

***Excerpt from the book manuscript of Jens Soering, chapter 9, page 165 – 175:***

[...]

On June 7, while I was still trying to persuade the policemen to allow me to see my attorney, I nearly panicked and told the truth. An English Detective Sergeant named Kenneth Beever asked me, "Would you consider, under those circumstances, taking into account your answer, pleading guilty to something you didn't do?"

"Would I consider doing that?"

"Yes."

"I can't say for sure right now, but I can see, I can see it happening, yes. I think it is a possibility. I think it happens in real life."

"I disagree with you, but don't let's get into any legal arguments now. I'm sorry. I think you answered my question."

"I mean, you know. I couldn't answer that question right now. I certainly hope that, I hope very much that it's not going to come to something like that."<sup>1</sup>

But it did come to something like that. I knew that the English magistrate had ordered the police to stop interrogating me about the homicides by midnight on June 8, 1986. If I was to keep my promise to save Elizabeth's life I could not wait forever for my lawyer, and the investigators never did allow me to speak to him. So on the

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<sup>1</sup>The transcripts of Jens Soering's 1986 police interrogations are available in the public records at Bedford County Courthouse.

evening of June 8 I decided to admit to Liz's crime without having checked my legal status with an attorney.

The interrogation was conducted by Bedford County Detective Ricky Gardner, who dictated these notes onto a tape recorder as soon as the interview was completed:

Told by Beever that Soering wanted to talk with me. Brought to detective's office at 4:45 p.m. Read *Miranda* warnings to Soering at that time. Said he understood and signed form. Said he would make statement only to me. Said that he did not want me to tape record the statement. I agreed and asked Jens to tell me what really happened. He began to make his statement.

Elizabeth and Jens drove a rental car to Washington D.C. on that Friday night. Discussed killing her parents...They were opposed to her seeing Jens. Thought that she could do better...Elizabeth and Jens did not want to kill them...Subject of killing them came up. He decided to drive to Lynchburg and confront her parents...Drove rental car there on Saturday night...Had knife with him...Had not decided to kill Haysoms, just wanted to talk to them and try to convince them to let Elizabeth continue to see him. Left Washington in afternoon...Drove to Loose Chippings. Knocked on front door. Answered by Mr. Haysom. He invited Jens inside...Elizabeth stayed in Washington to set alibi in case trouble happened.

Jens entered front door. Mr. Haysom served Jens one or two stiff drinks...Mrs. Haysom came down from upstairs...Argued with Mr. Haysom about her painting...Both were drinking heavy...My drink was gin and something...Mrs.

Haysom wearing jeans...Big argument between Elizabeth's parents about painting... They invited Jens to have something to eat...Led to dining room table...Sat with back to window looking over the hill through back dining room window...Mr. Haysom was to Jens' left side...Haysoms arguing very loud...They started yelling and arguing with me about Elizabeth...Said they could have me kicked out of U.Va....Said they did not want Elizabeth to see me any more...Argument got more violent...Head was ringing...

Tried to leave...Got up from my chair and tried to walk behind Mr. Haysom...He pushed me back and I was slammed against dining room wall...Hit my head against the wall...Do not remember how many drinks I had before I tried to leave...I did not drink much...Did not hold my liquor well...After hitting wall, I pulled out my knife and cut Mr. Haysom across his throat...Across his jugular vein...He grabbed his throat and yelled, 'God, you must be crazy, man!' Blood rushed out of his throat...I froze...

Just wanted to get out of there...Heard Mrs. Haysom screaming...She was coming at me with a knife...Waving it at me...Got knife away from her...Grabbed her and held her as a shield...Mr. Haysom got up from his chair and came at me...Used Mrs. Haysom as a shield...My glasses were knocked off in this fight...Slashed Mrs. Haysom across throat...She went towards kitchen...Mr. Haysom hit me in the head...Don't remember any more...

Left house...took tableware and clothes to the dumpster at the end of the street...Threw pants, jacket and sneakers into dumpster...Hit small dog on way to dumpster...Drove speed limit all the way back to Washington D.C....Met

Elizabeth at the movie theater...She was scared shitless...Told her what happened...She said, 'Oh my God!'

Jens threw two knives into dumpster...Went back to house to wipe up fingerprints and blood...Swirled footprints in blood on floor...Threw away glasses and silverware in dumpster...Turned off lights when he left house...Drove all the way to D.C. in rental car...Wrapped sheet around him...Jens' hand was cut in fight...Didn't notice cut until he got to dumpster...washed hand and wrapped it in a towel...Met Elizabeth outside Rocky Horror Picture Show...Theater in Georgetown near hotel...Movie ended around 2 a.m.

Derek Haysom was waving a spoon at Jens during the fight...Most blood was in the dining room...Mr. Haysom was standing like a bear and waved arms after he was stabbed in the throat...Didn't see either victim fall and hit the ground...Last time he saw Mrs. Haysom, she was walking towards the kitchen and was holding her throat.

The interrogation was interrupted at this point for a break which lasted from 6:45 p.m. to 7:19 p.m. When questioning resumed the English Detectives Kenneth Beever and Terence Wright joined Ricky Gardner, so I had to repeat my description of the murders. Consistency and accuracy were crucial to making my "confession" convincing, and I tried my best to repeat my story without changes. Only two new details were added, which Detective Gardner noted in his transcription of his tape recorded notes:

Jens showed me scars on his fingers which he said were from the fight with the Haysoms. [...] When he returned to Loose Chippings the second time, both Mr. and Mrs. Haysom were on the floor and not moving...Mr. Haysom was lying in the dining room with his feet out of the living room door, facing the front of the house...

During the last twenty minutes of the interrogation the policemen asked me a few questions about my motive. Here I tried particularly hard to keep my answers short and simple, since I believed this to be the most unconvincing aspect of my "confession." After all, Liz's mother and father lived in Lynchburg and thus could hardly prevent their daughter dating me while we both lived at U.Va.! But in trying to explain the supposed cause of Elizabeth's and my purported hatred of her parents, I had to be careful not to say anything which might point too strongly in Liz's direction. Detective Gardner recorded in his notes,

Elizabeth was raped in Switzerland when she was younger...He did not think that Mrs. Haysom was a lesbian...Elizabeth was neglected by her parents...Mrs. Haysom had affairs and enjoyed creating havoc in public...Mr. Haysom switched off to Mrs. Haysom and Elizabeth referred to him as cold...Photos of Elizabeth in the nude were taken by her mother and shown to visitor...Jens saw these pictures...Elizabeth showed them to him...Read excerpts of Jens' January, 1985, letters to Elizabeth...Voodoo is possible if people believe in it...Burglaries were a possible excuse for the murders...Dinner scene a coincidence...Jens concluded, 'I fell in love with a

girl. We talked about killing her parents. I didn't want to do it, but I drove to their house and killed them. I got caught.' Interview ended at 9:42 p.m.<sup>2</sup>

While my statement ended at 9:42 p.m. the three investigators' questions should then have begun in earnest. Detectives Gardner, Beever and Wright were all familiar with the evidence found at Loose Chippings, so they knew that too many details of my story did not correspond to the scene of crime. The location and type of murder weapon, the location of the bodies, the clothing of one of the victims, the logistics of the fight, the state of the scene of crime, the forensic evidence, even the number of killers -- none of these matched my "confession." Normal police procedure would have been to interrogate me further, since false confessions are common especially in high publicity crimes and I had already alluded to the "possibility [of] pleading guilty to something [I] didn't do." But, as in the spring of 1985 when police failed to confront Elizabeth with the fingerprint and blood type evidence against her, Bedford County law enforcement officials decided to handle the Haysom murder investigation in their own unique non-standard manner.

Most policemen would have had doubts about a confession which did not match the type and location of the murder weapon as discovered at the scene of crime. In my statement I told police I "had [a] knife with [me]" which I "pulled out" to kill the Haysoms, and that I "threw two knives into [a] dumpster" near Loose Chippings afterwards. While Detective Gardner did not note this in the transcription of the interrogation, I also described the weapon to him as a butterfly knife with a two-edged blade, and Liz later provided the investigators with a sketch of the knife. On our return from Washington on Sunday morning, March 31, 1985, we had stopped to look

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<sup>2</sup>The transcripts of Jens Soering's 1986 police interrogations are available in the public records at Bedford County Courthouse.

at a store window display of knives on Wisconsin Avenue, so that we could describe exactly the same weapon when the time came to lie to the police. Unfortunately Elizabeth and I chose the wrong knife! The medical examiner who performed the autopsies on Derek and Nancy Haysom concluded that all wounds had been made with a *single*-edged blade. And it was a single-edged kitchen knife which crime scene specialists *discovered in the drawer to the dining room table at Loose Chippings*. The knife was part of a set, but only this one had blood residue on its blade, as if the killer had cleaned it hastily and returned it to the drawer to hide it in plain sight.

Not only the type and location of the murder weapon, but also the location and description of the victims' bodies in my "confession" failed to correspond to the scene of crime. Liz had told me in the Washington Marriott Hotel that her father's corpse was *in* the door from the dining room to the living room. So I told Detective Gardner that "Mr. Haysom was lying in the dining room with his feet out of the living room door, facing the front of the house." In fact Derek Haysom lay entirely in the living room, stretched across the door to the dining room at a 90° angle. And Nancy Haysom according to my "confession" was "wearing jeans" when she had really worn a flowery robe.

From the evidence at the crime scene it was also clear that the fatal attack in the dining room could not have occurred as I claimed. I told Detective Gardner that I "sat with [my] back to [the] window looking over the hill through [the] back dining room window [while] Mr. Haysom was to [my] left side" at the head of the table. Fingerprint experts indeed confirmed that Derek Haysom had eaten his bowl of ice cream at the head of the table. But the only other place setting was to *Mr. Haysom's* left, *facing*

the back dining room window, and here the killer had removed the fork and glass from the setting to hide his or her fingerprints. From that side of the table it was unnecessary and indeed impossible for me to "walk behind Mr. Haysom" to try to leave the room, and he could not have "pushed me back and [...] slammed [me] against the dining room wall." Even if I had sat on the other side of the table and Mr. Haysom had pushed me, there was no "dining room wall" against which I could have "hit my head" but only the huge back window. My lengthy narration of how I had supposedly murdered Elizabeth's parents thus made no sense.

Other details of my description also did not match the crime scene. Investigators found clear evidence that the killer or killers had taken a shower in the master bathroom to wash off blood, but nowhere in my "confession" did I refer to showering. The lights on the outside of the house had been left turned on, though I told police that I "turned off [the] lights when [I] left [the] house." At my trial Commonwealth's Attorney James Updike cited the blazing outside house lights as evidence of my guilt; the switch was inconveniently located in the master bedroom, where a non-family member like me was unlikely to find it. But I had visited Loose Chippings twice in the spring of 1985, so I was well aware of the electrical eccentricities of the house.

Finally, there was yet another contradiction between my "confession" of June 8, 1986, and the scene of crime: the fingerprint, blood type and, possibly, foot print evidence which placed Elizabeth in Loose Chippings at the time of the homicides. And only one or two hours after I finished my statement the three investigators received the strongest possible corroboration of the forensic evidence incriminating Liz. Detective Beaver asked her, "You knew he was going to do it, didn't you? Did you?"

"I did it myself."

"Don't be silly."

"I got off on it."

"You did what? What does that mean?"

"I was being facetious."

"O.K. then. Now tell me the truth, please, without being facetious. You did hate your parents ?"

"I did not hate my parents."<sup>3</sup>

Elizabeth's claim that she did not hate her parents was no more true than her assertion that her admission to murder had been a facetious joke, but by then she was safe. The policemen had their confession, mine, and they wanted no further complications.

Why did Detectives Gardner, Beever and Wright allow Liz to explain away her admission of guilt as a joke, even though her confession was corroborated by forensic evidence? Why did these same investigators accept my statement as true in

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<sup>3</sup>The transcripts of Elizabeth Haysom's 1986 police interrogations are available in the public records at Bedford County Courthouse.

spite of its obvious inaccuracies and the absence, at that time or later, of any fingerprint or blood type evidence linking me to the crime scene? Perhaps because my claim of responsibility for the killings was so very convenient from Sheriff Wells' and prosecutor Updike's point of view. My "confession" reduced Elizabeth's role in the crime to that of an accomplice, so the venerable names of Langhorne, Gibbes, Astor, Benedict and Haysom were saved from complete disgrace. Liz did not even believe that I would actually carry out the murders, according to Judge William Sweeney, a life-long friend of Nancy Haysom's brother, Risque Benedict<sup>4</sup>. The *real* culprit was that foreigner, that German - me.

Before I move on, I must mention one other important reason why my "confession" of June 8, 1986, should be considered untrust worthy: I was never able to repeat the same story without changing various significant details, depending on what my audience at the time seemed to want to hear. Fifteen years after I "confessed" in that London police station, the study of the phenomenon of false confessions became a serious scientific and legal sub-discipline both in the U.S. and in Europe, and experts discovered that one of the hallmarks of a typical false confession is their constant mutability. On every re-telling, the story changes – and so it did with me.

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<sup>4</sup>Bedford County Circuit Court Judge William Sweeney presided over Elizabeth Haysom's plea and sentencing of 1987, and Jens Soering's trial of 1990. He made this comment in an interview published in the magazine *Albemarle*, Charlottesville, Virginia, June 1, 1990.