

8-20-98

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW WITH VINCE CARRAHER (VC) & STEVE BJORKLUND (SB)
Ralph Duke Appeal
File No.: 9345/35393

VC: I'm calling for Steve Bjorklund, please.

___: Okay, just a minute please.

VC: Thank you.

SB: Yeah?

VC: Yeah, my name is Vince Carraher. I'm with attorney Meshbesh, up in Minneapolis.

SB: Okay.

VC: And, we're handling the appeal for Ralph Duke. He gave me your number and told me that you may talk to me. That there may be some information that is of some value. Have you got a couple minutes?

SB: Sure.

VC: How do you feel about this, first of all. Are you comfortable with all of this?

SB: Well, you know, I guess I'd have to kind of -- I kind of wish I had a list of what questions you're gonna ask so I could kind of think through the consequences of what's happening with them, but.

VC: Yeah.

SB: I guess what I would do is I would tell you what I think would be valuable to you.

VC: Yeah, well here's - here's what I'm primarily concerned with. That, this Joe lived with him for a while and you gave him a job. Joe Ballard?

SB: M, mmm.

VC: And uh, I haven't read Joe's court testimony, but he cut a deal too, as did everyone else. I'm thoroughly convinced this was not Ralph's deal. He did not put the money up and these guys turned on him to save their own asses. I'm a believer you should go to hell for your own sins, not somebody else's, so, I've got recantation statements from about six people and I've corroborated some other things, so I think it's looking quite strong.

SB: M, mmm.

VC: But, would you - now you were at one time, or maybe you still are, I don't know, Ralph's brother-in-law?

SB: Right.

VC: Okay, he was - what's your sister?

SB: Diane.

VC: Are they still married, or?

SB: You know, I'm not sure. I couldn't tell you that. I'm not for sure what the status of that is.

VC: Okay. At any rate, how long did you Ralph?

SB: I've know Ralph since I was probably 16 and I'm 50.

VC: Oh. You don't sound like it. You grew up in St. Paul, is that it?

SB: Well, no I grew up in Wayzata.

VC: Wayzata. How did you happen to meet him?

SB: Well, my sister was going out with him. When she was ah, I might have been 18, I guess, she was going to the Minneapolis Institute of Art, I think she met him there.

VC: Okay.

SB: Right out of high school. So I was probably, well yeah she was 19, so actually I was probably about 15 or 16 when I met him.

VC: Okay.

SB: And then after that, after they got married and stuff, they had property in different places. They had a couple in California and then I did some work on a couple pieces of property for him up in the cities.

VC: Yeah.

SB: This went on over, probably a 20 year period off and on.

VC: Your a contractor?

SB: Yeah, I'm a contractor/builder. So I've known him and been around him off and on for probably upwards of 30 years.

VC: Okay.

SB: The point I want to make is I was around him, you know at different times because basically when I was with him I was working. I was working on a project, so I would see him come and go. And most of the time I would see him with my sister. You know I would see Ralph alot. He would take me along with him, once in a while. This went on for well over 20 years and I never saw, you know I tell the truth because I've been in business all my life, I never saw him buy cocaine, I never saw him sell cocaine, I never saw him talk about cocaine or any other type of drug.

VC: Right.

SB: I met alot of his friends, I've never heard them make any drugs deals or any offers to buy or sell drugs.

VC: Uh, huh.

SB: You know I never saw any drugs, other than with the exception of a small amount on marijuana on about three occasions, this is over 20 years.

VC: Yeah, yeah...

SB: So I saw it maybe three times, that Ralph had a small amount of marijuana for his own personal use.

VC: Yeah, okay.

SB: I never saw him buy or sell or attempt to make a deal. What I did see over all those years that I was around him off and on, is I saw him sell cars.

VC: Right.

SB: I saw him buy cars and I saw him buy and sell real estate.

VC: Yeap.

SB: Okay, now that goes over two to three decades of time. So this whole case that the DEA and who ever else is involved with making this case, it is so surrealistic to me. If he could be this "Drug King Pin" that there talking about and have this humongst network. When I heard about it I just laugh and said who are they talking about.

VC: That's right.

SB: For one thing the guy worked 18 hours a day, buying and selling cars and doing real estate. If he was working that hard to make a living and he was this multi-millionaire drug

dealer, see none of it fits. The pieces to the puzzle don't fit.

VC: They wanted him so bad and I don't know why because I've known Ralph for about 30 years myself and I'm 64, basically retired from Meshbesh, but I do a little...

SB: Then you can adjust to what I'm saying.

VC: Yeah. I did see him on a regular basis, he would come by every once in a while, we handled an accident case for him, we handled some stuff for his brother snookie. He was never arrested, charged with a crime. My wife and I were out of the country when this happened. I was surprised when we got back, we were gone for a year, to hear about this. But there were certain people that blame him for everything and...

SB: Well, you know, some of this I'm going to tell you is hearsay..

VC: That's alright.

SB: Between you and me, I'm not for sure, is it the DEA that kind of handled this or was it the FED's?

VC: Well the DEA, that's a federal agency, there was a agent alone from the Minneapolis Police Department.

SB: I think it was a joint venture. Because the FED's actually brought me down and went through all my books.

VC: Well there was a guy name Carey, agent Carey, then there was a guy name Saliski.

SB: Saliski, I think, I remember him.

VC: And Carey testify also in the Long Cadillac case and kept throwing out Ralph's (inaudible)

SB: They brought me down, they went through all my books and thank God I claim everything whether it's in cash or not, so I had everything correct. I paid taxes on everything that Ralph ever paid me.

VC: How did they happen to contact you, why did they contact you?

SB: Well, I think they did a sweep. I think they had everybody that had anything to do with him, that was related or had business.

VC: Okay.

SB: You know it was sweep, they got everybody. And um...they were fishing.

VC: Were you in the Metropolitan area at that time?

SB: Yeah.

VC: Okay. You weren't living down....

SB: Living out by the Wayzata area.

VC: Yeah.

SB: So, you know they went through my books and they found everything was in order. Then I told them just what I told you, I said, "You know I've been around this guy for twenty years and I think you guys are just, this just doesn't make any sense."

VC: Did..

SB: And I said, " I wish you fellahs would ask me to come and testify at the trial or at the pre-trial hearing." They didn't want me any where near it because I had exculpatory information for him.

VC: And that's exactly what they have omitted.

SB: And so nobody called me.

VC: Nobody called you.

SB: And I was around. I don't know if you could consider me an eyewitness, but I watched this guy live for twenty years. And you can't tell me that he was bringing in, what there talking about, and I wouldn't of seen something or heard something or found something. You know, because I lived right in his houses.

VC: Yeah.

SB: Most of time we were working on the house that he lived in.

VC: Okay. Did they take you down to the federal building in Minneapolis?

SB: Yeah, federal building in Minneapolis. Went down by myself, probably should have gone with my lawyer, but I didn't have anything to hide so, I went down alone.

VC: Can you remember the name of the agent?

SB: You know, I really can't. There was two of them.

VC: Two of them. Was there a federal prosecutor around by the name of Hopeman?

SB: It's been so long, I don't remember.

VC: Yeah, okay.

SB: There were two guys, it was at the federal building. Far as I knew they were FBI agents.

VC: Yeah, okay. And you told them what your telling me?

SB: Yes.

VC: Of course all the time you been around him, you never picked up on anything that improper or illegal?

SB: Absolutely.

VC: Okay. They don't want to hear that?

SB: In fact they probably swept the room after I left, I think. I think they wanted me gone bad.

VC: Yeah, okay. Did any defense attorneys ever get a hold of you?

SB: No, Well I tried to call, I can't remember the details, but I don't know if I talked to one of the lawyers at that Pre-Trial hearing from Rapport, not Rapport, but Meshbesh, I either called there office or I talked to one of there attorneys at one of the, I don't know if it was the Arraignment, it wasn't the trial, it was some kind of a legal thing that they did before. It might have been an Arraignment.

VC: It could of been.

SB: And I don't recall if I just talked to one of the lawyers in the hallway and basically gave them a short revision of what I just told you, so that I hope they call me to testify or if I called Meshbesh's office....

VC: Well he wasn't representing Ralph. In fact he was, there was a conflict of interest and they wouldn't even let Ronnie in the courtroom.

SB: Well, that maybe why nothing happened because I know I did contact Meshbesh.

VC: He ended up with attorney Joe Friedberg.

SB: Okay, because this was probably before they made that determination. It was when he was first arrested.

VC: Well, it could have been.

SB: So, I think maybe it just go lost in the lines, but what did, after the FED's, I told them I want to testify. Then I tried to get a hold of Ralph's, at that time who I thought was his attorney, and nobody called me.

VC: Well, you would have testified had you been called?

SB: Absolutely.

VC: Okay. Now let me ask you about Joe Ballard. Do you remember when he came back here?

SB: I think he came back when Ralph got that house in Delano.

VC: And I don't know the dates there, but ah...

SB: It would have been about two years before he was arrested, I would say.

VC: About 1986 or so?

SB: Some where in there.

VC: Was Ralph trying to help him out?

SB: Yeah.

VC: Okay. Now my understanding, and I don't know if you know this and I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, my understanding is that it's this Ballard you know got into drugs out in California and he's a cousin of Ralph and Ralph was trying to get him squared away or something.

SB: That could very well be. I'm not sure about that, because I don't know Joe that well.

VC: Okay.

SB: Actually, Ralph was trying to tell me that he was working for me. I think what the deal was, is that I was charging Ralph for the job and Ralph just kind of loaned him to me because I don't think I actually paid Joe.

VC: Okay.

SB: I think the payments actually came from Ralph. But I turned in hours for Joe so Ralph could see what, you know, Joe works. So

it's kind of a in the grey area there, Joe wasn't really an employee for me, but he was working with me on Ralph's house and then Ralph was paying him.

VC: Okay.

SB: A draw based on the hours that I turned in. So he wasn't my employee, but he was working, I guess, I don't know what to say about that. He wasn't actually, I didn't use him out on my other construction jobs, it was....

VC: Just on Ralph's house?

SB: Just on Ralph's work.

VC: Yeah.

SB: We kind of did this, like you said, he was trying to help Joe, trying to keep him straight. And he asked me can he work with you on a project, and I said yeah, sure.

VC: Good. How long did that project take, you remember?

SB: It was more than one.

VC: More than one of his houses?

SB: I think he worked on the Delano house and I think he worked, some at the, you know Ralph had that car dealership over on I think it was 4th street or 7th in St. Paul, we went in and remodeled this store front and stuff, where he had some his cars for sale.

VC: Oh, yeah. Did Joe help you there?

SB: I think he did.

VC: Okay. Did the guy, how did Joe appear to you?

SB: Well, he's pretty quiet. He was always real quiet.

VC: Uh, huh.

SB: And you know like I said, you know, just basically did his work.

VC: Yeah.

SB: I didn't socialize with him or anything, we never went out because I always seem alot older than him.

VC: Right.

SB: He was just another one of the family that Ralph would keep, Ralph had to help his whole family.

VC: Yeah. Did you know any of his kids, Lamont?

SB: Just, I met him. I can't honestly say I have ever done anything with him or anything. If they walked in the room right now, I don't know if I would recognize them.

VC: There is quite an age gap there.

SB: You know Rob (inaudible) my nephew and Samantha, I keep in touch with them. But the other kids I don't really know to well.

VC: Okay. There was also an allegation by Carey that there was the Duke gang. He kept referring to the Duke gang and the Long Cadillac...

SB: That's pretty laughable. What that was is Ralph was trying to take care of all these cousins and nephew's and stuff and he was just, because the whole family was all kind of, you know, I don't know how to put it delicately, but the family units in alot of the Duke family were not cohesive. So there were kids living with there grandmothers and aunts..

VC: I know.

SB: And so Ralph was trying to make sure these kids were staying in school. He was trying to make sure that they all were working.

VC: Yeah.

SB: It was more like a patriot of a family then a crime family.

VC: Exactly.

SB: He does the same thing I try to do. I try to help the kids in our family.

VC: Yeah.

SB: If they get in trouble you get in there and say what's going on, you know, get your school work done, get a job. Just what every other family does. They try to take care of their own.

VC: Right, exactly. I found this over the year, that they always didn't get along, you know. There were some family squabbles.

SB: Yes, there were.

VC: It's just unbelievable, I know that they threatened, for instances his nephews, the threatened his parents etc.

SB: You what they did, because I heard from a lot of the family afterwards, they would come in in the middle of the night, the DEA, knock the door down, the people would be sleeping, they come in to their bedrooms shine flashlights in their face and have a pistol drawn on them.

VC: Well, they squeezed everybody.

SB: And they did that and alot of these kids are 16 through 18 years old.

VC: Right.

SB: Then they said your going to do life in prison without parole unless you come up with some corroborate information about this drug family.

VC: Exactly.

SB: Well these kids all of a sudden are facing long times in jail unless they come up with something that these prosecutors want to hear about, and basically the kids just said "okay" and the prosecutor told them what they wanted to say and that's what they said.

VC: That's what I've heard from alot of these young guys that have recanted.

SB: Well, I think what they did is, I think they strong armed all these kids and I think they actually blackmailed them to get testimony out of them.

VC: Well, that's what there telling me know. Know we have to convince the appellate court and hopefully get a post-conviction hearing. But, you know, number one I wanted to rule out this Duke gang stuff and then also, firm up that Joe Ballard was actually doing some work for Ralph, he wasn't running drugs back and forth to California. I interviewed Joe's brother, he drove some cars back here for Ralph.

SB: I drove a couple of cars for him.

VC: Did you?

SB: Yes, I drove a car they picked up in Chicago, it was a (inaudible) and I drove it from Minneapolis out to California. You know, basically was transporting cars.

VC: Yeah.

SB: That was back when I was in college.

VC: Sure. Well, these kids have been stopped, you know, a kid driving a fancy car through Utah, chances are he may get stopped.

SB: I got stopped in Las Vegas by the police, when I driving that (inaudible) down there. And they searched the whole thing.

VC: Okay. Searched in Vegas.

SB: Yeah. Because when they see a young kid in a real expensive car in Las Vegas they usually stop them because there's so many stolen vehicles gone through there.

VC: Well, they particularly stopped these black kids, see. And on no occasion did they ever find any narcotics.

SB: Right.

VC: I mean it's just, you know. Which pissed off agent Carey, but that's another story. So, I didn't know that you drove a couple of times, that's terrific.

SB: Yeah, I did.

VC: Good. Alright. Well, let me ask you this, if I prepare a little report, I have taken some notes here concerning our interview, I'll prepare a brief affidavit type thing, mail it down to you and if you are comfortable with it, and agree to the format, would you sign it and send it back to me?

SB: Sure will.

VC: Okay. What is your address?

SB: It's ah, do you have the spelling of my name?

VC: Is it B-J-O-R-K-L-U-N-D?

SB: Right. And my first name is S-T-E-P-H-E-N.

VC: P-H-E-N, okay.

SB: Okay. My address is [REDACTED].

VC: [REDACTED]..

SB: [REDACTED] Avenue....

VC: [REDACTED] Avenue...

SB: Easton, that's E-A-S-T-O-N...

VC: Uh, huh.

SB: Minnesota, 56025.

VC: 56025, is that....

SB: If you need it, I got a fax phone that's on all the time, it's 507-

VC: 507...

SB: [REDACTED]-

VC: [REDACTED]-

SB: [REDACTED].

VC: Okay. That's your fax.

SB: Yeap. I got to tell you. This whole thing, the way they did this really stinks:

VC: It does. As I said I was out of the country, came back didn't know much about it, you know, I heard about it. Then Ralph got a hold of me, oh a couple years ago, were doing this without charging him a fee, he doesn't have any money. And, you know, as I said semi-retired, so I have some time, I can do these things.

SB: I think if he could get out though, he take care of it, (inaudible)

VC: Oh, I don't give a shit. I really don't.

SB: He would though..

VC: I know. I don't even keep track of my time. Because I agreed to do it and Meshbeshher's office agreed to do it. You know, you should do some free work once in while, what the hell. So, the more I get into it, the more outrageous it appears to me because the Government knew it wasn't his money, that these kids pulled there money and they were dealing with another undercover agent.

SB: You know, when they picked him up, there saying he's this drug lord and everything else, they picked him up supposedly when this actually was going down. He was going over to have pizza.

VC: Uh, huh.

SB: And they picked him up, no drugs in car and no guns.

VC: I know it.

SB: If he's suppose to be this "Drug King Pin" it would be pretty foolish to be running around unarmed.

VC: That's right.

SB: And buying pizza without a body guard anything else. None of the pieces of the puzzle fit.

VC: No, they don't.

SB: None of them.

VC: They don't at all. Did you see that billboard?

SB: Yeap.

VC: Yeah, I didn't see that.

SB: That was really...

VC: I saw photographs of it.

SB: Yeap.

VC: After.

SB: He was just a trophy on their wall.

VC: I know it, I know it. It's just outrageous.

SB: Yeap.

VC: And of course the judge, I think he listened to all these rumors and then you windle coming at him from a prosecutor outside the courtroom and how he could sentence someone to life in prison and a first offender is beyond me, I just can't get over that. But they can do it and they did it.

SB: Doesn't sound like America to me.

VC: Well listen, I will get together a report and get down to you.

SB: Yeap. And if you need me to come up, I certainly would.

VC: Well, that would be long down the road, if we needed that. Are you near Rochester?

SB: The other way. Were closer to Albert Lea.

VC: Oh, okay.

SB: Kind of half way between Albert Lea and Mankato.

VC: Yeah, alright. Well, I want to thank you. When I talk to Ralph I will tell him I spoke with you and that you were supportive.

SB: Yeah.

VC: Okay.

SB: Thank you very much.

VC: Thank you.

SB: Yeap, bye.

VC: Bye, bye.

Subscribed and sworn to before me
this ____ day of _____, 1998.

Notary Public