

Today is January 19, 1999. I am speaking with Mr. Joseph Ballard.

VC: Do you go by Joe or Joseph:

JB: Joseph.

VC: How do I spell your last name, Joseph?

JB: B-A-L-L-A-R-D.

VC: May I ask your age, sir?

JB: Thirty-three.

VC: Can you give me your home address?

JB: [REDACTED]; Gates, Oregon, 97346.

VC: And if for some reason I had to phone you, I can reach you through a relative by the name of Jeffrey, in that area?

JB: Yes.

VC: Okay. You probably remember several months ago I tried to track you down through your brother and I ask Jeffrey to request you call me. Do you remember that?

JB: Yeah.

VC: And you called my office?

JB: Yeah.

VC: And we weren't able to get together?

JB: That's right.

VC: Okay, but tonight you called me at my home, correct?

JB: Yeah.

VC: Okay. First thing I would like to ask is are you related to Ralph "Pluky" Duke in any way?

JB: Yes.

VC: Is he a uncle, cousin....?

JB: My uncle.

VC: He's your uncle?

JB: Yes.

VC: Okay. Sometime back, 1988/1989, did you move from the West Coast back to Minnesota?

JB: I moved from the West Coast back to Minnesota in 1987.

VC: Okay. Did you stay with your uncle Ralph Duke for a while?

JB: Yes.

VC: Do you remember what period of time that was?

JB: Late 1987 into 1989.

VC: Okay. Where were you living?

JB: In Watertown.

VC: Watertown, Minnesota, in Mr. Ralph Duke's home?

JB: Yeah.

VC: Okay. As a relative, was he in some way trying to help you out?

JB: Yes. He had me move from the West Coast to Minnesota, just to try to keep me out of some trouble, when I was younger, when we were living out in (inaudible) California.

VC: Okay. While you were living there, did you do a little work for his former brother-in-law, a guy by the name of Steve Bjorklund, who is a contractor?

JB: Yes. Construction.

VC: Okay. Some construction work. So that kept you busy then, gave you a little bit of an income?

JB: Right.

VC: Also, Mr. Duke was, I guess you call it, jockeying cars, selling cars, do you remember that?

JB: Yes.

VC: Okay. Some young folks, some relatives or what not, transported some cars from the West Coast back here and then he would sell the cars. Did you ever transport any cars?

JB: Yes.

VC: Do you remember approximately how many trips you made?

JB: Maybe three, four, five, I don't recall exactly.

VC: Okay. Now at any time did you transport any illegal products, items, such as drugs, guns, jewelry, any of that?

JB: Not that I recall or ever saw.

VC: Okay. You never asked to do any transportation of anything illegal. Were you ever stopped by any police authorities, traffic cops or anything like that?

JB: A couple times I got some traffic tickets. In 1989, we were stopped at a road block in Faribault, MN.

VC: Was the vehicle searched?

JB: They were taken from us. My brother Jeff and myself.

VC: Okay. Did they ever find any illegal substance in those vehicles?

JB: No, they did not.

VC: Okay. Do you know why they stopped you?

JB: From what I understand, when I was handcuffed and put in the trooper car, the trooper guys ask me how much drugs in the car. I told them I don't know what your talking about.

VC: Okay. Were you required to stay all night in jail?

JB: Yes. They wouldn't let us out with the rest of the inmates, for any recreation or anything. I gave my father's, Harry Ballard, phone number to one of the inmates and ask him to call him collect, say collect from Joseph and let them know that Jeff and I are in jail and their not giving us a phone call, their not letting us out.

VC: Well, how long did you remain in jail?

JB: I believe it was over night, until the next day when that fellah did call my dad and then some how my dad called someone, I think, and next thing I knew, they were letting us out of there.

VC: Do you know what they did with the cars?

JB: No, I don't. We never got the cars back.

VC: Never got the cars back. Was that several week, months, or whatever, before the arrest of Ralph "Pluky" Duke?

JB: That was several weeks before.

VC: Was there an officer by the name of Carey, involved in that, stopping you, arresting you?

JB: Yes, he had put a gun to my head.

VC: He put a gun to your head. What did he accuse you of?

JB: Transporting narcotics, drugs.

VC: And no drugs were ever found, were there? You were never charge with anything, were you?

JB: Never. I knew there was no drugs in the car and I was so afraid that they were going to plant some.

VC: Okay. But there were never any charge brought forward for the night you and Jeffrey were stopped and the car searched and the vehicles taken away?

JB: Never.

VC: Never any charge?

JB: When we were let out, they never did give me back my shoes, I was let out barefooted.

VC: You were?

JB: Yes.

VC: Why didn't they give you your shoes back?

JB: I have no idea.

VC: There's been an allegation that there was a gang called the "Duke Gang", is that a false allegation?

JB: Yes it is. There was never a "Duke Gang".

VC: Now, you would have been in a position to know, if there was such a gang?

JB: Oh, yes.

VC: All the time you were around Ralph Duke, were you with him much during the day or evening or were you kind of doing your own thing?

JB: I was kind of doing my own thing. He was pretty much gone a lot.

VC: At any time, did you hear him discussing buying and selling of drugs or illegal substance?

JB: No.

VC: Okay. Did you ever hear him talking to his son or his nephews with the intent of buying drugs?

JB: Never.

VC: Do you know if his son or any other young people, came to him requesting he front the purchase of a large amount of narcotics?

JB: No, not to my knowledge.

VC: Okay. Did his son and nephew's and a lot of these young people come around much?

JB: Not much. (Inaudible) run into them from time to time on the streets and say hi, how you doing, or if the family had a Bar-B-Que, family functions, that was about it.

VC: That was about it, okay.

JB: (Inaudible) family, I have never heard of no "Duke Gang".

VC: Okay. If he was going to put up a large amount of money on behalf or his son, his nephew's and a number of other young people, do you think you would of been in a position to know that?

JB: I think so.

VC: You were living in the same house?

JB: Yes.

VC: Okay. I'm going to ask you about some young guys that testified against Ralph Duke. Mr. Duke is what, he's over 50 years old?

JB: Yes, I believe so.

VC: And these people I'm going to ask you about are much younger. Did he hang around with a lot of young guys or more people his own age?

JB: More people his own age. The only time he hung around with the young ones, like I said, if we had a Bar-B-Que or Thanksgiving or something like that.

VC: Do you happen to know the Hutchinson brothers?

JB: I know of them, I don't, I heard the name, I don't know them, I didn't hang out with them.

VC: Okay. How about a guy name Virgil Tollfree?

JB: No, I don't know him.

VC: Okay. There's a guy by the name of Scott Tredwell?

JB: I heard that name. I heard he was a friend of Marcel Duke's. He would hang out with him.

VC: Did Mr. Ralph Duke hang out with any of those guys?

JB: No.

VC: Then there is a fellah by the name of Tony Turner, does that name ring a bell?

JB: I know Tony. He's a family friend.

VC: He was more the age of Lauren, Marcel or..

JB: Right. I think a year or two younger.

VC: Do you know if he knew Mr. Duke?

JB: He knew him, but he didn't hang out with them.

VC: Then there's a fellah by the name of Lindsay, another one by the name of Givens?

JB: I don't know those names.

VC: Okay. There's a fellah by the name of Kevin Beal, there's Andre Billups and Kevin Walker.

JB: I don't know the names. I have heard of Kevin Walker, but I never hung out with the guy, never even really talk to him..

VC: At Mr. Duke's trial there were some people that testified that he did not even know. Then there was some people who had passed through Iowa and they testified, Ralph Duke didn't know them. Were you present at Ralph Duke's trial?

JB: Not the whole thing.

VC: You testified in the trial?

JB: Yes.

VC: Were you arrested after Ralph Duke was arrested?

JB: Yes.

VC: He was a, correct me if I'm wrong, but wasn't he arrested before this sting operation?

JB: Um....I believe so, it was so long ago.

VC: Were you around when he was arrested? Were you home? I have no idea where he was arrested.

JB: I was not around.

VC: Okay. Then how much later were you arrested?

JB: June sometime.

VC: Would it of been several weeks later?

JB: I would say so.

VC: I don't have his exact dates...

JB: Maybe four or five weeks later.

VC: Okay. I don't have transcripts from that trial or anything like that. Why did they arrest you?

JB: They said that I was under arrest for transporting narcotics. They arrested me, took me down to St. Paul for a while, then transferred me over to Minneapolis, where I was taking up into the federal building where this Mike Carey said that I was in trouble for big time transporting and I was going to do 30 years.

VC: So, he threatened you with 30 years?

JB: That's what he said.

VC: Did he want your cooperation against Ralph Duke?

JB: They never discussed it with me, it was my lawyer who talked me into doing that.

VC: Talked you into accepting a deal?

JB: Yeah.

VC: Who was your lawyer at that time?

JB: I think it was Mike Colich.

VC: So he did all of the negotiation for you?

JB: I believe so, after having meetings with him.

VC: Were you required to testify then?

JB: Plead guilty and testify.

VC: Were you, because of this deal that you accepted, did you incriminate yourself for something you never did?

JB: I did incriminate myself. A lot of pressure put on, just, everybody was doing it and everybody was going to get big time, so I had no choice.

VC: Okay. Then you were required to testify in court?

JB: Yes.

VC: Were you told, pretty much, what to say in court? What they wanted to hear in order to get a conviction against Ralph Duke?

JB: Pretty much what they wanted to hear, is what they liked.

VC: Can you remember what they wanted to hear? Did they ask you about Duke putting up money for this sting operation?

JB: They never asked me about that because I believe they already knew he didn't.

VC: Yeah, they knew he didn't. Okay, what did they, do you mind telling me what you testified to? As I said, I don't have a copy of the transcript with your testimony, so I don't exactly know.

JB: They asked me about living at the house, about Ralph Duke and have I made any trips to California from Minnesota and Minnesota to California and vehicles, things like that.

VC: Okay. What do you think you had to say to please the prosecutor and get your deal?

JB: Anything dirty. That I transported drugs in vehicles, that I made trips with money.

VC: And none of that was true?

JB: No.

VC: But, you said that because you were threatened with extensive prison time, right?

JB: Right.

VC: How much time did you end up getting?

JB: I got 9 1/2 years. I did 54 months in and I'm still finishing up on paper.

VC: Okay. You weren't transporting money or drugs, so you plead to something you never did?

JB: Right.

VC: That's correct.

JB: Yeah.

VC: I'm not putting words in your mouth, but this is what it sounds like your telling me. Were you afraid, worried that you would get 30 years or something like that?

JB: Oh, yes.

VC: Alright. You told me that you knew some of these names of these guys and the way I understand it, they were not associates of Ralph "Pluky" Duke, is that correct?

JB: To the best of my knowledge, they weren't associates and I never hung out with them and they, like, never came over, he never, you know.

VC: So they didn't get into this whole sting operation with you? They got into other areas?

JB: The associates that you mentioned?

VC: The prosecutors and the police officers and when you were testifying in the stand, they concentrated in different areas, with your testimony?

JB: Right. I don't recall that I answered any questions about the sting.

VC: Okay. Did you know anything about that sting? Or did you learn after the fact?

JB: I learned after the fact. I do know, in my opinion, Ralph had nothing to do with it.

VC: Have you talk to some of those involved that have told you that Ralph had nothing to do with it?

JB: One court appearance, I talked to Lauren Duke and he just stated to me, oh, they think uncle gave us the money.

VC: Okay.

JB: I just kind of laughed.

VC: Did he come out and say that, that wasn't the fact?

JB: Oh, yes. He said, he didn't give us the money.

VC: Did he ever tell you who put the money up?

JB: I don't recall that. I just thought it was maybe him and the other younger fellahs that were involved.

VC: Yeah, that's right. Your right about that. Going back to this Officer Carey, did you only have one experience with him? Is that when he put the gun to your head?

JB: That experience, then later in Faribault where, I forget the other officer that was in the room, but you know, he played bad cop, the other guy played nice cop, you know.

VC: Uh, huh.

JB: (Inaudible) everything was there except the bright light in my face, then when I was indicted and taken to the federal building in Minneapolis, where he said, your in big time trouble for big time transporting, 30 years. Those are the only incidents I recall him.

VC: Okay. Your father, Mr. Harry Ballard, he's a deputy sheriff, correct?

JB: Yes.

VC: He's been a long time deputy sheriff, is that correct?

JB: Oh, yes.

VC: Did he have a good reputation in the community?

JB: Very good.

VC: Do you know anything about a burglary to your father's residence?

JB: Yes.

VC: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

JB: I don't recall exactly when, but I was visiting him a lot, I had a key and I went over there and his front door was open. His car wasn't there, I tried calling his name and he didn't answer, so I went in and there were some things that had been thrown around, I went upstairs there was his little tin safe under the bed, was on the bed, his extra police hand gun was pulled out and left on the bed. So I went back downstairs in the back and someone had come through the screen window over the sink and walked right out the front door, so I called my dad at work.

VC: The screen was damaged or taken off?

JB: Yes.

VC: Okay. You called your father, then did someone notify the local police department?

JB: Yes, my dad came home and called 911 or called the police and they came out.

VC: Okay. Was there ever a suspect? Was a neighbor aware of someone coming to the door asking about your father, before hand?

JB: It was the neighbor, who at the time, lived a couple of doors down. He had said that somebody asked if Joe was around. That's me. They guy said I don't know, the next thing the house was broken into.

VC: Could the neighbor identify the person that asked for you?

JB: I don't recall.

VC: Did your father suspect it might of been an agent, a government agent?

JB: Yes and so did I.

VC: Who did you think it may have been?

JB: I thought it was Mike Carey.

VC: When you first met Carey, did he have a beard, mustache, that type of thing?

JB: Yes. A really thick one.

VC: Okay. Later on when you saw him, had he shaved that?

JB: Yes.

VC: How long later?

JB: I can't give you a specific time, I don't know.

VC: Around the trial time?

JB: Yes.

VC: Okay. How did your father and you happen to suspect that maybe it was Carey that broke into the house.

JB: Because everything that was going on at the time, I thought who else could it be.

VC: Do you know if your father's house was under surveillance?

JB: I never noticed, I don't know.

VC: Is there anything else you know about that?

JB: Nothing else.

VC: At any time, did you talk to the prosecutor, who's name was Hopeman or another prosecutor by the name of Denise Riley?

JB: Yes.

VC: (CONTINUED ON SIDE B)

JB: Pled guilty, I just don't recall.

VC: Okay. Did they try to, did Hopeman or Denise Riley, try to influence you in any way or was that done through your lawyer?

JB: I don't recall them trying to influence me, it was just my lawyer thought that this was the best thing to do.

VC: Okay. So you took the advice of your lawyer?

JB: Yes, I did.

VC: You were pretty young at the time?

JB: (INAUDIBLE)

VC: Okay. Once again, I think I asked you, did you feel intimidated and afraid because of this whole thing?

JB: Oh, definitely. It was a scary experience.

VC: Okay. So that's why you testified the way you did, so you could avoid doing many years in prison, right?

JB: Yes.

VC: Once again, I don't mean to put words in your mouth.

JB: No, I was definitely afraid.

VC: Okay. So what you testified to, you damaged your own position, is that correct?

JB: Yes.

VC: In the course of that, that testimony affected your uncle, right?

JB: Yes.

VC: You never did transport money or drugs, is that correct?

JB: Not any that I saw.

VC: So there was no "Duke Gang" as you have said...

JB: There was never a "Duke Gang".

VC: You weren't part of some kind of a big drug ring, coast to coast deal?

JB: No.

VC: Okay. The time you were arrested and thrown in jail, there were no drugs found then?

JB: Just a small amount of marijuana, which was some personal marijuana that my brother and I were smoking.

VC: Okay. Were you in two cars or one car?

JB: Two.

VC: Alright. Who was stopped first?

JB: I was in front.

VC: And you came upon a road block?

JB: That's what it looked like to me, I thought it was a car accident.

VC: And that was on what highway? You coming up through Faribault?

JB: I can't recall exactly what highway.

VC: That would of been 35W interstate?

JB: Most likely, yes.

VC: Do you have any idea why this road block was set up, did anybody ever tell you? Did anybody give you any history of why you were stopped?

JB: No, I don't recall.

VC: Okay. When you were stopped, did they bring up Pluky's name? Carey?

JB: I don't recall.

VC: Okay. Let's see, is there anything else, you can think is important?

JB: Nothing else that I can think of.

VC: Okay.

JB: I don't know, it was just a bad experience, like I said.

VC: Yeah.

JB: I can't think of anything else.

VC: Your sister, Jackie, who know lives in Minnesota, there were some allegations about her, too. She was in no way, to the best of your knowledge, involved in any illegal activity?

JB: No way.

VC: She's a woman with children, is that correct?

JB: That's right.

VC: Okay. She lived in California for a while?

JB: Yes.

VC: When Pluky would be in California, would he visit family members out there?

JB: Yes.

VC: Okay. Did he ever ask any of those family members to do something illegal on his behalf?

JB: Not that I know of.

VC: Did he ever ask you to do anything illegal on his behalf?

JB: No.

VC: Okay. I think that about covers it. You told me that Mr. Duke was never involved in putting up money, that ultimately ended up in a sting deal. That was a group of young guys that did that.

JB: Exactly.

VC: He never asked you to do anything illegal, all you ever did was transport some cars for him, is that correct?

JB: Right.

VC: Okay. Now with your permission, I have recorded this. Have I made any promises, threats or inducements to you so you would talk to me?

JB: No.

VC: So your talking to me on your own free will?

JB: Right. My brother Jeff asked me to give you a call, so that's what I'm doing?

VC: Has anyone else made any promises or threats to you?

JB: No.

VC: Do you want to repeat your name again?

JB: Joseph Ballard.

VC: Okay. I will have this transcribe, and I will mail it out to you in care of that address. I will make a copy for your records too.

JB: I won't need a copy.


Joseph Ballard

With time to ponder the THREAT of 30 years in jail, at the time my life flashed before my eyes, my parents would most likely be dead, my child would most likely be married w/children, my life would be ruined, I had no choice, other than to say what they liked & wanted to hear.