldn't get himself out.

Det. Diskin: Okay. Was anybody else still in there?

T. Mercer: No.

Det. Diskin: Okay

T. Mercer: Er, yea, that's why she, after everybody leaves she looks in there and checks to make sure

Det. Diskin: What was James doing at this time?

T. Mercer: He was out, out walking around and talking to people and, and fortunately he gets to sit right by the door so every time the door opens he gets relief but the people in the back aren't getting any relief. And uhm fifty, or fifty-five people in there it's very unusual size of a, a sweat lodge, it's usually you know, fifteen is a large sweat lodge. And we build this, this kiva here, this sweat lodge specifically for him cause we know he brings in a whole bunch of people. (Inaudible)

Det. Diskin: Okay. So you, you are the one that pretty much notices there are still people in there?

T. Mercer: My wife did

Det. Diskin: Your wife did?

T. Mercer: My wife did and then she went and tore out the back and then yelled at me and then we came and uh pulled those guys out. Started CPR.

Det. Diskin: Okay, uhm, what, did you call 911?

T. Mercer: My wife did

Det. Diskin: Your wife did?

T. Mercer: Yea.

Det. Diskin: What was James doing while you were trying to call 911?

T. Mercer: Uh he was sitting in a chair over here in the shade and uh actually my wife was back there first, she talked to somebody else and then went and talked to James Ray and then I came over and found that they were blue and we decided it was time to call for an ambulance. But he, he didn't know what to do with it.

Det. Diskin: Did he say anything when you, did you talk to him at all afterwards?

T. Mercer: No, no I was too busy

Det. Diskin: I can imagine. Did he go over there and check on the people?

T. Mercer: Yea he was there looking around and, and you know I mean he was very concerned I'm sure but uh I don't know what he could have done unless he was CPR trained and that was all being taken care of at that time

Det. Diskin: So you guys were doing CPR until the paramedics got here?

T. Mercer: Yea. There was like four or five of us that kept on switching off

Det. Diskin: Were there two people or three people that you were working on?

T. Mercer: There were (Inaudible) two people

Det. Diskin: Okay

T. Mercer: The other person that we pulled out, he was breathing but uh wasn't really very coherent but he was okay so we just left him alone (Inaudible) in a (Inaudible) position and left him there. There was other people watching him (Inaudible) a whole bunch of people

Det. Diskin: What the uh, the fire guy, the first guy on scene, what he told me this morning was he shows up and sees you know you guys working on those, those people so they go over there and deal with that. And they didn't know that there were people still inside and he said that he thought that there were people still inside but they found out later that they had to go back in and get (Inaudible)

T. Mercer: No they, by the time they got here everybody was out

Det. Diskin: Okay

T. Mercer: Yea, we had pulled everybody out and that's why the sweat lodge looks like it does cause we opened this side and opened up that side

Det. Diskin: Is it normally not open like that?

T. Mercer: No it's only opened in the front, that's the only opening there is

Det. Diskin: Okay. And that's where James sits?

T. Mercer: yea he sits right by the door because that's, traditionally that's where the fire, I mean where the sweat lodge guide sits, is right there

Det. Diskin: Okay. And who was responsible for deciding when you need more rocks?

T. Mercer: James

Det. Diskin: Okay. And so he would tell you bring me a certain number of

T. Mercer: Yea, he'd say I want four grandfather, it's called grandfathers

Det. Diskin: Oh

T. Mercer: So he'd you know call for seven or, or eight and you know however many he thought (Inaudible)

Det. Diskin: Did you think that he was calling for more than normal?

T. Mercer: No

Det. Diskin: Okay

T. Mercer: Actually there was, he was calling for less than normal

Det. Diskin: Less than normal

T. Mercer: Yea cause in the years before he'd get, you know, ten, twelve rocks every time and this time he, a couple times he only asked for four you know

Det. Diskin: Okay. Did you see anybody throw anything on, on the rocks or did they put something on the rocks?

T. Mercer: No, the only thing we do with the rocks is we uhm, before I start the fire, and I start the fire at least two hours, two and a half hours ahead of the time; you know actually it was three hours this time cause I took so long, but we put a pinch of tobacco and some sage, it's an offering to the fire and a, and a prayer that we put on the fire and then we start

Det. Diskin: in fire?

T. Mercer: yea, well right on the rocks and then we, the fire burns it off and I start the fire

Det. Diskin: Okay, uhm, I might have some more questions for you

T. Mercer: Okay

Det. Diskin: (Inaudible) these things come up cause you seem to be the best source of information as far as what happened cause you were, you know (Inaudible)

T. Mercer: uh huh, I've done it before

Det. Diskin: Yea

T. Mercer: And all these, all these blankets and everything are stored in this pump house over here and uh the blankets are usually up off the ground on the table, you can see there's a table in there. And the tarps and the other things are, are usually laying on the ground.

Det. Diskin: Okay, so the tarps are stored on the ground over here?

T. Mercer: Yea, in that, in that little building you could see

Det. Diskin: You think there could have been anything on the tarps that would cause any kind of problems?

T. Mercer: Well there is rats around there and I saw some rat poison on the, on the ground. You know there's chunks of rat poison but uh you know that's been there, I mean there's been rats in there ever since I've been here (Inaudible)

Det. Diskin: Never had a problem?

T. Mercer: No.

Det. Diskin: All right. Something you probably know more about what happened than we're gonna know

T. Mercer: I (Inaudible) so, yea

Det. Diskin: Well you know we'll check with the Medical Examiner because his, his work on the victims and see what he,

T. Mercer: Uh huh

Det. Diskin: see what he can determine

T. Mercer: Yea

Det. Diskin: but it sounds logical what you've explained that you know it's too hot

T. Mercer: Yea and not enough water yea. Cause you know, I mean people don't drink enough water the way it is

Det. Diskin: Does anybody encourage them to drink water while they're doing this?

T. Mercer: Uh well there's, there's water, there's a water bucket and a water with lemon and electrolyte bucket so and a lot of cups so there's plenty of water here but you know I mean you can't get hydrated in a few hours, you need to be drinking a day or so ahead of time to make sure you're hydrated enough. And I don't know what happened during the vision quest, you know, I wasn't part of that.

Det. Diskin: What is that?

T. Mercer: That's when they come and they uh, everybody, these guys pick a spot out in the, out amongst around the land where they stay for two days. They come and they make a circle around themselves and they just stay in this one spot for two days and, and then you fast you know, you, it's, it's like a uh, I guess I don't quite know how to explain it. It's, it's a spiritual type of ceremony that you go through

Det. Diskin: And that goes on the two days before this?

T. Mercer: Yea, they, yea they do a bunch of stuff here and then they get them ready and then, what was it? We did this Thursday, so Wednesday, Tuesday night they took the people out and they placed them in their spots and then they spent two nights out there and then Thursday morning they bring them back, give them a small breakfast cause they know they're gonna do sweat lodge so they don't give them too much food

Det. Diskin: Mmm Hmm

T. Mercer: And I'm sure they tell them to drink lots of water, you know, I mean that would just be, I, I'm sure they do but I don't know, you know I wasn't there for that part.

Det. Diskin: Do you think anybody's to blame for this or do you think this was just a tragic accident?

T. Mercer: You know, that's hard to say but

Det. Diskin: Let me ask

T. Mercer: the way, the way they run the sweat lodges is a lot different than other sweat lodges that I've been involved in

Det. Diskin: Okay

T. Mercer: And there's a lot more people in there and it's a bit more chaotic but I don't know if I would wanna say

Det. Diskin: Did you have concerns going into it?

T. Mercer: Yes. I, I mean because the last two years before that, the only reason that we did the sweat lodge is because I haven't worked in a year and then you know they pay be pretty good money but other than that we would have not done it this year because I know that people should have gone to the hospital in previous years

Det. Diskin: Okay

T. Mercer: at least that's my opinion

Det. Diskin: Okay, and James Ray is separate from the people here, is that, he does his own thing,

T. Mercer: Yea, (Inaudible)

Det. Diskin: like rents, rents this out?

T. Mercer: Yea exactly

Ross Okay, uhm anything else you can think of that you think is important?

T. Mercer: No not right off hand I don't

Det. Diskin: Okay, I'm gonna give you my card

T. Mercer: Okay

Det. Diskin: And I'll write my cell phone number on the back

T. Mercer: Were there actually three people who died?

Det. Diskin: No there was just two because the firefighter, you know how it is in a structural

T. Mercer: Yea

Det. Diskin: thing like that, people see things differently, and people see different things. Like he thought that there were three, three bodies up here when he got here.

T. Mercer: Uh huh. Well I know four helicopters left and I heard last night that three people died from one of the paramedics so I so I just

Det. Diskin: Yea and uh that's not the case so we can (Inaudible)

T. Mercer: (Inaudible)

Det. Diskin: we, we checked in on that this morning and it looks like

T. Mercer: just the two

Det. Diskin: two

T. Mercer: two that we pulled out of the back

Det. Diskin: yea, and, and they were probably dead here

T. Mercer: before we even got to them

Det. Diskin: could have been, yea

T. Mercer: That's, that's my feeling cause when I was working on that girl I mean there was no pulse and I'm pretty in tune with energy and people and

Det. Diskin: Mmm Hmm

T. Mercer: there was no feeling there at all

Det. Diskin: How old was she?

T. Mercer: I don't know, I have no idea. I mean she looked like she could have been in her early thirties, like 20

Det. Diskin: Did she appear to be in good, decent shape?

T. Mercer: Yea, she was a thin girl and uh

Det. Diskin: What about James? Did he appear, James is the other, the other one that died

T. Mercer: Oh, no he's a real big guy, had a pretty big belly. I don't know what kind of (Inaudible) people like that are not quite as in shape as, didn't look like he worked out.

Det. Diskin: Okay. Well

T. Mercer: If there's anything else you need please call me

Det. Diskin: Well I do appreciate that

T. Mercer: And I appreciate you guys coming out here

Interview concluded

Fri Nov 06 15:49:04 MST 2009

Apvd C16/0394 DBW