

*I/V Fleming, Donna, Creating Absolute Wealth 2008.C27

On November 23, 2009 I conducted a recorded telephonic interview with Donna Flemming. The following is a transcription of the conversation and the audio file was submitted into evidence.

Respondent: Hello.

Interviewer: Hello, is this Donna Flemming?

Respondent: Yes, it is.

Interviewer: Hi Donna Flemming, this is Mike Poling. I am a detective with the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office.

Respondent: Oh yes, I emailed you guys a while ago, didn't I?

Interviewer: You did and --

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: I am triaging all these e-mails, trust me, there is a lot of them.

Respondent: Oh, I bet there are, I bet there are yeah!

Interviewer: I don't mean to put yours down at the back of the pack.

Respondent: Don't worry about it, I am not taking it personally.

Interviewer: But since you only attended a half of seminar so I wasn't thinking that you might have been at some of these where people were injuring themselves.

Respondent: Well no, I was not, the reason I left the seminar I attended is because I felt we were put in situations that were in my opinion incredibly unsafe. And I left the seminar I left you know like half to two-thirds afterwards and I do understand that there was a woman who was killed at one of these particular seminars that I attended.

Interviewer: Do you what's yours that you attended, the name of it?

Respondent: Yes, of course, mine was called Creating Absolute Wealth and it became very clear to me that this was only Creating Absolute Wealth for Mr. James Ray, great name for it by the way. But I just felt totally completely ripped off and I had paid for two seminars, that one and another one that was supposed to take place in November later in the year. I was unable to get one dollar back. I spent \$6,000 and couldn't get one cent

back even for the seminar I left which I almost understand. But for the one that was six months in the future, I have no idea why I and I went to small claims court and lost.

Interviewer: oh, How come?

Respondent: You know what, I guess because they had very, very rigid no-refund policies in place and I guess legally they were on a solid ground and I had been told verbally that there was not going to be a problem with the refund but that in the long run, nothing.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I was really disappointed, I was disappointed not only in them but I was really disappointed in the system because it was appalling to me. There were about 175 people in the seminar and there was a lot of mystery about what is to come, about what the exercises or the warrior experiences. There is a lot of secrecy about what they are. So you kind of go through sort of blind and basically follow directions. And so the seminar that I went to, we were all told to basically change into these clothes that were in piles in the back of the room and they were all like thrift store clothing. Anyway all the women and men had to change in to those clothes, women were told to remove makeup and I feel like an idiot telling you this because it was at any point in time I should have thought what the hell am I doing, this is ridiculous. But nonetheless, I was kind of going along with the program and ultimately we were all dressed in these clothes. They literally put dirt in our hair and on our faces and we still don't know where we were going and then we were loaded into the buses and brought down to Downtown San Diego and just dropped off in Downtown San Diego, told not to associate with each other. We had no money, no water, no ID, nothing and we were dropped off. We were told very specifically not to associate with anyone else, we were to wander around on our own in a seedy, scary area of San Diego. I am a pretty independent person. I am not easily scared but this is not a bright idea. I was extremely, I was angry and I was really put off by this and I felt we were incredibly vulnerable. And I heard subsequently that there was a woman who actually either fell or jumped off a building during that exercise, somebody who did die in San Diego and that was considered it was called an accidental death. But I think this guy has managed to slide through the system incredibly well and has been accountable to no one for anything. And I sincerely hope he is held to account for this last thing, I mean you guys think you're going to be filing criminal charges.

Interviewer: Well, at the completion of the investigation, we're going to be handing it to the County Attorney's Office who is going to make that determination whether they are going to prosecute or not.

Respondent: What do you think at this point?

Interviewer: I think they are going to try absolutely (Inaudible), I can't tell you --

Respondent: Well, I know this guy, I mean I remember of course, I know that it's your opinion but you put yourself in the hands of somebody like this and he's got to have some responsibility for the people that he is exhorting to stay, I mean I can just hear him telling people not to give into their bodies and --

Interviewer: Well, that's what I wanted to ask you, things you were told that you believe that you hear that would jeopardize the safety and stuff like that for instance, because you cannot call for help or you need to stay in or do this and complete the project regardless you are more than that. What does he say that makes you or makes a person continue in to strive through stuff that causes injury? You know what I am saying now?

Respondent: Yes, I know exactly what you are saying. Basically, you are not your body, that's the kind of thing he would say that you cannot give in to the weak side or the lesser you, that you are kind of more than that, I mean this is why I think people actually died because let's face it, people were experiencing reactions that should have told anyone to get the hell out of there. But I don't know if he would ever run across a person like this but he is very charismatic, he is a very convincing powerful guy. And he was always telling people to just not give in, not give in to your body to basically listen to him that he knew what to do, that not to pay any attention to what your own mind was telling you but just to listen to him. Like I said I am a little embarrassed because I was listening to him to the point that I got myself into a situation in Downtown San Diego. Listen, I got through it, I got through it. Fine, I got back to the place and I got my car and left. But I also felt like certainly an idiot I mean why did I let it go that far.

Interviewer: That's what I am saying, not doubting you, why do people let it go that far, is it what he presents to you, that's what I want to know is how he has the ability to do that, does that make sense?

Respondent: Yeah, it makes sense. It's funny that you should put it that way too because I ask myself that a lot. But, I think this is where it comes down to this very odd thing called charisma and you know where you place what another person says as sort of more important than what your mind is telling you.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: That he knows more than you know about what you should do that he is in some sense, he puts himself sort of as a God-like figure, and people pay more attention to what he says or he tells them to do than their own logical mind or common sense. It's something about people like that and I've only run across a couple of people like that in my whole life and he is one of them, he's got that undefinable something, I mean I've got to tell you something I am not a wealthy person. I think this guy seeks \$1,000 for two seminars and that's ridiculous. But I do have to tell you that I was totally convinced that it wouldn't be a problem to get my money back if I was dissatisfied. I was totally convinced because they convinced me. I remember them saying hey, James stands behind this product so I do have that little defense. But of course, they lied but I did think that I would not have a problem. But still that's a lot of money to turn over to

somebody and actually feel, I thought it was how ridiculous of me and I did it. I am a smart kid, not a kid by the way, I am 60. But I mean really I feel I am shocked that I got taken in by somebody like that.

Interviewer: I'm not saying you got taken in and I mean he does have a product that and he is able to sale it and more power to you.

Respondent: Yeah, but when you get to the product and realize what bullshit it is --

Interviewer: In my opinion, the product means well for instance this is what I am wondering, this would be the question I've had for you. You said he tells you that your body is more than that, listen, it's the lesser you or whatever, you are more than that. Listen to me. Now if he is telling you to listen to him and not listen to your body, there is a problem. Now some people I talk to say oh no, James Ray tells you to listen to your body. What do you say about that statement? He tells you to listen to your body?-

Respondent: No, I would refute that. I've heard a lot of James Ray and read a lot of James Ray, and James Ray basically puts himself in a position of no, listen to me, listen to me, do what I say to do, not what your body says to do. His whole thing on these seminars, including the San Diego thing, was to get out of your comfort zone and your body if left to its own devices, your body just wants to be comfortable. So he is pretty much spouses his thought of ignore that, ignore this comfort is a negative. Comfort holds you back.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: I mean it's constantly going, everything is about going beyond your comfort zones.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: Getting outside of your comfort zone. So no, that I have heard him very definitely say no, don't listen to your body because all your body wants is to be comfortable. And if you do that, fine, no problem but no growth, you won't grow. One thing everybody who signs up for James Ray seminar has in common is they are all into personal growth I mean everybody who signs up for these things signs up for thinking that they are going to get a lot of personal growth out of it, nobody expects, even me taking Creating Absolute Wealth I didn't take that so I would get rich financially. Even though perhaps if I grow as a human being I will be more capable of earning better money and stuff like that but it wasn't really about the money, it was about the person and getting passed the things that block us. So, but I definitely, pardon me.

Interviewer: If you can do that, that's a useful product.

Respondent: Absolutely.

Interviewer: But when this product becomes criminal and that's what we're trying to figure out, you know what I mean?

Respondent: Right, yeah.

Interviewer: And with the things, I am not trying to put words in anyone's mouth, not because you didn't go to Spiritual Warrior obviously and that's one of the biggest things I am trying to do is what does he tell you to do because you are doing what he tells you to do. If he tells you to do x, y and z and you're trying hard to do x, y and z and you are putting your faith in him and if something happens there is a problem, you know what I mean. That's what he's being reckless and not looking after your safety. Like, follow me along this cliff face and you're not going to fall, you're going to be fine. But he can't promise that but if you have faith in him like he tells you don't listen to your body listen to me then that's where the issues are. But unfortunately, I know what you are saying I just can't put that towards the sweat lodge, if you know what I mean, but I can put this is how he get theto have faith in him.

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: By putting your body second and then, that is what's holding you back. Or you will never

Respondent: Yeah, well, you know I think I don't know you know in terms of the law, how any of this looks because it is interesting I mean it's not like he picked up a gun and shot someone.

Interviewer: Absolutely, right.

Respondent: So it's not that infinitive but he does accept a very, very large amount of money for people and puts himself in a position of leadership.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: And I believe and again is this legal who knows but I believe that there is a responsibility that goes with that leadership that I mean I think that everybody who was in that sweat lodge believed that he at least knew what the physical limitations were and would know enough to recognize life threatening symptoms and he obviously didn't. I think its (Inaudible).

Interviewer: That's where the issue comes in.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: If he knew that this could happen, he didn't do anything to prevent it. If he didn't know it could happen that's where the civil, not a criminal but knowing that your life is in danger, If I could prove he knows that he is putting people at risk and he is not

caring for their welfare and it happens then he is criminally liable and that's how I look at it.

Respondent: Right. I see your point yeah.

Interviewer: But if you --

Respondent: No, I am wondering though --

Interviewer: If you could fall from this you can follow me, but you're going to be completely safe.

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: This is a hurdle you're afraid of heights you can buy this, you can die but when you say such like you might think you are going to die but you are not.

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: You're putting your faith in him that he is going to pull you through this. So I don't know if he has done that in this and I think did you say you were at Creating Absolute Wealth in 2007?

Respondent: I did that in 2008.

Interviewer: And I am trying to figure out that's where the investigation comes in and that's why it's not, we know what happened and we know

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: It's a tragedy and people, the public doesn't understand exactly what it takes to prosecute a criminal case versus a civil case, and I don't know either. I mean I've been doing this for a while and I keep fighting the same thing, I am on this line of is this criminal or civil, I think it's criminal and I'm told it's civil.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: So what I told you is exactly what we look for. If he is guarantying you safety and do this and you are not going to die and just hang on, you will be fine and it doesn't, then he's put himself at risk.

Respondent: Well, the only --

Interviewer: You feel uncomfortable and you can leave at any time.

Respondent: Right, sure.

Interviewer: You don't have to follow me, listen to your body, then he is not liable. Then you're sort of falling you know what I mean that would be --

Respondent: Well, from everything I have read from people in the sweat lodge not that there are that many of them speaking but it seems to me that he was telling people to ignore their body and to stay despite what they were going through.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: And that's what I have heard and the very fact that he has people sign these disclaimers indicates that he knows the level of the danger.

Interviewer: Right and that's what I am trying to explain.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: By doing this, he knows that there is risk, what does he know of the risk and that's the hard part. I have to prove that he knows that something is going to happen and he knows hyperthermia is there and that's hard to do.

Respondent: Yeah, it is hard to do because how can we know what was in his mind, um you know. Seems like he should have had medical people on site or something too so I tell you he is really cheap.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: I mean this thing that I did \$3,000 for a weekend I mean they provided nothing.

Interviewer: It's a little overhead and all profit.

Respondent: Oh God, all profit and mostly volunteer staff I mean this guy just hit a gold mine when he realized because a lot of listen I tell you it's nothing else this has cured me of the whole self-help industry I mean I help myself I mean I am cured in some sense of that kind of thing. And maybe I should thank him for that but having been exposed to this guy and the way he operates I am hoping that he is held criminally liable because this is absurd to me that he toys with people's lives the way he has. Its such abandoned.

Interviewer: Well, it's probably going to sharpen I mean I can't guarantee anything but I can see that with the results and stuff it's going to be tried and then again, I can't speak and I am not speaking for the attorney's

Respondent: No, and what's your name? I am so sorry, I missed it.

Interviewer: My name is Mike.

Respondent: Mike, yeah.

Interviewer: And my last name --

Respondent: Yeah, it must be an interesting case for you guys.

Interviewer: It is, it's interesting but it's also difficult.

Respondent: Oh yes.

Interviewer: The [REDACTED] ?

Respondent: No that's actually like [REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

Interviewer: Yea, [REDACTED] is quite a big area I guess because I'm from the [REDACTED] area.

Respondent: Yeah, it goes down there too. So I mean I would be happy to help make any statement, obviously any true statement that I can because I think he deserves it. I am not a fan as you probably get it. For me, listen, I've lost \$6,000 which I still had trouble accepting this, it's a chunk of money and it just seems so wrong to me, just wrong that they never tried to come to any kind of agreement to make it right with me, I mean and that's a horrible way to run a business.

Interviewer: And that's typical, I mean I'm not saying that you are not the only one. There is a lot of people that want their money back and unfortunately because of the way he has his business, he knows what he is doing, as far as financially.

Respondent: Yeah, legally he was absolutely on sound ground and he knew it that there is a big difference obviously there is legal and illegal and there is right and wrong and unfortunately they are not always coordinated. So I wish you a lot of luck.

Interviewer: We will do our best and I do appreciate.

Respondent: Anything I can do and any further light I can shed on anything, as I said I would be happy to.

Interviewer: Okay, and you know my name now and if you need anything just give me a holler.

Respondent: That's fine.

Interviewer: I think I have your e-mail and I will shoot you an e-mail with just my information if we needed to know anything if you hear something you can let me know.

Respondent: Do you have it [REDACTED]

Interviewer: I do have that.

Respondent: Good, okay cool. Keep me posted if you can, I'd love to know and good luck.

Interviewer: Thank you so much --

Respondent: All right, thanks a lot. Good bye, Mike.

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