

*I/V Aaron Bennett by Det. Ross DiskinC23

On 12/14/09 I interviewed Aaron Bennett. The following is a 3rd party transcript of that interview:

Det. Diskin: Were you a participant in 2009?

Aaron Bennett: I was neither, I was a Dream Team member which is kind of, you know what that is?

Det. Diskin: Yes. Okay and Liz was a Dream Team member too, correct?

Aaron Bennett: Correct.

Det. Diskin: And you had, let me look at our spreadsheet here, this has been quite a lot of work putting this all together. In 2008 you were a participant?

Aaron Bennett: Yes in no, no, no in 2008 I was also a Dream Team member.

Det. Diskin: Okay.

Aaron Bennett: And 2007.

Det. Diskin: Okay I see it now. So in 2007 you were a participant and '08 and '09 you were a Dream Team member?

Aaron Bennett: Correct.

Det. Diskin: Okay and let's go back to 2007 just tell me what you can remember about that sweat lodge?

Aaron Bennett: Oh man, I've been doing this so much. Alright, so without me going through the whole scheme any specific things, like controversial things you want me to talk about specifically to kind of speed it up?

Det. Diskin: Well what we are doing we are looking at, we are looking at some problem some people say that there were problems in 2007, some people say no. I understand the difference of opinion on what "problem" means. Some people have told us that they had you know passed out and thought that that was fine, that was great. Actually it was a positive experience for them and other people we saw that thought that that was bad, that these people thought. So basically any problems that you saw in 2007?

Aaron Bennett: In 2007, no, I would find no hospitals, no, you know I think everyone was at a 100% by the end. Definitely when they woke up the next morning.

Det. Diskin: Okay. So by the next morning everybody is fine?

Aaron Bennett: Totally, yeah.

Det. Diskin: Okay, did you see anybody lose consciousness in 2007?

Aaron Bennett: The only one I can remember, she had to be put into a bathtub. I think she was just overheating and kind of dehydrated but just with some help she was fine by probably and definitely by the next morning she was fine.

Det. Diskin: Okay.

Aaron Bennett: So I don't think anyone blacked, I don't remember anyone blacking out.

Det. Diskin: Okay and how about 2008, what happened in 2008?

Aaron Bennett: What happened in 2008? Trying to remember, I mean like you know, same thing really, no, I mean the lodge from my perception the lodge was constructed exactly the same; same size, same length, same heat. In regards to how people responded, I would say the same thing I don't remember specific people that; I remember people needed assistance afterwards but like I said definitely by the next morning once they slept and drank a lot of water everyone was fine.

Det. Diskin: Okay and we talked to Barbara Waters who was, I think she was a participant in '08 and a Dream Team member and '09 and she had some problems do you remember anything about that?

Aaron Bennett: About her specifically, no, I can't remember.

Det. Diskin: Let me, I wasn't quite ready for an interview, let me pull up my, I am trying to remember what people said so we can figure that out and you can understand where we are coming, so many different people witnessed different events you know the different sweat lodges and everybody seems to have a little bit different take on what actually happened. What we were told is in 2008 that about 20 people got sick and that doesn't necessarily mean that that's bad so we are just trying to confirm that and see if people had any kind of medical problem if or you know if it was part of the event and that was a positive thing that they were you know kind of feeling like they were having either an out of body experience or an altered state or something like that. We are not judging the spiritualness of this, we are just trying to.

Aaron Bennett: Right I mean I remember in 2008 yeah, some people needed assistance were needed is to send that and needed you know some support after the lodge like they were feeling weak. I can't remember any people specifically but I remember that no one was seriously hurt you know it was seriously you know by the next day I am pretty sure everyone was fine so.

Det. Diskin: Okay do you remember a girl that got hurt and was bleeding?

Aaron Bennett: In 2008?

Det. Diskin: Yes.

Aaron Bennett: No, I don't. What happened?

Det. Diskin: We were told that she was getting out of the sweat lodge and she fell down and broke a tooth and was bleeding.

Aaron Bennett: Broke a tooth? No, I don't remember this.

Det. Diskin: Do you remember that from 2007 by chance?

Aaron Bennett: No, I don't.

Det. Diskin: I'm pulling up my notes again to make sure I have the right

Aaron Bennett: No, I mean it could have happened and it could of slipped my mind but no, I don't remember.

Det. Diskin: Okay and it's difficult, you know this was last year and you know you are doing your own thing having your own experience and it's difficult to really make notes of what other people are doing.

Aaron Bennett: Right.

Det. Diskin: Do you remember thinking that anybody should have been transported to the hospital in 2008 was anybody in that bad of shape?

Aaron Bennett: No.

Det. Diskin: What kind of condition were you in?

Aaron Bennett: I was fine, I was fine.

Det. Diskin: Okay and then let's go to 2009, kinda tell me what you remember about 2009.

Aaron Bennett: I will just tell you some bullet points now. From my understanding like I said the lodge construction and duration and heat was basically exactly the same as 2008 so that's what I have been telling a lot of people because there is not; there wasn't a huge difference at all. I really wouldn't have known any difference because I was sitting in the, I was sitting in the exact same place in the lodge in 2009 and 2008.

Det. Diskin: Okay and what part of the lodge was that?

Aaron Bennett: It was, see walking, you get inside and I was on the left side of the door right next to the door and so James would have been on the opposite side of the door.

Det. Diskin: Okay so you would have been one of the last ones going in.

Aaron Bennett: Yes, I would have right by the door so I was there in 2009 and 2008 and for both times I did the exact same role and I stayed in the whole time so. So my experiences was constant and I mean do you have any specific questions because I don't, I don't think you want me to blab for.

Det. Diskin: You know and we, you never know what's going to be important but

Aaron Bennett: What are your thought topics and what are things that you need clarification on that I can kind of help?

Det. Diskin: Basically the entire lodge. When's the first round that somebody had a problem in 2009? Like when did somebody leave where they you know, just couldn't handle it anymore?

Aaron Bennett: People I think someone left after the first round but that happened in 2008 and 2007 too. I mean pretty much every round I want to say people are leaving or someone is coming in. I would say by round maybe three or four people needed like assistance, like physical assistance to get out of the lodge whereas like they needed to be guided because they weren't strong enough to crawl out by themselves. That happened probably around three or four. In the first couple of rounds people would just crawl out and it's like I gotta get out and then they leave.

Det. Diskin: And was that consistent with 2007 and 2008 or was it different?

Aaron Bennett: No, it was exactly the same.

Det. Diskin: Okay. When did you first notice that there was a problem?

Aaron Bennett: When the lodge was over and when I saw people receiving CPR was when I really knew something was up. And I would say maybe even like at the end there were just little more; there were some more people that needed to be taken out by means of dragging or you know dragged out but other than

Det. Diskin: What round was that were people had to actually be dragged out?

Aaron Bennett: Well I would say the last maybe two or three but definitely I was more talking about at the very end when it was over people who we thought were fine weren't and they needed to be you know carried out.

Det. Diskin: Okay, alright and do you remember when Lou got burned in the fire?

Aaron Bennett: Yeah, I don't remember which round though.

Det. Diskin: Do you remember how that happened?

Aaron Bennett: Kind of like, he was leaving, like he wanted to get out, yeah like pretty sure he wanted to get out. And I think he just lost his balance and he slipped and you know if the door is 6 o'clock on a clock, you know the door in the lodge, he was out about 9 or 10 o'clock, that makes a difference and he would and he is going around clockwise so he was gonna go 9, 10, 12 1, 2, 3, 4 you know all around the circle. And I think he slipped, it's pretty crazy.

Det. Diskin: Alright, okay and let's see, do you remember anybody saying that they were having a problem or wanting to leave or needed help leaving or anything like that?

Aaron Bennett: Yeah.

Det. Diskin: Okay tell me about that.

Aaron Bennett: Okay, yeah people said they wanted to leave and they needed help or let me see, yeah, I mean this is the same as last year too which is why it wasn't a red flag for me or James. I mean people say I want to get out and part of the spirituality, I guess part of it is like you are more than your body that's where James has been getting sort of a beating for the saying it. And yeah, so often times if people say like I need help, you know like I gotta get out of here and then they would be helped out in between rounds, during the rounds, uh no. And that's part of, I know that's part of the lawsuit ship. You know it's like during the rounds you wouldn't let anyone out and yeah that's true.

Det. Diskin: Okay so during the round nobody could leave?

Aaron Bennett: During the round this year, this year, no during the rounds he wasn't willing to just open the door and let people out, no and this was stated before it started so people knew about this sort of rule of the lodge and then he did this same thing for the past two years too.

Det. Diskin: Alright and when people said you know, you know I want to leave or you know or whatever, they try and leave, did he try to talk them out of it or coach them and say no you know you can do it and hang in there?

Aaron Bennett: We all did, yeah, he did verbally and all of us were like you can do it. You know, it was a whole; it was more like a team effort to help people.

Det. Diskin: Okay so everybody was kind of coaching people to stick it out?

Aaron Bennett: Exactly yeah.

Det. Diskin: Probably no one knew that people were going to die.

Aaron Bennett: No way. (laughs) No way.

Det. Diskin: And you know just so you know nobody is saying that James Ray intended for people to die or knew that people were going to die or anything like that. That's not being said, nobody believes that. You know we are not out to get James Ray by any stretch of imagination we are just trying to get the facts. I don't know if he would be charged with anything criminally or not. Like I said clearly he didn't intend this to happen you know so what our job we put together all the facts, we confirm (Inaudible) statements and then we hand it to the county attorney's office and they look it over and see if they are considering filing charges but we are not really taking a stand either way. Some of the statements that were made and I don't want to you know prompt you or change your independent recollection by saying too much in a question but do you remember towards the end anybody saying hey there's people unconscious back here or I need help getting these people out or anything like that.

Aaron Bennett: Is this when the lodge was still going or when it was over.

Det. Diskin: No, when the lodge was still going.

Aaron Bennett: I remember people saying there were people unconscious. I can't say yeah I mean I don't remember those words. I remember hearing words of kind of concern or worry that something may be wrong. And here is the thing I mean many people you know alot of people were lying on the ground because it was cooler on the ground. So kind of this is what I have been telling people as well, is that there's, even if I was sitting next to someone who was unconscious, there is no way I would have known because that person may have been having a difficult time and they were lying on the floor as many people were because it's cooler. So they could have just had their eyes closed, kind of conserving their energy so when James might have heard people saying this person you know I think this person has a problem I mean everyone is so altered, everyone is so out of it that he has heard that before he has heard that year after year after year so, does that make sense?

Det. Diskin: It does. It does, totally.

Aaron Bennett: Even on my end because I was there the year before, well the past, the previous two years. There was no I wasn't like dude, you know, I wasn't like James you better fucking do something because this is really different. It was very similar to the last two years. So there is nothing that I feel James should have done differently because everything was the same as you know the past 5, 6, 7, years he's been doing this you know so that makes sense.

Det. Diskin: It does make sense. So you know, he wouldn't have known, you know

Aaron Bennett: He wouldn't have known

Det. Diskin: so in other years people were having problems and would say something but they were fine and so now

Aaron Bennett: But they were fine, yeah

Det. Diskin: they've seen this before. Do you remember anybody saying specifically about Liz, that Liz was having a problem? Do you remember that conversation?

Aaron Bennett: Inside the lodge, no I don't remember anything. Oh, go ahead.

Det. Diskin: There was a conversation with somebody and James Ray where they had said hey Liz is having a problem and he said, well Liz has done this several times before she is fine, do you remember anything like that?

Aaron Bennett: I don't, I actually don't remember him saying that, no.

Det. Diskin: Do you think that could have happened without you knowing that or remembering that that was said?

Aaron Bennett: Yeah, that could have happened. I don't know.

Det. Diskin: Okay. And let's see what else; do you remember somebody saying that they were having a heart attack?

Aaron Bennett: No.

Det. Diskin: Okay.

Aaron Bennett: Inside the lodge?

Det. Diskin: The person said this after they left early and when they went outside they said they were having a heart attack and James responded to him.

Aaron Bennett: No, I don't remember because I was in the lodge the whole time. I don't really remember what happened.

Det. Diskin: Okay. And one of the other, I think I asked you this, but and I just want to make sure, you know this is kind of important to the investigation so I want to kind of determine what was said if you remember the conversation, but at one point several witnesses told us about a conversation where some people in the back near Kirby and James where they said, hey these two are unconscious I need help getting them out of here and James Ray responded to that, do you remember that conversation?

Aaron Bennett: Not specifically. Sorry.

Det. Diskin: Okay.

Aaron Bennett: I yeah, I don't.

Det. Diskin: Okay. And let me ask you this were you aware of any prior problems in the sweat lodge where people were having some heat stroke or any kind of major medical problems from the sweat lodge?

Aaron Bennett: Can you ask that again?

Det. Diskin: Do you know of any prior problems with the sweat lodge in prior years where people had been transferred to hospital or had problems?

Aaron Bennett: In prior years, I haven't heard of anyone being transported to the hospital, just probably dehydration but what you know, my guess it would be just kind of dizziness and nausea and you know that type of stuff.

Det. Diskin: Okay. Let's see, most of the common statements people make, kind of that told me about, did James ever, I'm trying to ask this question in a way that I won't, you know influence your memory. Do you remember where somebody left the lodge other than through the door during the lodge?

Aaron Bennett: You're phone is, something's weird with our connection. Can you call me right back?

Det. Diskin: Sure I'll call you right back.

Aaron Bennett: Okay.

Det. Diskin: Alright.

Aaron Bennett: Okay.

Det. Diskin: Can you hear me now?

Aaron Bennett: Yeah that's better. So, what was your question, sorry?

Det. Diskin: Do you remember a time where somebody left the lodge other than through the door?

Aaron Bennett: All I know is that I don't know if someone left, someone told me that someone left, (Inaudible) makes the flap open and like a whole bunch of (Inaudible) came into lodge, I didn't see if someone crawl out though.

Det. Diskin: Okay, and this was not through the door this was, was it

Aaron Bennett: Yeah, there was, it was probably around, if we use our clock, it was probably like 1 to 1:30.

Det. Diskin: Okay.

Aaron Bennett: You know kind of across from the door at the other end.

Det. Diskin: Okay. And do you remember how James responded to that?

Aaron Bennett: At first people thought if someone brought in a flashlight and he was like drop the flashlight, people were like dude turn off your flashlight. So I couldn't, I actually didn't know someone lifted the flap until I left and someone's like oh yeah I think we took someone out. So I don't think he knew either, actually I am sure he didn't know.

Det. Diskin: Okay, and afterwards when it was time to leave, now you would have been, you were like close to the door just to the left of the door, so you would have to go all the way around to go out?

Aaron Bennett: Yeah I think, I think I just snuck out.

Det. Diskin: You didn't go out clockwise?

Aaron Bennett: I don't think so because I think I needed help. I actually don't remember what I did.

Det. Diskin: Okay, yeah I was going to ask you what you saw as you went around the lodge but

Aaron Bennett: What did I see? Well I did go around the lodge I mean, once I got out I went back in and I helped kind of take people out.

Det. Diskin: Okay. When you went back in, had everybody who was able to leave did they already leave?

Aaron Bennett: Yeah, well yeah, me and I think a couple other guys either stayed in there or kept kind of taking people out, going back in, finding another one who needed help, taking them out. So does that make sense?

Det. Diskin: Yeah I am trying to understand so everybody files out and so everybody goes out one by one and then at some point people stop coming out and is that when you looked in and went back in and to help people?

Aaron Bennett: I think yeah I got out and then some people said some people need more help and then I went back in so people, yeah.

Det. Diskin: At that point how many people were still inside?

Aaron Bennett: Ones that needed assistance. Gosh let me think. I bet, I would bet like 5 to 8 people needed help, whether that be dragging or complete carrying out.

Det. Diskin: Okay, do you by chance remember who those people were?

Aaron Bennett: No, I actually don't.

Det. Diskin: Okay. And did you know a lot of the people, a lot of the participants?

Aaron Bennett: Yeah I knew some of them before and I met a lot of them just there.

Det. Diskin: Okay, alright and then afterwards when you know you go back in and help people get out, at what point is there kind of a panic where people realize that you know we need to do something different? In other words when you went back in you were helping people out the flap, correct, out of the door?

Aaron Bennett: Correct.

Det. Diskin: Now at what point did that change to where you know somebody realized that they needed to you know lift up the tarp and bring them out a different way?

Aaron Bennett: I don't remember. I think we got most people; we got most people out through the flap. I actually don't remember, I wasn't one who opened up, well are people saying they kind of opened up the flap and took people out from the back?

Det. Diskin: Yeah there were two or three people out, yeah James and Kirby who had died and they were brought out the back.

Aaron Bennett: Okay, I wasn't one of those who brought it out the back so I don't really know.

Det. Diskin: Okay. And do you remember a conversation at all about whether or not they should open up the back of the tent?

Aaron Bennett: During the lodge?

Det. Diskin: No, no after everybody was out, in other words witnesses had said that hey you know there is people in there we need to open up the back of the tent; do you remember that conversation at all?

Aaron Bennett: No, I don't.

Det. Diskin: Okay. And then you said that at some point you realized that there was a problem and that was when you saw people given CPR to James and Kirby, (Inaudible)?

Aaron Bennett: When I personally noticed there was a problem?

Det. Diskin: Yes.

Aaron Bennett: Yeah that was kind of the red flag for me.

Det. Diskin: Okay. So you see them giving CPR, can you kind of explain the scene of what was going on and what was happening?

Aaron Bennett: Sure, yeah there were, I was out and everyone was out of the lodge by then and I would say, with the ones getting CPR we are about, I assume it's like right where they got dragged out of their place, it was probably, it was right outside the lodge, if the door is 6 o'clock again, probably around 2 or 3 o'clock outside of the lodge. And yeah they were lying kind of side by side and just kind of people I forgot who but I think it was like a Dream Team member or some people were giving them CPR. And I think and then the other people who needed assistance were more in the place where they usually go when (call disconnects abruptly).

Aaron Bennett: I don't know what happened, let's try it again.

Det. Diskin: Are you on a landline or on a cell phone?

Aaron Bennett: Well here you want me, here I will tell you.

Det. Diskin: Well I think it's my phone actually because this has happened recently, I was just curious if you are on a landline because that would confirm that this was my phone.

Aaron Bennett: No, I am on a cell phone but I am not moving so that, oh well let's just keep going.

Det. Diskin: We are almost done, I just wanted to touch base on everything that we have learned so far and see what you can remember about it?

Aaron Bennett: Okay anything else because I think you caught me mid story but anything else you needed or any like information

Det. Diskin: Yeah I kind of lost the part of what now you said that people were kind of helping each other?

Aaron Bennett: Yeah, yeah people so the people who needed assistance were outside the main gate (Inaudible) and kind of spread out and participants, Dream Team members, staff, everyone was just sort of helping people as needed. And that was sort of it?

Det. Diskin: Who was directing this, I mean was there somebody that was in-charge of saying hey go help that person or this person needs help?

Aaron Bennett: At this point not really, I mean there were some more vocal than others I can't remember who but at this point it was, everyone was sort of helping out wherever

and if someone needed something, someone would just yell hey get this person water or like whatever. So no there wasn't like one director cause at this point it was a bit chaotic.

Det. Diskin: Right. And what was James Ray doing while this was going on?

Aaron Bennett: What was he doing? He was with his assistant who was actually in the lodge with him for a lot of the time. He was walking around, he was, he was checking in on people. I did see him at one point hold up an IV for someone. And which is, well that's actually when the paramedics came. But he was I mean kind of observing what was going on and I saw him hug people, I saw people, I saw him like some of the Dream Team members he gave hugs to and yeah that's about it.

Det. Diskin: Okay, do you think he could have done anything different?

Aaron Bennett: Different I mean.

Det. Diskin: Afterwards I mean do you think

Aaron Bennett: Yeah, I mean different or more productive, I mean of course he could (Inaudible)

Det. Diskin: I mean was there anything that he could have done better or worse or?

Aaron Bennett: Yeah you know I'm not one to say because if I were James, I don't know what the fuck I would have done. So he was just probably like whoa, like I don't know what to do here but he was there the whole time, he didn't, alot of people say he ran off immediately. (phone disconnected again)

Aaron Bennett: Alright, last time.

Det. Diskin: Sorry about that and I don't know, it didn't like breakup or anything, it's just like all of a sudden dead, but anyway go ahead.

Aaron Bennett: So I don't know he could have done anything better.

Det. Diskin: Okay and do you remember James Ray telling people to go back to their cabins?

Aaron Bennett: No I don't.

Det. Diskin: Okay some of the witnesses have said that when the paramedics were getting there and that could have been to avoid further chaos but that he had told people who were able to, to go back to their cabin.

Aaron Bennett: He may have, I don't remember.

Det. Diskin: Okay. Alright is there anything else that you can think that would be important to our investigation?

Aaron Bennett: No.

Det. Diskin: And let me ask you this as a Dream Team member did you go on the Vision Quest?

Aaron Bennett: No, we led people to their spots but we didn't actually do a Vision Quest.

Det. Diskin: Okay. And can you tell me the night before the sweat lodge what was going on with the Dream Team?

Aaron Bennett: The night before the sweat lodge, this is when they were in their Vision Quest. We were, the night before some people were; we took shifts, about who was going to be on site and who wasn't. I think the night before we were all kind of in the kitchen area just hanging out and eating or something. I mean there wasn't anything going on.

Det. Diskin: Some of the other members told us that the Dream Team was kind of having not really a party but kind of a little get together in the kitchen and that James Ray was kind of upset about that for them not keeping track of people, is that correct?

Aaron Bennett: Yeah that happened, that happened.

Det. Diskin: Can you tell me about that?

Aaron Bennett: Sure, I don't know how it's really relevant.

Det. Diskin: Well I mean it's important if James Ray is trying to make sure that his people are taking care of.

Aaron Bennett: Oh I get it, yeah absolutely, we were kind of having, we had some chocolates, we had some wine and James comes in and he is like, he got like angry and he kind of lectured us like kind of like we were his kids about why aren't you holding space for the participants and you know I am kind of ashamed of you and you should be you know, he told the participants that the Dream Team members would kind of be thinking about them and having them in their thoughts and he was pissed that we were just kind of celebrating and partying and were kind of fucking off.

Det. Diskin: Okay. And was Liz a part of that?

Aaron Bennett: Yeah I'm like 90% sure, we were all there.

Det. Diskin: Okay. And how much did Liz have to drink, I am not trying to sour her reputation or anything like that, it's just you know it might have contributed?

Aaron Bennett: I have no idea, none of us were drinking that much, I think probably the most was like a glass each, it wasn't, we weren't getting drunk.

Det. Diskin: Okay so I mean it wouldn't have been enough to where she was completely dehydrated or?

Aaron Bennett: To the next afternoon? No, definitely not.

Det. Diskin: Okay. Well let me, can I give you my direct line in case you think of anything else that you think is important?

Aaron Bennett: Is it the one that shows up on my phone?

Det. Diskin: No, that's our main switchboard and you can get to me that way but you have to talk to several different people, but I can give you my direct line.

Aaron Bennett: Yeah sure go for it.

Det. Diskin: Okay it's area code [REDACTED].

Aaron Bennett: Okay and what's your name again?

Det. Diskin: My first name is Ross and my last name is Diskin.

Aaron Bennett: Okay awesome.

Det. Diskin: And I appreciate you are talking to me and anything that you think would be important to this investigation let me know you know whether it's incriminating or not, I mean we are looking at it from both sides.

Aaron Bennett: Okay, awesome, good.

Det. Diskin: I appreciate it, thanks.

Aaron Bennett: You're welcome, bye Ross.

Det. Diskin: Alright bye.

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