

*I/V Trumfour-Cheney,Sellen Transcript Det M. Poling C27

On November 23, 2009 I conducted a telephonic interview with Suellen Trumbour-Cheney, a registered nurse living on the property on/near the Angel Valley retreat. The following is a transcription of the interview. For complete details please refer to the DSS.file for the recorded conversation.

Suellen: I work there.

Det. Poling: Are you the famous Sue Ellen?

Suellen: Yes.

Det. Poling: Okay. Hang on one second. I've got to pull up my uh, my notes that I was, if you don't mind. I thought I did have notes. Sue Ellen it says you live on the premises of Angel Valley. Do you have a house there?

Suellen: I did. We have an RV and actually we live at [REDACTED] now but we went out there in May to help with (Inaudible 00:27) retreat so we stayed for a month and then we have a home on the mountain, went back there for the summer. And the chefs rented our RV while we were gone and then I came back out and spent about a month or six weeks there and then moved back here to town.

Det. Poling: Cool. So Sue Ellen if you don't mind me asking, are you a nurse practitioner, are you a

Suellen: No I'm an RN and also a registered polarity practitioner and

Det. Poling: What is that?

Suellen: It's energetic body work, personal process nutrition; it's a holistic health system that works with balancing imbalances in the flow of the energy in the system.

Det. Poling: Got ya.

Suellen: Yeah.

Det. Poling: I know all about that stuff

Suellen: Do you?

Det. Poling: No.

Suellen: Alright,

Det. Poling: I'm just kidding

Suellen: it's a very, very good thing with nursing you know what I learned in my nursing and yeah.

Det. Poling: Cool. Well what I wanted to, do you have time are you

Suellen: Sure, Yeah.

Det. Poling: What I wanted to know, if I could, is just a few things. What was your role the night of the sweat lodge back in, it was October 8th?

Suellen: Yes. Nothing other than being living in Angel Valley at the time and I think that I was in the office some part of that day. So I really had no role in the sweat lodge.

Det. Poling: Were you employed by Angel Valley during around that time?

Suellen: Our situation there was that we really not employed, we got our housing there and then we got a stipend for some of our volunteer services, but I was never employed as a nurse there.

Det. Poling: So your volunteer services did not include being a nurse?

Suellen: No it did not. Well mainly what I would do is some polarity sessions for individual retreatants that were there sometimes but no I had no connection with James Ray's group there as a nurse.

Det. Poling: Okay. So have you ever performed any I would say like employee functions for James Ray?

Suellen: Never, no.

Det. Poling: So James Ray never spoke to you and said could you do this for me?

Suellen: Never, no.

Det. Poling: Okay. Were you ever hired by Angel Valley to perform any services during a James Ray event like maybe cooking, cleaning, washing people, hosing them down after their ceremonies?

Suellen: No, no, the only thing you know a number of us were there on board but it was mainly helping the office getting folders ready and things like that. But once their group arrived I had no function with them at all. I never even met James Ray.

Det. Poling: And he, would he know that you, so if you never met him, did you talk to Dream Team members there to say hey I'm nurse if you need anything,

Mary Ellen: No

Det. Poling: this RV over here, or room something, something?

Suellen: No, never, I mean I did see some of the Dream Team, they would come up to the office to make phone calls or you know need help with the Xerox machine but no nothing related to nursing at all.

Det. Poling: Okay. Have you seen James Ray's events beforehand?

Suellen: I have not, I actually have been around Angel Valley for quite some time as a personal retreatant but no I had never been there for one of his events before, this is the first time.

Det. Poling: Okay. If you don't mind me asking, how were you informed that there was a problem over at the sweat?

Suellen: Amayra and I think Jordon, two other staff members, came up to the office looking for me saying there's an emergency at the sweat lodge. And I jumped in cart and went down there.

Det. Poling: So you were already in clothes and everything?

Suellen: Already what?

Det. Poling: Clothes, I mean you weren't in your night

Suellen: Oh no, cause that was early, that was like 5:30 or something like that I've forgotten the time now but it was early, yea

Det. Poling: Okay. If you could, can you tell me what you observed once you got in the cart just tell me what your observations were?

Suellen: Yeah, when I got out of the cart and walked over to where everybody was my first thing I saw was these two people were getting CPR on the back of the tent. They were outside at that point. And then I saw numerous people in varying forms of collapse and throwing up and all that sort of thing.

Det. Poling: What did you think when you don't mind me asking?

Suellen: Oh my God, you like I'd been a triage emergency nurse for many, many years I've seen a lot of (Inaudible) I knew right away we had a big problem on our hands.

Det. Poling: Okay. Could I ask you what your function was or what, did anyone ask you to do something or did you just your, the initiative to help out?

Suellen: Yeah. I just, you know at that point many of the staff were already there and everybody was just kind of running around to see where they could help out because emergency services hadn't arrived yet, they'd been called but they weren't there yet. So I just kind of did my, you know what I'm kind of set up to do as nurse. I just glanced around and tried to find where I thought I could be of most help. And at that point it was with the two people that were, I probably shouldn't say this maybe I should, in my opinion they were dead already.

Det. Poling: Right

Suellen: Yeah, when I took one look at them I was pretty clear that you know I mean I'm not a doctor I can't pronounce people dead but they certainly looked pretty dead to me. But CPR was going on so I just kind of hung out there and tried to get some pulses, feel for pulses in different parts of the body.

Det. Poling: Did you try to give CPR to anybody?

Suellen: No, I didn't need to cause it was already happening. The only thing I did with the people that were getting CPR suggest that the woman be turned on her side cause I heard some gurgling in her throat even though I knew that probably she was already dead. I just had them turn her over and just get rid of the food that seemed to be in her mouth and throat. But otherwise no, the CPR was being kind of conducted by someone from James Ray's group who I think is a doctor. So at that point kind of having a sense that they were already pretty well dead, I at that point went to see where else I could be helpful.

Det. Poling: Okay. So you saw the male and the female right side by side, correct?

Suellen: Yes that's right.

Det. Poling: Can you remember if any of those names were Liz Neuman?

Suellen: Do I remember what?

Det. Poling: Do you remember who Liz Neuman was?

Suellen: I remembered who she was but I never saw her that night because the next person I got involved with was Sean Ronan who was also right behind the tent. And he was initially fairly stable and then started to get really sick so I pretty much stayed with him and by then the rescue squad arrived and I paired up with one of the rescue workers and helped Sean Ronan. That's pretty much where I stayed.

Det. Poling: With Sean Ronan, okay. Do you remember who helped Sean Ronan out, were you there when that happened?

Suellen: Who helped? No I was not there when, no, people were already out of the tent when I got there.

Det. Poling: And Sean Ronan, was he close to where the girl and boy were?

Suellen: In reference to where he was, outside of the tent, I would say yes.

Det. Poling: Okay, alright and as far as James Ray, did you see him there?

Suellen: I saw him sort of after most of the ambulances had arrived and were taking people out. I went again to scan to see if there was anyone else that needed my help and I saw him just standing there. And I only knew it was him from his pictures because I had never met him.

Det. Poling: Did anyone tell you that your services were not needed?

Suellen: No.

Det. Poling: Okay. Did you feel that people were being taken care of fairly?

Suellen: Had been taken care of what?

Det. Poling: Fairly, I mean, were they were doing CPR, were they were doing everything they could?

Suellen: Yeah. It seemed to me they were, I mean there was just so many people that were sick. And after Sean seemed to stabilize somewhat I got up and asked the rescue worker that was working with him if I could just take a break for a minute and see if anyone else needed my help. So I just scanned around and at that point you know it appeared that everybody was either grouped with somebody or somebody was there with them, yeah, and a lot of those people were our staff at that point.

Det. Poling: Anything that you heard or saw that limited anyone from getting help?

Suellen: No.

Det. Poling: Okay. Are you familiar with hypothermia?

Suellen: Yes I am.

Det. Poling: So I am not crazy when I say hypothermia.

Suellen: No, actually, I have it.

Det. Poling: You have it?

Suellen: Yes I have it, I have heat exhaustion and I have to be very careful in the heat but yes I know what hypothermia is --

Det. Poling: and stroke, and heat stroke, do they have the same characteristics?

Suellen: They do, yes.

Det. Poling: When you see these people being sick and coming out like that, are those signs and symptoms of heat stroke?

Suellen: Yes, heat stroke, heat exhaustion sometimes it is a little hard to tell to make a definitive diagnosis. What I saw was very consistent with what I see in myself when I get it, throwing up, pale, nausea, disorientation, yeah that's what I saw. I saw a lot of people just on the ground throwing up and very pale and cold.

Det. Poling: Okay. And are you familiar if it gets to the point of hypothermia, is that a life threatening --

Suellen: Oh yeah for sure, I mean that's when the temperature goes very, very high, yeah

Det. Poling: At what point, I know you are not a doctor, I am not expecting to, but as far as your knowledge, how long is it still reversible you know what I mean, I mean there is a point where it's not reversible and then you have permanent damage?

Suellen: Yeah, what's coming to my mind just from my nursing background is like a temperature of 106, 107 yeah.

Det. Poling: And that's internal temperature though, correct?

Suellen: Yes that's correct.

Det. Poling: So how hot is your body on the outside for your inside temperature. Ah, I shouldn't even ask that question cause

Suellen: Well I think the inside temperature is probably the hottest actually in the body because that's the core temperature, that's where the metabolic processes are I would guess that would be where it would register the highest.

Det. Poling: Okay. I asked a question that I don't even know anything about. I'm sorry about that.

Suellen: No, yea, that's alright.

Det. Poling: I don't know, that's for a doctor.

Suellen: Yea, exactly

Det. Poling: Was there anything that you noticed like bites or anything on anyone?

Suellen: The only thing I noticed was that over more towards the front of the tent there was another little tent set up and somebody had some burns and I just took a quick look at him. I think they were on the knees, around the legs or something and to me somebody was with him. And I just passed by, you know he was upright and he was talking at that point he was looking better than a lot of other people so I just kind of passed by that.

Det. Poling: Did you hear anyone denying attention or telling someone to stop giving CPR or they were doing anything wrong? (Inaudible) question I am sorry.

Suellen: No I never heard any, I've heard there was some of that conversation but I never heard anything where anybody was saying don't do that. No, I did not hear that.

Det. Poling: Were you present before the emergency was called out?

Suellen: No, I was not.

Det. Poling: Have you ever been to James Ray's events where people were sick like this?

Suellen: No, I have not, this is my first experience of a James Ray event at Angel Valley.

Det. Poling: And from a nursing background, do you go to sweat lodges?

Suellen: I have participated in sweat lodges, yes.

Det. Poling: As far as a nurse?

Suellen: No, not as a nurse, no, just for my own personal work and cleansing, whatever. I've been to probably four in my life.

Det. Poling: Would you consider a sweat dangerous?

Suellen: Not if it's properly done, no. And not if each person is told to you know monitor how they're feeling and if there is any question of anything, please feel free to get out at anytime. That's how it's been when I've done it. So each person is given responsibility for themselves as well as the leader kind of checking in to make sure everybody is doing okay. And I was only at one that had probably 40 people in it, the rest of them, it was more like a very small group of 6 or 8.

Det. Poling: Do they ever tell you can't leave the lodge?

Suellen: Never, no never.

Det. Poling: Okay. I probably have a million questions I have for you on that. But the main thing is if anyone was not you know if you heard anything going on or seen something that was not right, that's what I would need to know.

Suellen: Yeah. I would have to say and probably because of my own focus at that point, I mean my nursing background kicks in and I was looking for where I could be of most help and I was very focused. I went to where I thought I could be most helpful and stayed there except for like two occasions when I just felt like a triage, I just went out and walked around to see if there was anything, anybody that needed me more than who I was with. And I didn't see anything at that.

Det. Poling: And this is probably repeating myself but I don't know if I asked it this way, did you hear anyone say let them be they are going to be fine like the people that weren't dead like the other people that were sick, did anyone say just let them go, they would be okay, they would be fine?

Suellen: No. No. I did not hear that by the time I got there, no I didn't, that conversation.

Det. Poling: And the hoses, things that you see they are cooling the temperatures down after they leave the lodge?

Suellen: Well, you know I never even saw that because I was in the back you know initially with Kirby and James. So we were in the back of the tent and then also with Sean Ronan was in the back of the tent most of the time. Afterwards I saw that there were some tarps on the ground and it appeared that there was water on them. I didn't see any of the hosing or anything. It might have been going on while I was in the back of the tent I don't know.

Det. Poling: This may not be a fair questions but I'm thinking maybe a nurse would know that just say for instance someone came into an ER room with heat stroke or something like that, is part of the treatment to cool the body temperature down?

Suellen: I guess it would depend on you know taking the vital signs and seeing whether the temperature was very high because it's kind of the other end of it that people get kinda shocky actually and yeah they're getting, they're getting like sick to their stomach and pale and they feel cold. So that would be something to be assessed.

Det. Poling: That's what I don't understand and maybe in your nursing background you can help me but if you're suffering from a heat stroke or from hypothermia, is your body cold, does it feel cold?

Suellen: Well it can, I believe, but that may be more of a heat exhaustion thing because you know they differentiate between heat exhaustion and heat stroke. And if I'm remembering correctly that people who have heat exhaustion may be the ones who felt

cold, whereas hypothermia they might feel like they were burning up, I mean in both cases dehydration is a problem.

Det. Poling: Why I'm kind of confused when I look at the treatment is people coming out were treated two ways, and I don't know if it was simultaneously. One, some of them were given blankets and some of them were hosed down or were they all hosed down and then given blankets? I don't know how that works.

Suellen: I don't know, I actually never saw that piece. What I did see was a lot of shivering people who were in blankets.

Det. Poling: Okay so the blankets were because they were cold.

Suellen: Yeah they were actually shivering and feeling cold and then I only heard secondhand that when they came out of the lodge, some of them were saying I need water, I need water, I need water. That's all I heard but I don't know whether that meant they wanted to be hosed down or they wanted to drink.

Det. Poling: And as far as treatment if you are suffering from the heat and you are hosed down, is that dangerous?

Suellen: Well, again, being a nurse, I wouldn't do any action like that unless I knew what was really happening with that person.

Det. Poling: That's why I am wondering why, why they have water hoses at these events, I mean it sounds to me and I am not trying to make you speculate, I'm just trying to understand if there's a hose there that means you are getting too hot in my opinion.

Suellen: You know part of this tradition is that when you do a regular Native American sweat lodge, oftentimes it's done by water and between rounds you go out and you do jump in the water to cool down. The difference of what the normal sweat lodge is and people just go in, they cool down then they go back in again, it's a very normal kind of thing where each person is judging what they need to do for themselves as opposed to what I have heard being the length of time that they were in there and probably how overheated they get. Well I don't have to speculate on that, I saw it. I saw the effects of they were in, you know, obviously in there too long and got too hot so maybe as an emergency measure, you would try and cool them down, you know?

Det. Poling: Yeah I don't get lost and I don't mean to say it like that, I get confused. I hear spirituality and I hear health and science and my thinking is that if you get too hot, you can cool down and you can come back to your body or come back to earth like if you're dying and you're, you're almost gone. I, I understand that it is reversible and you can regain consciousness and come back to life. Then the spiritual side of it says you are gone, you are gone and wait a minute do I want to keep going or do I want to come back to my body, you know what, do I have a choice? You know?

Suellen: Yea, well when I saw the two people that died, I saw that they had signs that I've seen before in people that are dead. There a lot of modeling like a lot of purpley look on their skin, very pale and on their extremities kind of bluey, purpley, that's a bad sign whenever you see that. Now what that meant in that moment I don't know. But it said to me these people were really in very bad shape.

Det. Poling: I know you said something about the spirituality part and just help me out because some people believe in spirituality, some people don't, some people believe in science, some people believe in God, some people don't, I am not trying to go there but what I am trying to think here is, is that part of dying when they are leaving the body, you know what I mean, is that same? Are the two things colliding me, the religion or science and spirituality?

Suellen: You mean death of the body and the spirit leaving? I don't know, I mean to me that's a mystery, I don't know all of that. I don't really know at all. Yeah, I don't really know. I just know that you know I've sat with a lot of people who have died and there seems to be a moment were the life force goes out of their eyes. That's all I know.

Det. Poling: I don't get in too deeply, I'm sorry, I didn't mean

Suellen: No it's fine but you know I don't really know. Honestly it's a mystery that I hold.

Det. Poling: And a lot of this is a mystery to me and I don't know I mean I think I know why they died. I'm not a doctor but you know it doesn't take a rocket scientist just to know what happened here.

Suellen: No, and there are autopsies have been done and all that so they should have some pretty definitive I mean when people die from core heat or whatever there is certain science there in the organs and stuff that are pretty different.

Det. Poling: Do you remember if anyone there took core temperatures if you were there and watched the medics do it or anything?

Suellen: They have them monitored and I know they were doing blood pressure and they were doing pulse and I believe that maybe like on Sean Ronan, they may have done a core temperature on him and they may have taken his temperature. I can't be absolutely sure.

Det. Poling: Yea, I don't know either.

Suellen: No cause we were pretty much watching his blood pressure and his pulse for indicators, how he was doing and giving him IV fluids and stuff.

Det. Poling: And did you hang around till after the helicopters left?

Suellen: Yes I did.

Det. Poling: So you were there for most of the time then?

Suellen: I was there most of the, yes I was there until everybody all the people who were sick were either taken to the emergency room, flown out of there, driven out of there or the rest of the people went over to the dining room and then I went to the dining room and by then the trauma workers were there and we just spent the night there pretty much with people.

Det. Poling: Were you in the dining area when people were talking?

Suellen: Yes I was.

Det. Poling: Did you hear any staff members like James Ray staff members talking like oh you know what we should do, what should have been done anything -- we can't believe this happened, we have told him before not to do this or anything like that?

Suellen: No, no, no. I never heard that and mainly the people that I was talking to were the participants. I don't remember talking to any staff actually. I mean part of the problem was they weren't very visible. There's something called the Dream Team which I think are like people that are kind of in training to be leaders and I think some of them were around but you know the staff that I knew as staff were not there.

Det. Poling: Were you there for the channeling?

Suellen: I was not there for the channeling. That was the next day, wasn't it?

Det. Poling: Yeah.

Suellen: No I was not there.

Det. Poling: Michael called his friend (Inaudible) and they did (Inaudible)

Suellen: No I was not there for that.

Det. Poling: Okay. Any information that you think I need that I don't have that might be helpful?

Suellen: Let me think a minute. I don't think so

Det. Poling: Or even something you would do differently, I know hindsight is 20/20 but

Suellen: I mean actually once we got there and started dealing with people I would have done exactly what was done which is just get as much help as we can get in there, professional help and get these people to treatment as soon as possible. So that's the job

of triage is get them out of here, get them stabilized and you know just keep getting them out to the best help they can get and then you know dealing with the people that are left that are less sick and less sick until everybody is taken care of. And I think that was done, the rescue workers, the fire people were fabulous.

Det. Poling: I bet that was a weird situation that you find yourself into with all those people (Inaudible)

Suellen: It's horrible but you know there's something in a nurse that's worked in trauma and ER you take into this place and you get very focused and you get very clear about you know assessing who needs your help the most and go there. And that happened for me that night to me. I mean that I wasn't (Inaudible) after but and I felt what I felt you know. But I just kicked into my nurse mode, I've been a nurse for 35 years so I kicked into my mode and I did what I could do.

Det. Poling: Are you still a nurse?

Suellen: Yes, I'm a registered nurse in Vermont and Arizona.

Det. Poling: Oh cool. (Inaudible)

Suellen: Mainly I do private practice now, I have my own business called Polarity Wellness East/West and I mainly work with people to help them stay well and re-own their responsibility for their own health and that sort of thing. I don't work in hospitals anymore. But I did my time.

Det. Poling: I was gonna say, you did your time. And You're in a beautiful place now, Sedona's nice.

Suellen: It is an amazing place, yeah. So you know I think once it became aware what was happening, I have no criticism from my own experience of everybody that could pitching in and trying to help. And I'm sure there were things that I didn't see or hear or anything but I was very focused.

Det. Poling: I appreciate that you're talking to me about this too.

Suellen: Yeah, sure I mean I have nothing to hide.

Det. Poling: Yeah, I'm not thinking anything like that, I just you know, I wanted, whatever happened I just need to know what people have heard and said you know especially different people.

Suellen: Yes, and you know I am a neutral person from the perspective of, I wasn't involved in it and I just got called in and if I had heard things that I think you should have known I would have said. But I've heard them secondhand but I didn't hear them myself.

Det. Poling: Absolutely and that's what I wanted; what you've observed.

Suellen: Yeah I have told you everything that I heard and as I said I was out in the back of the tent with these really sick people. I'm sure there was a whole lot going on in the front where people were coming out of the tent and all that stuff but I didn't see it and I didn't hear it.

Det. Poling: Okay. I definitely appreciate your talking to me today and calling me back.

Suellen: Okay.

Det. Poling: Suellen, you have a great day.

Suellen: Thank you, you too.

Det. Poling: Take care.

Suellen: Bye, bye now.

Det. Poling: Bye.

Apvd C16/0394 DBW