

*I/V Hafstad, Else Det. Willingham C36:

On 10/30/09, at approximately 1240 hours, I spoke with Else Hafstad by telephone. I audio recorded the conversation and the following is an accurate transcript of the interview. For the digital recording please see the CD in evidence.

Respondent: Hello.

Interviewer: Hello, is this Else?

Respondent: Yes it is.

Interviewer: Else this is Detective Shonna Willingham and I am with the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office in Arizona.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: I am following up with some interviews on the Angel Valley Retreat and I know it's got to be getting late over there in [REDACTED] right now.

Respondent: It's not too late it's 20 till 9 so you are fine.

Interviewer: Well is now a good time I can go ahead and talk to you and go through our questions?

Respondent: Sure.

Interviewer: I understand that you trusted your instincts and did not go into the lodge, is that correct?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Smart move. Now we have a set of questions here and I am just going to go through them with you and it will probably take about 30 to 45 minutes. Is that okay?

Respondent: Yes because of time difference it's probably going to be difficult to postpone it anyway. So yeah just go ahead and we will just do it.

Interviewer: Okay all right. Well how did you learn about James Ray?

Respondent: Well I had been to an event before.

Interviewer: Where was that event?

Respondent: I went to an event where you had free introductory in Houston.

Interviewer: Houston Texas?

Respondent: Yeah, that's where I lived at the time. And then I guess that sort of was very compelling so I signed up for and paid for an event that was called Practical Mysticism which was five days in Lake Tahoe and I did that in May and that was a very good self-help kind of week and it was very helpful I learned a lot.

Interviewer: Was that in May of this year?

Respondent: Yeah May of this year, yeah. I did the other one in February and then I went to the one in May and then I signed up for this one and I went and that was probably in October.

Interviewer: So you have been to a total of 3 events?

Respondent: Yeah that was my 3rd one.

Interviewer: Had you ever been in a sweat lodge before or have you ever been inside of a sweat lodge or a sauna?

Respondent: No, I have been in sauna and usually they make me dizzy so I used to going to them and I can sit there maybe 15-20 minutes and then it just gets too hot for me. Well I just didn't think it seemed safe because he explained that he had the hottest sweat lodge that he ever done before and the roof was lower than it had been before and I knew it was about sixty of us. And he explained that you probably had to be prepared to crawl on your hands and knees because you couldn't stand up in there. Well I am an engineer so I just thought safety is one of my areas and I just didn't think it seemed safe and then we had just done these two, I guess it was about 36 hours without food and water and I was on my period and I had kind of been complaining that I had never bled so much in my life before and I didn't know if it was the strain or whatever. But I was dehydrated to start with and I thought to go in there, I wouldn't even last 5 minutes so I just didn't think it was right and I didn't think it seemed safe. And so I just decided I wouldn't go and I thought people kind of felt like, I just thought that it didn't seem safe and that people were being pressure to do stuff. That whole event was different than the two other ones that I had gone to, it felt like a lot of pressure and I arrived at the Angel Valley a little late so I missed the introduction that James Ray had and he must have said something that motivated everybody to have their heads shaved. And so I went up and I watched kind of saw the last two people that were having it done and they asked if I wanted to do it and I just said well it doesn't mean anything to me, it doesn't do anything to me to shave my head so I didn't do that. Then everyday it just occurred to me even that last day that afternoon the girl that died she had had that long hair and then she was one of the many girls that just they went out and did it in the break and then they kind of went straight up to show themselves to James Ray for some kind of an approval and he would have everyone cheering oh that's great and I thought well that's what you get, you get that 10 seconds of cheering and then you sit there with your head shaved. Well I just didn't see the whole value of it for myself. I am always a little wary of mass pressure,

group pressure and it looked like it and it felt like it and the theme was to go beyond where you have ever been before so I thought well why am I not doing this. So I don't know I think it was just, you know ultimately you are responsible for your own, you need to know your own body and your own limits.

Interviewer: Right sure, sure.

Interviewer: I can call again tomorrow when we can do this if this is not a good time.

Respondent: No, no I ask for you to do that because I think you are almost at 9 hours difference or something.

Interviewer: Right we are at 9 hour difference.

Respondent: Yeah so you got me now and so just go ahead; I will try not to ramble on and you just ask your questions.

Interviewer: No, you are fine.

Respondent: Even though I didn't go in I feel so sad about the whole thing so.

Interviewer: Well and the information you just gave me about how you are an engineer and you looked at everything and analyzed it and felt it wasn't safe, I mean that's important for us to know.

Respondent: Well the heat and the pressure and the lowering of that roof, my thing was I didn't go there and I felt guilty about not having gone and so I sat there and I struggled with not having done it and all that and I felt kind of silly at that. It wasn't right for me and that's what I knew but I should have spoken up because I knew there was one lady before we went out on that Vision Quest she asked if she could have just a little bit of water because she needed to take her medicine and James said no and he asked for what's the medicine for and she said it's blood pressure medicine. And so I think maybe she got to have a little water or something and no one was told that we were going to do a sweat lodge afterwards so I don't think all of us really tried to hydrate like crazy when we got back. And I hardly ate anything because I have never been without food and drink or water for that long and I was just drained from, I felt like I had been bleeding so much that I figured if I go in there I don't have anything to go on.

Interviewer: You were already drained.

Respondent: But I was also a bit pissed at James because he knew there were a couple of very obese women and men there and also one with that blood pressure problem and he should have warned people somehow that you know what you are going into, very extreme heat and just go in cautiously. And instead I had two roommates that were I feel nauseous and I feel scared and all that stuff and I thought well then why do you go in there.

Interviewer: That's right.

Respondent: If it's that important to get approval from one man like that then something is wrong.

Interviewer: It's a very good statement, very good statement.

Respondent: Well I just didn't understand it so.

Interviewer: Okay. Well my next question is did you hear anyone talk about or make assurances about the personnel conducting or building the sweat lodge that they were specifically trained or experts, being James?

Respondent: No, we were told that it was a Native American that was building it and his staff was down there and they came back and they said it's hotter than he's ever had it and that was just all, all that I can recall that he said about it and it made people a bit anxious and scared I think and then someone asked how long we would have to sit in there and when he said two to three hours, I thought that's crazy I am not going in there.

Interviewer: Okay. In the days prior to the sweat lodge, what did you have to eat?

Respondent: This one was different than last time because we actually could have bread and so I did have bread. I think it made a difference to me but most of that food was all vegetarian food. And we were encouraged not to eat proteins because we needed to be elevated but I don't know if I cheated but I did eat some, and several people did eat some snacks and we did encourage eating some snacks during the day before we went to that Vision Quest thing. He did supply us with a bag of salt and we were told that we needed to take a teaspoon of salt everyday.

Interviewer: Each day or often were you told to take the salt?

Respondent: Once a day.

Interviewer: Okay. So, one teaspoon each day?

Respondent: And then drink as much as we could kind of keep hydrating but we didn't know about the Vision Quest the day before or something and we didn't know exactly when it would happen. And we were put through a very, for me that was more challenging than anything else was that whole Samurai exercise thing.

Interviewer: The Samurai game?

Respondent: Yeah that was very tiring physically and mentally and James Ray was playing God and that's when I got so scared you know he really thought he was. I just thought Jesus something happened to him, he is totally out there now. I think he is very

wise and he's got a lot of stuff to teach and I really have benefited a lot from his teachings but that week he went over and beyond and there is no excuse for that behavior. I mean I don't know maybe that whole Spiritual Warrior you know I didn't know what I came for and it wasn't explained at all and so I was unprepared for those two things, I wasn't ready for the no food and no water and certainly prepared for, we didn't even have a whistle. If I had known that we were all going to lay out there where there could be snakes and whatever all kinds of stuff, I would have demanded that we all at least have whistle so we could warn someone if we needed help.

Interviewer: Sure.

Respondent: But that was just like, thinking about it afterwards there was no preparation, there was no monitoring, they didn't have anyone come out and look just to check if we were okay in those two days and nights we were out there.

Interviewer: So no one checked on you or anything like that?

Respondent: No, and I think that was totally irresponsible. Lot of people had never been alone in the dark and some hadn't even been out camping before so that's very interesting.

Interviewer: What if anything was discussed for safety procedures if there was a problem inside the sweat lodge or during the Vision Quest?

Respondent: Nothing and you know what when I walked down there, when I saw their helicopter, I started running down there and I felt like something horrible has happened and I saw that war like scene of people mumbling and crying. Although I saw James and Barbara they were just standing there and when they saw me dressed in normal clothes and they realized I hadn't been in there, they both looked at me with surprise like what are you doing all dressed, didn't you go in there and I thought you know you didn't even know that I wasn't in there, I could have been laying dead in the back of that hut without them even knowing it and that's what pissed me off because they saw me and I said I know first aid, I have worked in Red Cross for years I can help here show me where I can go and they just said go back to your room.

Interviewer: You are kidding.

Respondent: No, but the first aid people had arrived, I was going to run over and assist them but they got, it seemed like they got pissed and they just said go back to your room. Well, instead I helped people in the showers and all that but they had no idea that I wasn't even in there so I know they didn't check who went in, did they even count how many were in and how many came out, it's just annoying. I thought so much about this afterwards, you know my mom says I have a guardian angel or something but you know it's always unsafe not checking on people and I am sure they cared but they thought they could sit and spiritually have a guard over us from sitting in their rooms or something, I just didn't get that. I mean you can be spiritual but it has to be a little bit practical and grounded too.

Interviewer: Exactly. And as you were made ready to do the sweat lodge, were you told what you expect and how to respond to any reactions that you might have had?

Respondent: No. The only thing he said that it was going to be extreme and it feels like your skin is about to pop out of your body or something like that and it's going to be as close as you can ever imagine going to your next life or something but it's very cleansing and I remember him saying it's very detoxifying and you will come out of there and your skin will feel like it will be so smooth and it will be like a baby's bottom, I thought yeah I am not here for a beauty treatment. I left and I was angry because I thought he knew that the day or two days before something that lady with blood pressure saying, she said to him you know the only reason why I am doing this is because I trust that and I know that anything you will have us do you have done yourself so I know we will be safe. And I just remember her saying that and then they all went all scared running around, they had 20 minutes to get ready and be in that sweat lodge and it made people not think I think, it rushed them and they didn't think about what they were doing and if they were ready for it.

Interviewer: So they really weren't given a lot of time to think and consider it just go get changed and be there, huh?

Respondent: No, he said actually we are not going to have lunch because I don't want you guys puking all over the floor or the ground so we are going to skip lunch and now see you there, you have got 20 minutes go do it and then everyone was rushing up to get dressed in the clothes to go in there. And I think that maybe for some of the people it must have been why they didn't even think twice about what they were about to do, they were just doing as told.

Interviewer: And do you think that played into the events of all week long how that went that direction?

Respondent: Yes. Not shaving my head, he would make fun of it. So there were four of us that didn't do it then there were three of us and then there were just two of us and he would look right at us and smile. Well some of us that still hung up on our appearances and stuff like that, it's group pressure and I thought well why would I do it now, is it because I feel like he is making fun of me or does it mean something to me to shave my head and I said it doesn't make any sense, it doesn't give me anything to shave it, the only reason why I do it now because I don't want him saying this to me anymore. So I thought no, I am not going to do it. And I know a couple of those girls they were shivering and scared about having their hair cut off and still they were going to die if they didn't and then when they did it, they stood in front of him gleaming like see did I do it and I felt like gees, well what do you think you know they stand there and like little girls getting an acknowledgment or something.

Interviewer: Getting approval.

Respondent: Yes. You know yeah you did great, oh your scalp's wonderful but some of us were still not hearing it.

Interviewer: So did you go down to the sweat lodge at all before people went in or during?

Respondent: No. I actually went to, I slept in the tepee, it was freezing cold, thought hey it's what you pay all that money for. We had no idea how we would be sleeping but I went there and my two other roommates they were getting ready and all nervous and all that and I just sat down on the bed and I said do I want to do this. And so I just asked myself if it's right for me and I just felt like no, and then why would I do it, I would be dizzy in there and what am I proving, nothing really. And so I just thought no it's not safe, it's not going to be good for me, I am not ready for it I am totally dehydrated and I am bleeding like crazy so what good it could do.

Interviewer: Exactly.

Respondent: That's all, there was no magic in it it's just common sense I think.

Interviewer: I think you are right. So you said you heard the helicopters and that's when you went down?

Respondent: Yeah because I went up, I expected more people actually I was so surprised that I was the only one up there. I went to the kitchen area where they had everyone gather after that event in the evening so just went up there and I sat and waited for other people who had decided not to do it as well would show up. But no one ever came so I grabbed the magazine and a book and I just sat around and then I heard the helicopter, watched the first helicopter and I just knew something must have happened and I just ran down there to see.

Interviewer: And after being told to just go back, did you go help anybody or did you go back and what happened next, what did you do next?

Respondent: Well I said well I know first aid I am certified I can help you and then I saw people I knew and then I saw people shivering and babbling and so I went up to the people that I could and I helped them go take their shower and I stood outside their shower making sure they wouldn't faint when they got in the shower sometime. So I went to people's rooms and brought them water and just that's all I could do really.

Interviewer: That's a lot of help.

Respondent: There was nothing I could do other than just hang on and you had all these ambulances, all those ambulances were coming and the helicopters and all that stuff.

Interviewer: Tell me about an exercise that he did with some type of breathing.

Respondent: Some breath work exercise.

Interviewer: Yeah. What was that all about?

(Informal Talk) Else was talking with her daughter.

Respondent: The breath work, yeah I guess it's been researched a lot on that breath work exercise so it's an interesting thing to try. But that's also one of those things where it's not like you go unconscious but I am sure some people could, you breathe really fast and it's kind of like you would breathe as you are getting hysterical. I don't know how else to explain it but you are just breathing and then they have this really loud music and then they walk around and they make sure that if you are not breathing or if you stop doing the breathing, they might come and then they will come and breathe in your air to remind you that you should breathe again and this goes on for not too long I think. It feels like forever and when I got tired of it, I would just take a little break and then I would get into it again. But it does make you, you can see things so you can get in touch with subconscious or something like that and all have different experiences I guess.

Interviewer: During that did James Ray say that he was trained in this or certified or did he make sure that you had a buddy or a partner or what was the setting?

Respondent: Well he had his team there and they were checking on you and I think actually the breath work exercise they do so often, I think probably in most of this from what I have heard is that's normal thing that he does. I remember the first time that I did that same exercise at the Lake Tahoe and then I remember maybe I paid more attention then, at that time he did really explain what to do and not to do and just keep breathing and we will be there and we will help you, you can raise your hand and all that. So I felt that one was a very safe exercise to do because they were attentive to people that if they were freaking out or doing anything. So I think he probably did say the same things in this one, I probably just didn't pay that much attention because this felt safe, you are in totally control about yourself.

Interviewer: Did you fill out any type of medical forms or were you asked about any health issues?

Respondent: No, that's the only thing. That's why it got me angry because a few people flagged that they had some problems and there was never any checking on that anyone. Maybe they did but it was never publicly done. We filled this, we signed these release forms and I have to admit that that happened so fast that pretty much just you can take the time you want to sign it like any document but maybe there was something in there that said something about that but there were never any medical condition, never anything to fill out at first like you would in the doctor's office or something like that.

Interviewer: Right. And obviously you came down when the helicopters were there. So how did you see James Ray respond or react to the people that were struggling and in distress?

Respondent: They just stood there with the team leader and they were already dressed or out of there. That's what surprised me so much, they just stood there and seemed irritated that I came from nowhere not having been in there. So yes, that was I think the other part that I in retrospect thought it was very odd. And then I feel you know when I was up there and that team leader or whatever was there, she seemed to be irritated with me you know made me feel very bad that I hadn't been in there.

Interviewer: You think he should have responded differently?

Respondent: I think he should have welcomed anyone that wanted to help out because we had spent this time together, it would be comforting and he should have said and especially when I said I am certified and I know what I am doing, they should have said yes please go and why don't you give them water or comfort them or something just basic human instead of what should I do sitting in my room, yeah that was arrogant and it's like did they have an experience in there that they hadn't quite gotten grounded at or something. I thought it was an aloof response and I mean I really think they were so surprised to see me walk down there in a sweater and jeans because they had no idea that I wasn't in that sweat lodge.

Interviewer: They didn't, they didn't have any idea then they didn't have any --?

Respondent: No, they had no idea we weren't all in there and I could have just you know that's the thing that pisses me off is I could have been laying in there and they wouldn't have known at all because they had no routine for checking who went in and who came out.

Interviewer: So you were discouraged from helping by being told go to your room. Is there anything else that they did or said?

Respondent: No, they didn't want--

Interviewer: Else what do you think happened down there?

Respondent: Well I think he was trying to break new records, I think he gets excited by going one more step, he is always saying you got to go beyond and beyond and what he felt about going beyond. And I think he just went way beyond and got all caught up in doing it bigger than ever and he didn't think about it, I think he was like a little kid that just got over excited and he forgot everything about safety.

Interviewer: Has anyone talked to you or contacted you to tell you what to say if you are questioned by Law Enforcement?

Respondent: No. I tried to leave very early just because they said that there were reporters and stuff and I have a very senior management position here. So I didn't really

want to be in the papers; in [REDACTED] people don't do unusual things, they are very homogenous.

Interviewer: Very conservative?

Respondent: Yes. And I also was worried that you if CNN or Fox News or something got hold of it they might make something big out of it and if they got hold of the list of people if they found out there was [REDACTED], it would be noticed and then they would probably make a big deal out of it.

Interviewer: That would cause problems for you.

Respondent: Well I am a single mother of two children and that was also one of the reasons why I didn't want to take a risk in that lodge because if anything happened to me then it would have been very irresponsible and selfish I thought. There's nothing I could experience in there that would excuse that.

Interviewer: Good for you.

Respondent: So I made sure I could drive away. As soon as my phone picked up I called to see but they hadn't heard anything so I didn't say anything.

Interviewer: I think that's great and they won't find out who you are or what you are from us so.

Respondent: Well that's fine. You know these things blow over. I am not ashamed of being in that, I think it's great I think a lot of people learn a lot from him but you also have to know what kind of a group you are in.

Interviewer: And know what part to take, what part to say no I am not going to use that.

Respondent: Yeah. And they never told you have to but the whole thing with shaving the head and the whole pressure and pushing on the honor and the extremeness of everything that if you don't do it then, you know you have no idea how many people came up to me just during those days and wondered why I wouldn't shave my head and that made me think why on earth this is so important that I don't shave my head and I thought is there something with me and I thought no I actually prefer myself with long hair and that's all. I don't want to return to work with a shaved head.

Interviewer: Why is it so important to them that you shave your head?

Respondent: Yeah. So that's the only thing that made me realize that people actually died in that Sweat Lodge and that girl that died in there I thought did she sit in there longer just to make sure that she wasn't a wimp or wasn't going; you know there is a saying that always you have to play full on.

Interviewer: That's James Ray's saying?

Respondent: Yeah you have to play full on, you play full on in life, you play full on because if you don't play full on, you are kind of getting your toes in, you are kind of not really wanting to do it and you are not totally getting into life. And so I think that girl she just shaved her head that same day and she stood there gleaming with pride and wanting acknowledgment so did she sit there feeling sick and knowing that this wasn't right when I am thinking I better just stick it out a little longer, little longer. You know that's pressure, that's pure.

Interviewer: I would not be surprised that you are pretty accurate and you are aware there has been three deaths, right?

Respondent: Yeah I just heard that was another one last week or something.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: I don't know who that is, I hope it's not the one with the heart problem but there were a lot of sick people. Both my roommates spent the night at the hospital and they had suppositories and they were just out of it and they couldn't hold down even water, they would be throwing up water so.

Interviewer: Who were your roommates?

Respondent: I don't remember their names actually. I mean I am bad with names as it is but there were just two other girls that both shaved their heads. I think it was part of my decision not to do it because they came all rattled into that tepee and one of them said oh I am so scared I feel like throwing up, I don't think I had enough water and it's not going to be good and I thought why do it then. And they were looking at me, why aren't you getting ready, I said I am not going to that, why not, no it's just not for me. Oh okay well we got to go, we got to do it, come on let's go, and I thought okay then.

Interviewer: Did James Ray or anyone else tell you what his qualifications for running the sweat lodge were?

Respondent: I think he has done this many times before. I mean he has been in them and learned it from the natives and he knew that the natives don't do it that hot and they don't have it pitch dark and they don't have the roof so low I mean they do all these things but this was more. He talked about proving it to the Indians too that white people could do this and that was the same thing he said about that Vision Quest that they have said that white people can't do Vision Quest and it was kind of like a dare me. It sounded like he had something personally to prove that he would do it hotter and do it in more dire circumstances than anyone else and stuff and those weren't really appealing things to me.

Interviewer: Okay. Well we have discussed a lot of what took place and got a lot of detail, is there anything important that you think I should know about the events that took place out there?

Respondent: No, I really don't think that, certainly he didn't say anyway. I think he was just being very naive, I don't think he is trained in anything that has to do with safety. I work in oil and gas so safety is on the agenda and under everyone's skins so that makes a big difference and he doesn't have anyone around him in his team either that's trained in these things with that mindset to be faced. And that's what I noticed in all three of these events that you do think that people can break their arms, they can get seriously hurt and I think he's just been lucky that he hasn't had more accidents. I don't know that he has had any before but he's been lucky for a very long time and he just went over and beyond this time.

Interviewer: Okay. Can I give you my Email address and if you think of something important or you look back at your journal or whatever, could you Email that information to me?

Respondent: Sure. I don't think that there is anything that I can, you know I wasn't in there so I didn't get the feeling of being in there and I don't know that I can be so helpful but I am going to get something to write on there. I just moved back to [REDACTED] so I am moving stuff and it was a lot more junk than we had decided to keep than I expected so a big mess. I don't know if you have ever done that but I am amazed at the stuff that we have been keeping for so long.

Interviewer: I did, I did a move about 6 years ago when I was like oh my word, I had the biggest yard sale.

Respondent: Why couldn't I throw it away before it got packed, that was more difficult, now I have to throw away.

Interviewer: Yeah, and I did the same thing, dug a lot of stuff and then finally realized--

Respondent: And then ended up throwing it out. So what's your Email address?

Interviewer: It is [REDACTED]

Respondent: Well okay. That's the longest one I have ever seen.

Interviewer: Yeah I know. I think it's partly because [REDACTED] and all that so. I want to thank you for talking to me.

Respondent: Well you are welcome. I will make sure I send you a Email if I come up with something but I think that's all I really got. Things were pretty simple and very, very unfortunate so I hope you get the good picture of what really happened.

Interviewer: Did James Ray come back up, did he speak with any of you the next day or any other time?

Respondent: No. There was some one pagers, one page very Corporate America writing about how he couldn't talk to us now but there was no apologies or anything or remorse for the people that were hurt and died and all that and I think a lot of people reacted negatively to that. I think he would have been very wise even if it was hard for him to make the trip up and just talk to us briefly because I think that's what people were missing that's what they were staying up waiting for all night I think, to understand more before they left.

Interviewer: Okay all right. Well again thank you for talking to me.

Respondent: Okay. You are welcome.

Interviewer: Have a good night.

Respondent: Okay you too have a good day.

Interviewer: Bye-bye.

Respondent: Alright bye-bye.

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