

*I/V Nelson,Carl-Transcript of Sup#25 Det. S. Willingham C36

On 10/23/09, at approximately 1530 hours, I spoke with Carl Nelson by telephone. I audio recorded the interview with my digital recording and the following is an accurate transcript of that interview. A CD of the digital recording will be placed into evidence.

At the beginning of the interview I had left a voice message for other witnesses.

Hi this is Jennifer Halley from [REDACTED]. I have recently gotten a new phone and lost the old one, so I am gathering numbers again, so if you could please leave a detailed message and your phone number, I will get back to you as soon as possible, have a great day and God bless you.

(Voice Mail)

Interviewer: Hi, Jennifer, I am Detective Shonna Willingham with the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office. I am assisting and investigating what appeared at the Angel Valley Retreat and if you could give me a callback I am at [REDACTED], Thank you.

(Voice Mail)

Respondent: I guess it's because our numbers were showing up in there.

(Voice Mail)

Interviewer: Hi Linnette, this is Detective Shonna Willingham from the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office. I am assisting and following up with interviews regarding the Angel Valley incident, if you could give me a callback I am at [REDACTED].

(Voice Mail)

Respondent: Hello.

Interviewer: Hello, I am trying to reach Carl Nelson.

Respondent: Speaking.

Interviewer: Mr. Nelson, I am Detective Shonna Willingham. And I am with the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office. I am doing some follow-up reference the James Ray incident that occurred at Angel Valley with the sweat lodge.

Respondent: Okay. Are you covering for Anne Gordon, what's her last name Gordon (Inaudible) because she called me earlier and she scheduled to talk on Tuesday?

Interviewer: Oh okay we are trying to keep track of all of that via the internet on a spreadsheet, but it did not indicate anyone had contacted you. So I will let her go ahead and make that contact.

Respondent: Okay, you know who I am talking about?

Interviewer: Yes, I know Ms. Gordon, she works over in the Prescott area.

Respondent: Okay well then I won't look up her name then. Okay that's fine.

Interviewer: If that's going to be all right, and that would work better for you, I will let that be. If you would like to talk to me now we can do it now, if it's a good time.

Respondent: Uhm what time is it

Interviewer: I am not -- you are in, what?

Respondent: I am in [REDACTED].

Interviewer: You are in [REDACTED], I am in Arizona so we are about 3:30 here.

Respondent: Oh is it three, three hour difference, I thought it was two. How long is this going to take?

Interviewer: Probably about a half hour.

Respondent: Oh, you are faster than Anne.

Interviewer: Oh, well it depends on how quickly we can get through the questions and how much you know of what took place. And were you ever initially interviewed sir?

Respondent: Yes, I was, it was 5 minutes in the dining hall.

Interviewer: Okay, but it wasn't a very long interview, was it?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I can just punch this out, now that would be fine if it's only going to take a half an hour.

Interviewer: Yeah some of my longer ones have went 40 minutes and that's just when someone had more to say than just answering the questions I have.

Respondent: Well I will switch phones and put on a headset here.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: All right go.

Interviewer: All right. How did you learn about James Ray?

Respondent: The movie "The Secret."

Interviewer: "The Secret" okay. How many of Ray's seminars or events have you attended?

Respondent: One, two, three, I think four.

Interviewer: Four of them?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: And which of those were the ones that you attended?

Respondent: I attended Harmonic Wealth.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I have attended Practical Mysticism, I attended Modern Magick this year and you are aware that that is the one that changes every year.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: It was only this year. Obviously Spiritual Warrior, I think that's it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: He has a pyramid, a list of his classes and I think the only two that I have not done, and I can tell you this, is the Creating Absolute Wealth and then the other one it is The Quickening, I have not done those two.

Interviewer: And I heard there was one also called Quantum Leap.

Respondent: Yes I have done Quantum Leap, yes thank you.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you ever before this event been in a sweat lodge?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Have you ever been in a sauna?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: How are they different?

Respondent: Well I think you probably going to look for the temperature as the obvious difference, the sweat lodge was much hotter.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you hear anyone tell or make assurances that the personnel conducting or building the sweat lodges were specifically trained or experts or what were you told about all that?

Respondent: Okay, was I told or given assurance, say that question again.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you hear anyone talk or make assurances that the people conducting or building the sweat lodge were specifically trained or experts?

Respondent: The people who, I don't know who built the sweat lodge.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: So I can't speak to who built sweat lodge. So if you want to ask about somebody else?

Interviewer: How about who conducted the ceremony?

Respondent: There were no statements or assurances about, I think you asked about training about being trained to do that. He has stated that he has been in sweat lodges before.

Interviewer: And who are we talking about? Who stated that?

Respondent: James.

Interviewer: James Ray, okay.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: That he had been in them, did he ever say that he has done that before?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you feel prior to going into the sweat lodge that it was safe?

Respondent: Yes I thought it was safe.

Interviewer: Why did you feel that way?

Respondent: I had no reason to think otherwise.

Interviewer: Okay. What was your position inside the lodge when you went in?

Respondent: You mean location?

Interviewer: Yes, location.

Respondent: I was three quarters at the way around, you go in and you move to the left going clockwise, in order to a, follow the ceremony and the spiritual precedence, but it also kind of keeps some order, so I went three quarters of way around sitting in, what we called the east.

Interviewer: Okay. And were you in the outer or inner circle?

Respondent: Outer.

Interviewer: And do you remember who was seated to your right?

Respondent: To my right, actually my wife Louie.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Who has been interviewed by Tom Boelts?

Interviewer: Okay. So she has already had a second interview.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. And who was to your left?

Respondent: That would be Josh Fredrickson who is, he is an employee of James Ray.

Interviewer: Right. And who is in front of you?

Respondent: I don't remember.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you ever move?

Respondent: You mean other than to leave?

Interviewer: Okay. When did you leave?

Respondent: I stayed through the first session, you are supposed to. You may leave when they open the gate, which means the door. You are allowed to leave or to come in and so I waited till they open the gate after the first session and at that point that I left after the first session.

Interviewer: So you stayed through the first round?

Respondent: Correct.

Interviewer: And then you left?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Did anybody else leave with you?

Respondent: My wife left and I believe there was a lady who had, not quite shoulder length black hair and I don't recall her name, I know she was engaged to another man who was there.

Interviewer: Okay. And what prompted you to leave?

Respondent: It was too hot. Let me rephrase it, for me, okay for me, it was an experience that I did not want to go any farther with because of the heat, for me it was too hot.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you return?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Okay. Prior to the sweat lodge, did you eat or drink any fluids?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Had you taken part in the Vision Quest?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So what did you eat that morning?

Respondent: The morning at the sweat lodge?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: The regular breakfast that I had been eating all through the week, I don't recall what it is, but I can pretty much guess, it was, I always ate eggs, I ate gluten free bread with peanut butter, organic peanut butter on it and I probably had some of the fruits.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I don't know that I had the yogurt or not.

Interviewer: Okay. And did you drink plenty of water or --?

Respondent: Well plenty is a pretty big term, I did start drinking water.

Interviewer: Okay, because you had come off of fast and the --

Respondent: Right, and having come off of fast, I did not slam food, did not slam water.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I was gently reintroduced to those things, so you can start little slow and start to pick up the speed.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you know what to expect from the sweat lodge?

Respondent: No, other than sweating.

Interviewer: Okay. So were you given any instructions or told what to expect in anyway prior to?

Respondent: We were instructed on how to behave in the sweat lodge.

Interviewer: Okay, what were you told?

Respondent: Well how to enter and how to leave, when you could leave. To be aware that you press yourself to be, you know back on the wall and that the people on the inner circle be up against you and that at some point during the circling with the event that it might be nice and quite courteous of you to say, hey you have been in the front row for several times, switch with me, and I will put you in the back and let you cool off a little bit, to take care of each other. Always exiting in the same manner that you entered and to be aware that there was a pit in the middle and that if somebody was leaving that and passing you to keep an eye on them, to ensure that they didn't fall into the pit, so we were to watch out for each other as we were in the circle. As far as what to expect, the only thing I knew that it was going to be hot and that we were going to probably be doing, some types of ceremonial chants or songs or things like that as we have done at other events.

Interviewer: Okay. What was discussed for safety procedures if there were problems inside the sweat lodge?

Respondent: I don't know anything specific in terms of safety, it was the big thing was to watch out for people as they passed by to ensure they did fall into the pit and to always go in the same direction, it wasn't couched on the safety procedure but that is kind of what comes to mind.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you left?

Respondent: Do you mean like when I got out, like I was belated or how I physically felt crawling out?

Interviewer: Yeah, how did you physically feel?

Respondent: I was pretty, I was not say pretty, okay I was a little bit disoriented and as crawling out and you are aware that sweat lodge is low, they all are explicitly low that you crawl. You know I am just stumbled while walking, I don't know, if you can

stumbled while crawling but that's what I would called it, I'd kind of would stumble while crawling out the door.

Interviewer: Okay. And once you are outside what took place?

Respondent: They hosed you down very quickly with water to cool your body down and then they just let you, then they just kind of stayed with you to make sure that you were okay and kept you cool and kept offering water and electrolyte, they had electrolyte solutions. And then it was up to me to decide when I was ready to turnover and ready to sit up and ready to drink of what it was that I needed to do.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you ever notice anyone come out of the lodge other than through the door?

Respondent: We had one person who showed, he showed up and we figured out that he had crawled out, I would say around the northeast area of the lodge because we were watching the front door, he didn't come out the front door, so we figured out where he came out.

Interviewer: Who was that?

Respondent: I think it was John Ebert, John Burt, John Ebert?

Interviewer: John Ebert, okay I think I have heard that before.

Respondent: He doesn't remember any of that.

Interviewer: I wouldn't doubt it. And that was later on, so I don't need to ask that one. And you didn't go back in, so I don't need to ask.

Respondent: No, I did not.

Interviewer: What did you hear, did you stay down near the sweat lodge during the entire event?

Respondent: Yes we stayed, I stayed in the vicinity, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. When people started coming out and were sick, what was taking place, what do you recall?

Respondent: Well I think you are indicating at the finish, but people came all through the ceremony at different times.

Interviewer: Right, I think about the fourth and fifth, between the third rounds on up, people started coming out, some would come out and go back in, because you are on the outside, can you explain to me what you saw going on?

Respondent: What they would do is they always kept you crawling, so that you would stand up, they just want you standing up, they wanted to keep you down close to the ground so that you wouldn't hurt yourself. And then they usually had two people that would come over and help kind of guide you or carry you, sometimes drag you to help, move you out of the way and people were behind you, they would have been quickly out of the way. And then they would quickly spray you down and do essentially the same thing that they would do for me. And some people would just lay there and within minutes were rolling over and walking and wanted to go back in, but the gate would be closed and some people took a little longer.

Interviewer: And some of them when they would come out, did they appear to be completely unconscious?

Respondent: Not during the event.

Interviewer: Not during?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I don't recall that.

Interviewer: Okay. When was it that people were coming out and appearing to be completely unconscious?

Respondent: That would be the finish, after the last session.

Interviewer: And how many sessions do you recall?

Respondent: I did not keep track, I know that they had an intro and I know that we had six, so there is seven, about seven rounds, somebody said that he did a round twice so eight, but I did not count, so that's here say from me.

Interviewer: Well that's a pretty close to what is being said. Did you ever hear anyone saying they were having problems or having a heart attack or thought they were going to die?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you fill out any medical forms or were you ever asked any health questions?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you experienced any symptoms or problems since the sweat lodge?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Did you see how Mr. Ray was responding to the people that were in distress at the end?

Respondent: No, and it's not because I don't infer that he did or did not respond people. I don't know, I was attending to a particular person and my entire intention was focused on that situation and I ignored everything else.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you tell me what you were doing?

Respondent: I was on the east side of the lodge attending to Sean Ronan.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: And my job, the job that I gave to myself, okay, was to stay with him until he was okay. And on the other side of me, actually it was where they were trying to take care of Jim, Jim died and Kirby, died. And having gone to a type of an emergency preparedness class for work, I understood that in a situation when they are doing CPR, you block people off from that environment, so I positioned myself intentionally between me and Sean or between Sean and the situation so that Sean would not be able to see or

Interviewer: What was happening to Kirby and James?

Respondent: There was something else going on. And so that I can take care of Sean and that Sean can take of Sean.

Interviewer: Okay that makes perfect sense.

Respondent: So as James was walking around I had, and he did he walked back and forth, he walked by me a couple of times, checked on Sean and that he'd go somewhere else, so you know I don't know what he was doing, it wasn't my job to know what he was doing.

Interviewer: Okay, oh sure. When did you first realize that there was something going wrong?

Respondent: That's kind of a vague term, going wrong, I didn't realize that there was a real problem until they started needing to do CPR on Kirby.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you tell me what you think happened that caused the deaths of three people at this event?

Respondent: I wondered I might get a question like that, so then you are asking me an opinion.

Interviewer: You experienced the heat and the environment inside the lodge, you experienced what was going on outside, you experienced the event.

Respondent: Right, I mean logically there was just too much heat for too long a period, I mean that's the simplest equation but people didn't leave, maybe when they should have left or they went back in or maybe they shouldn't have gone back in.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: And it's not for me to say, what people's tolerance are, some people came out of it okay.

Interviewer: Now, were people encouraged to stay or to return?

Respondent: That's an okay word to use, they were encouraged to go back in or they were encouraged to stay.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: They were not forced to or blocked.

Interviewer: No, they would never.

Respondent: Or were they forcibly pushed back into it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Eventually it came as personal decision.

Interviewer: Okay, alright. Has anyone talked to you or suggested what to say if you are questioned by law enforcement?

Respondent: Nobody has influence my comments.

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

Respondent: No qualifications were presented.

Interviewer: None presented okay. Is there anything that you can think of Carl that would be important for me to know that I have not specifically asked you?

Respondent: Other than opinions, no. I think everybody owns the responsibility for understanding their own body and honoring their own body. I don't know you know Louie, I, and somebody else were the first three to leave, so I know that people would and could leave if they wanted to leave and it would be okay for them to leave and I don't know that's I am a little baffled.

Interviewer: Tell me why you are baffled?

Respondent: Why people didn't leave.

Interviewer: Why they didn't leave, when it was so uncomfortable.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's a hard one to figure out.

Respondent: You know that goes back to owning the responsibility, you got to make that choice, so you have to know when to cry uncle.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay.

Respondent: I mean that's what is safety, you got to know that, you got to own it.

Interviewer: And I can definitely understand that, I can definitely understand that. I know that I know that people get into a certain mindset where they want to prove something.

Respondent: Right, yeah you know and I think, maybe I am going way off the record here, but you know you see these things on TV that's "do not do this at home, these are professionals," guess what somebody goes up and does that, you know oh my god, what were you thinking, I told you not to do that.

Interviewer: Do you consider James Ray a professional?

Respondent: Yes I would consider him a professional.

Interviewer: Do you still consider him a professional?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Would you attend another sweat lodge?

Respondent: Not under James Ray, if he does it the same way.

Interviewer: Okay. Well I cannot think of anything else. If you think of something that you know we didn't cover and what you saw transpiring and what you saw happening that would be important for me to know, could you call me?

Respondent: Yeah I can.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: So I would just use the same number I have for Anne.

Interviewer: No, let me give you a different number.

Respondent: Let me go, get some paper and write down. Okay what's your number.

Interviewer: I am at [REDACTED].

Respondent: And your name was again?

Interviewer: I am Detective Shonna, and it's S-H-O-N-N-A Willingham,
W-I-L-L-I-N-G-H-A-M.

Respondent: Okay.

Interviewer: Alright thank you.

Respondent: Sure. And so she doesn't have to call?

Interviewer: I will send her an e-mail, alright bye-bye.

Respondent: Bye-bye.

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