

Comments on ABC - 20/20 Program of February 9, 2018

by Jens Soering

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1. Reliability of DNA Evidence

Near the end of the program, the DNA expert retained by 20/20 claims that the unidentified blood at the scene could perhaps have been left by victim Derek Haysom. The 20/20 expert is just plain wrong.

In order to believe that the unidentified blood was in reality left by Derek, one has to conclude that the blood samples at issue were mixtures, and/or that the 1985 blood typing tests conducted by Mary Jane Burton malfunctioned somehow. My attorney Steven D. Rosenfield retained two nationally renowned DNA scientists, Dr. Tom McClintock (who appeared in the program) and Dr. Moses Schanfield (whose interview with 20/20 was not used in the broadcast), to address precisely this point.

Both Dr. McClintock and Dr. Schanfield examined the raw data, looking specifically for the possibility of blood mixtures and malfunctioning tests. They both concluded, separately and unequivocally, that the blood was pure, and that there is no reason to doubt Ms. Burton's blood typing test results.

Here is a detailed memorandum dealing with the reliability of the DNA evidence:

<http://www.liberty.edu/news/index.cfm?PID=18495&MID=257094>

2. Lou Benedict -- Parental Opposition to Relationship

The 20/20 program included a brief interview with Lou Benedict, one of the brothers of victim Nancy Haysom (and therefore Elizabeth's uncle). He claimed that Derek and Nancy Haysom were strongly opposed to their daughter's relationship with me.

With all respect to Mr. Benedict, that is not true and, indeed, cannot be true. I am certain that he is unintentionally projecting LATER media reports into the time BEFORE the crime.

At the time of the crime, on March 30, 1985, I had been dating Elizabeth for only four months. I had met her parents just once, for a brief lunch. They simply had not had enough time, or contact with me, to develop any strong feelings.

After our arrest, both Elizabeth and I told police that her parents opposed our relationship. That was part of our elaborate lie and my false confession, because we needed to invent a plausible motive for me. We based this roughly on "Romeo and Juliet."

Media reports of our interrogations in 1986, Elizabeth's sentencing hearing in 1987 and my trial in 1990 always emphasized this Shakespearean motive. Through endless repetition, the idea that Derek and Nancy Haysom opposed our relationship became one of the many legends that grew around this case. Now everyone "knows" Elizabeth's parents disliked me -- even though there is no actual basis in fact for this belief.

As far as Lou Benedict is concerned, he did not live in Virginia in January to March 1985. So how could he have known BEFORE the crime that Derek and Nancy Haysom did not like their daughter's new boyfriend? Would Nancy have called her brother Lou -- just to tell him about the love-life of one of her five children?

3. Fingerprints on Coffee Mug

Journalist Elizabeth Vargas and Chuck Reid discuss an entry in Elizabeth Haysom's and my travel diary that reads, "Perhaps fingerprints on coffee mug used by Jens in Bedford interview gave him away." Here, 20/20 brought to light new information that is actually helpful to me.

I discuss this passage in the travel diary on pages 93 and 94 of Bill Sizemore's and my book "A Far, Far Better Thing" (Lantern Books, 2017). To recap: this section of the travel diary was written by Elizabeth, not me; in court she admitted that almost everything in this section was fantasy; and my fingerprints were not found anywhere at the crime scene, but hers were. Why would I be worried about my fingerprints, if they were not (and could not possibly be) at the scene?

What was new in the 20/20 program was that Chuck Reid said that I did NOT use a coffee mug during the Bedford interview, but a Styrofoam cup. I myself had forgotten this, or I would have mentioned it on pages 93 and 94 of the book.

This is significant because, if I had been involved in the writing of this passage in the travel diary, I would have corrected Elizabeth's error. At the time Elizabeth started writing the travel diary, only a few weeks had passed since the interrogation in Bedford. So at THAT time, I would certainly have remembered that I used a Styrofoam cup, not a coffee mug.

Thus the fact that this passage in the diary refers to the wrong kind of drinking container shows that Elizabeth cooked this up on her own. I was NOT worried about a coffee mug; if I HAD been, I would have referred (correctly) to a Styrofoam cup!

4. Insufficiently Covered Subjects

In the last few minutes of the program, the producers crammed in many important subjects without exploring them. Last year the producers told us that they had tried to persuade network executives to make this program a TWO-hour special instead of a one-hour segment, because they had so much material. Unfortunately, the executives did not listen. Here, I want to summarize some of the subjects that were mentioned too briefly near the end of the program.

a) Missing F.B.I. Crime Scene Profile

For more on this subject, please watch the documentary film "Killing for Love / The Promise," now available through iTunes: <http://killingforlove.com/the-movie/>

The key piece of information: a F.B.I. Special Agent told Bedford authorities shortly after the discovery of the crime that the killer was a woman in a close relationship to the victims. In an on-camera interview in the documentary film, the F.B.I. Special Agent says, "I settled on [the] daughter," Elizabeth.

b) Luminol Testing of Car

For more on this subject, please read the transcript of a Virginia public radio report: <http://wvtf.org/post/jens-soering-new-turns-infamous-virginia-case>

The key piece of information: bloody shoe prints on the grass in front of the Haysoms' house end at the driveway, as if someone walked away from the crime scene and got in a car to leave. But when Chuck Reid tested Elizabeth's and my rental car, there was no trace of blood inside. Consequently, he concluded - - and, in the 20/20 program, reporter Amy Lemley confirmed -- that there must have been TWO cars involved: the rental car obviously went to the Bedford/Lynchburg area, but it did not go all the way to the Haysoms' house.

c) Tony Buchanan -- Car with Bloody Knife

For more on this subject, please read the transcript of a local TV report and a newspaper article: http://www.jenssoering.com/jens_soering_case_new_statement_video_new_interview

http://www.jenssoering.com/investigator_former_judge_dispute_mans_claims_in_soering_case

The key piece of information: several weeks after the crime, Elizabeth and another man -- definitely NOT me -- brought a car to Tony Buchanan's repair shop. The interior of the car was heavily blood-stained and contained a bloody knife.

5. Subjects Not Covered

Of course a one-hour program cannot cover all facets of this case. However, there were three subjects that were alluded to, but then not discussed at all. This may have raised questions in some viewers minds, which I want to address here.

a) Sexual Abuse as Motive

For more on this subject, please read a short chapter by Bill Sizemore in "A Far, Far Better Thing": https://www.dropbox.com/s/84zno2lxxkavebz6/Soering_Far_Text_chapter%202022.pdf?dl=0

The key piece of information: in a 2016 newspaper interview, Elizabeth finally admitted that parental sexual abuse had been the true motive for her parents' murders. (In that same interview, she maintained that I was the actual killer.)

b) Amy Lemley -- Judge William Sweeney

For more on this subject, please read a short chapter by Bill Sizemore in "A Far, Far Better Thing": https://www.dropbox.com/s/hii233gfdjigs4/Soering_Far_Text%20chapter%202014.pdf?dl=0

The key piece of information: on the first day of my trial, the local magazine "Albemarle" published an interview by Amy Lemley with Judge William Sweeney. In this article, he was quoted directly endorsing the prosecution's theory that I was the killer. Judge Sweeney also admitted being a friend of the victims' family since the 1940s, but he refused to step down from the trial.

c) Elizabeth's confession

For more on this subject, please turn to the very end of the short chapter by Bill Sizemore in "A Far, Far Better Thing" referred to above under "a) Sexual abuse as Motive."

The key piece of information: Elizabeth confessed on June 8, 1986, telling police, "I did it myself. ... I got off on it." The 20/20 producers used another excerpt of the tape recording of that interrogation session. Why on earth did they not ALSO use the audio of Elizabeth admitting that she committed the crime?

6. Personal Remarks

I expected the 20/20 broadcast to be disastrous, because "true crime" programs have ALWAYS treated me badly in the past. Thus I was genuinely surprised by how well-made, accurate and FAIR this segment was. I know the 20/20 team is not looking for praise from me, but I would like to thank and congratulate them: they are the very first national TV program in over 30 years to get the story right!

There is one thing that I would like to say here which I was not able to say in the 20/20 program: I am so very sorry for lying to the Haysom family and to the police in 1985/86. The Haysom family deserved to know the truth about what happened to their loved ones, and I kept that truth from them in 1985/86. By the time I was able to tell the truth at my trial in 1990, no one was willing to believe me anymore. Again, I am so very sorry.

At my (wonderful) attorney Steven D. Rosenfield's insistence, I now have to add something to that apology: lying to the police and covering up the murders, as I did, is not a felony, but only a misdemeanor. This is called "accessory after the fact," and it is punishable by no more than one year in jail -- not thirty-one years (so far) in prison.

Moreover, I told the police in England what I was doing ahead of time. In the 20/20 program, journalist Elizabeth Vargas played the tape recording of the police asking me if I would plead guilty to something I did not do, and I answered, "I can see it happening, yes. I think it is a possibility. I think it happens in real life."

It DID happen in real life: it happened to me the next day, when I gave my false confession. According to the Innocence Project, false confessions are involved in 28 percent of DNA exonerations -- like the Norfolk Four and the Central Park jogger case.