

\*I/V Melissa Phillips by Det. Willingham #C36

On 10/20/09, at approximately 1300 hours, I spoke with Melissa Phillips by telephone. I audio taped the interview. I spoke briefly with Melissa and then her friend came for a visit and we rescheduled to continue the interview.

Melissa has made a journal regarding what happened and she did not lose consciousness inside the sweat lodge. Melissa was seated two people from Kirby and James Shore was next to Kirby. Melissa put her face on the ground and lifted the tent flap and breathed the air from outside to survive. It was immediately hot and at one point Melissa felt her heart beating extremely fast so she left and went outside. She drank three glasses of water and electrolytes to help re-hydrate herself.

Melissa left after the third round and James Ray was calling to those who had left, warriors we need you in here. Melissa decided she would go back inside. When she went back inside she noticed people were passed out and sometimes two rounds would pass before anyone noticed someone had passed out. Melissa did not return to the same place, but stayed more on the east next to her friend Teresa. She said everyone seemed crazy and delirious. When Lou fell into the fire he screamed a horrible scream. Melissa said sometimes several rounds passed before it was realized people were passed out.

Melissa said she thought it was safe because in past events James Ray told them he would not ask them to do anything he had not already done. Melissa believes James Ray is a Shaman and has done this sweat lodge for 8 years with no problem. We were also told if you are not feeling well you can leave.

Melissa said she wished she had not returned. When I asked why, she said because she has a burn all over her body, mild heat exhaustion and witnessed these people die. Melissa said that at one point a woman was not breathing well and had slumped over. She told them someone has to get her out of here and it was Kirby. Melissa was told to just leave her be. Melissa said earlier when Kirby was saying over and over "we can do it" they tried to get her to go out and she would not.

James Ray told them they would be very hot, feel like their skin would split apart and mind over matter. Melissa felt James Ray's ego got out of control. When Lou burnt his hand, James said to Lou wow you will have a good reminder of this. Melissa feels James Ray did not pay close enough attention to the participant's safety. If you are encouraging with mind over matter, don't be weak, be strong. Those at the east, north and west were dream team members and they too were also in and out of consciousness. Melissa said her nipples were burnt from lying on the ground. The last round everyone was back against the edges of the tent and were encouraged to sit up, but no one did. Melissa said that Kirby was breathing in a snoring fashion for 4 rounds. Melissa kept telling them she was not breathing right and could see she was slumped over, but did not know if she was unconscious.

Melissa said she spoke with friends who have done a sweat lodge before and has learned that no other sweat lodges are run like this. Melissa felt so many did not want to disappoint James Ray. Many of his seminars challenge you to do things you did not think you could or would. This interview was interrupted and completed the next day.

Melissa provided me with information about waivers they did sign. She explained that she felt James Ray's heart was in the right place, but he was not adequately prepared with medical information and having proper medical staff on hand. She also felt too much emphasis was placed on being the honorable warrior. Melissa felt there was too much pressure placed on people and people were not able to breathe, making her feel unsafe. She told me there were no health questionnaires and he tells them they all must be responsible for themselves.

James Ray has always told them there are consequences for their actions and she is hoping safe guards can be put into place.

Melissa did not have anything to eat after Tuesday at lunch until Breakfast Thursday morning. Melissa drank about three liters of water Thursday morning. At round three she left and drank three glasses of electrolyte water.

James Ray told them they needed to surrender to death to survive it. It is going to be hotter than hell and you have to remove your mind from your body to survive this. Melissa said she does not recall being told that you would pass out. She does remember that if you did pass out you would be taken out. Melissa said that was happening and the men were working to drag people out if they were unconscious. She said they were told that you could not talk in the sweat lodge, it was the "master" who could talk. A lot of people were talking. A dream team member had to have taken the course before and graduated to be considered dream team. James Ray did not help anyone out, but Greg, Aaron and even Lou helped before he got burnt. Melissa said as soon as someone was noticed passed out, they were taken out.

Melissa said this is why this was such a disaster, because there was a delay in helping those who had passed out. It was not until the end we realized the problems. Melissa told me that was when Sean was conscious, but out of it. He was all over the place and almost went into the pit. She thought it was Sean whose eyes were so blood shot.

Melissa learned what to expect from both the Vision Quest, Sweat Lodge and the hair shaving because she was at a dinner with friends that had previously attended spiritual warrior and they talked all about it.

Melissa said James Ray wanted them to leave in an orderly fashion and only leave after a round was completed and the flap/door was open.

Melissa said she thought someone maybe James (Shore) scooted out the back. James Ray yelled for the flap to be put down as it was disrespectful. Melissa could not recognize the people who were still inside.

Melissa said throughout the week they had fasted, went without water and had been encouraged to stay up writing in their journals and not sleep.

Melissa said James Ray did not seem to respond at all once it was realized there was a problem. Melissa heard one of the team members ask James Ray what to do. He told her how should he know, he is not a nurse, where is the nurse. Melissa said she felt that he should have gotten onto his knees and started talking with the people trying to help them back to consciousness.

Melissa said the man made materials used to make the sweat lodge were not the right materials. She felt it was too hot for too long. Further she felt the participants were not properly prepared for this type of challenge.

Melissa felt there should have been the proper equipment and emergency medical personnel present for this type of event.

I placed a call to Melissa on 10/31/09 to ask some clarifying questions.

Investigation continues.

Detective Shonna Willingham C36

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