

Interview with Marvin Roberts

Jade: I'm going to ask you a few questions. Before I left I talked with Brian's Investigative Reporting class and we just came up with a few things that we wanted to talk with you about.

Marvin: All right.

Jade: Um, a lot of the questions revolve around the night that the murder happened and kind of like your whereabouts and what was going on.

Marvin: Alright, it's a long time ago, but

Jade: I know, I'm sorry, but I thought maybe you've had some time to think about

Marvin: Yeah I've thought about it, every now and then I'll go back to that night and try to think about my movements and whereabouts. But it's pretty hard even the next day you know, when I got arrested, cause I was trying to have a good time and not really look at the clock or nothing. I didn't know I was going to get arrested for murder and needed my whereabouts like boom boom boom you know. I'll try my best though.

Jade: Thanks. One of the questions is, you were driving your car that night.

Marvin: Yup.

Jade: And was there at any point when George, Eugene, or Kevin were ever in your car?

Marvin: No. George, Eugene, or Kevin? In my car that night? Let me see. I'm trying to think if I gave them a ride anywhere, but no. I'm pretty sure they weren't in my car that night.

Jade: Okay, is there any time you remember seeing them that night.

Marvin: I don't remember the times but I did see all of them that night and it was at different times. But I did see all of them. Not together or nothing, just one at a time you know. So I guess there was this wedding going on.

Jade: Right, at the Eagles Hall?

Marvin: Yeah, and then I went outside a few times to get some fresh air and stuff and then boom, I'd see either Kevin or George, and shake their hand cause I knew them you know, saying hello to them. I'd be shaking everybody's hands and

say hello to them and whatnot. But I don't remember times, but I do remember seeing them that night.

Jade: Do you have any personal history or have you ever met or heard of, or known Hartman himself?

Marvin: No, before I got arrested, I had never heard of him at all.

Jade: And what about his brothers?

Marvin: His brothers? Once again, before I got arrested I didn't... oh you mean his uh, I went to school with his twin brothers in 7th grade. I found that out later.

Jade: What about Grimes?

Marvin: Grimes. I went to school with his sister, but I didn't know him.

Jade: And what about Dale Depue?

Marvin: I'd never heard of him before I came to jail.

Jade: Okay, I know you've had some interaction with him in jail when you were in Seward?

Marvin: Yeah, Seward and FCC a little bit I think, if I remember right. Yeah, that's where I met him.

Jade: And since he's possibly a suspect for the murder, did that make is strange having interaction with him?

Marvin: Yeah, yeah a little bit. I don't know, it kinda seemed like he acted maybe overly nice to me. It just seemed like that, I don't know why.

Jade: Did you ever have any conversation about that?

Marvin: Ah, one time this guy from my home town, Curtis Helmer, he's been writing letters to the editor for I don't know how long now, and I guess Dale got wind of it cause Curtis put his name in there one time and he said, "You know they think I did your murder? I didn't do that murder." Then I didn't say nothing, I just looked at him and said, "Oh well." Then he said "Yeah okay, see you later Marvin," and that was it. That was about the whole gist of the conversation.

Jade: So do you have any anger towards him at all?

Marvin: Until there's some really solid proof, I don't have no anger at him. Cause I can't see how maybe people might think he did it, but people think I did it you know. So I can't really put the blame on anybody until there's some good solid proof or a confession.

Jade: What about Chris Stone? Do you know who Chris Stone is?

Marvin: I know who he is now, but before that no.

Jade: Now that you're in jail, is there is anything you'd like to talk about that you couldn't during the trial, but for any reason you feel comfortable talking about now?

Marvin: Not really. I kind of wish I would have gotten up on the stand. It was mostly my lawyer's decision and a little bit of mine cause I was real nervous. I know I'm innocent but it's a big step getting on the stand. I had my co-defendant with me and if I got up on the stand, then he would have had to get on the stand and his whereabouts and alibis are a little bit more shaky than mine. He still has whereabouts and alibis, but if I got on the stand, he would have had to get on the stand, so I said no. But if I get this next trial, then I think I'm gonna get on the stand this time, you know.

Jade: Is there something specific that you want to say. If you had gotten on the stand, what do you wish you would have said?

Marvin: That I was innocent, you know. That I didn't do this crime. If they asked me questions, I would have answered them as truthfully as possible.

Jade: Twelve people listened to your trial and listened to all the evidence and convicted you of murder. So you say that you're innocent, why should we believe that you're innocent?

Marvin: Because the evidence does not stand up, it doesn't hold up. I have good alibis and those twelve people were wrong. They went outside and shouldn't have, you know they misconstrued the evidence, if that the right word, I don't know if that's the right word. But I'm innocent and the evidence should point to that. I've got supporters out there, I believe in my heart, I know in my heart, and I know that God knows I'm innocent. I hope the evidence points to that in the future.

Jade: How does it feel to be convicted of a crime that you did not commit?

Marvin: Oh man, after six and a half years, its still a bad feeling you know? Just a couple of days ago I was sitting outside and I was thinking this was a bad dream. Am I gonna wake up? Its hard being away from my family. I want to start a family

and stuff like that you know, I want to be free. I want to get my life going. It's pretty hard being in here. I've got supporters out there and I want to thank them. I'll thank them when I get out. I'm positive I'll get out, but without the supporters and without the Lord up above, I wouldn't be where I'm at you know. I'd still be in here but I wouldn't be positive like I am. It's still hard after six and a half years. The biggest thing I miss is watching my little baby brother grow up. It's hard, but I'm surviving, I'm surviving day to day.

Jade: What was your life like before all of this happened? Did you have strong relationships with your family? I know you played basketball.

Marvin: Yeah, I loved basketball. Before I came to jail that was my number one hobby, but after I came to jail now, it's just exercise. Can you ask the question again?

Jade: What was your life like before you came to jail?

Marvin: It was fun. My family ties were real strong, now they're stronger than ever, but I had a close family. My mom, my sister, my step dad, and my little brother came into the picture when I was in high school. He's kind of the center of the family now.

Jade: How old is he now?

Marvin: He's eleven. I was planning to go, ironically I was trying to go to Seward to that auto mechanic school down there. I wanted to get into some mechanics. I tried going to college like half a semester.

Jade: At UAF?

Marvin: Yeah, but that didn't pan out, I wasn't cut out for it. My life was going though; I wanted to do something with my life. I wanted to get a trade, start a family you know.

Jade: So if you do get out of jail, do you have any plans?

Marvin: Right away I'm just going to try to spend as much time with my family as possible you know. After that if I get totally exonerated, I'm going to sue the state of Alaska for everything they've got. I want to try to find a trade, try to find a job. My mom said I can live with her as long as I wanted, but I want my own house. But initially I'll go stay with her and my family, but yeah I want to have a job and start a family and get my life going.

Jade: I know you just transferred here from Seward.

Marvin: Yeah about a month ago.

Jade: And how was that whole transition?

Marvin: Ahh, I wasn't as bad as a lot of people... I think my mom took it harder than me. I'm so used to this stuff right now.

Jade: Now she's a lot further away.

Marvin: Yeah, she's a lot further away. I get to talk to her with the phone cards, but she wants to visit me, at least once every two months she wants to visit me and that's going to be hard. She took it real hard. But I told her I'm in God's hands and if they send me down here, they send me down here. It's all in God's will you know. I just adjusted, I'm kind of adjusting right now, I'm trying to move out of my cell.

Jade: To another cell?

Marvin: To wherever, I can't get along with my roommate.

Jade: Really? What kind of problems are you having with your roommate?

Marvin: We just don't get along, people are like that, when you live together sometimes you don't get along. I get along with 90% of my cellies, but not this guy. I'm trying to move today, but I don't know if they'll move me or not. We'll see but, but I'm still adjusting. The weather is kind of hot. I played a little bit of b-ball the other day and it was like 95, 96 and I almost blacked out, so I was like, okay I'm going to sit down.

Jade: It's a lot different than Alaska.

Marvin: Yeah. I'm adjusting. I'll be fine, my family will be fine.

Jade: How different is it here within the jail from Seward. Like do you have more free time, is your cell bigger, are the guards different?

Marvin: Pretty much the guards are the same everywhere I go. Maybe they're a little bit better at FCC because they know the story of my case and all, and they were a little nicer to me. But pretty much CO's are pretty much the same everywhere you know. The jail is not that bad, I thought it'd be a lot worse. I like Seward a lot because they have a nice big open yard. Its wide open, you got the views, you got fresh air, you can go to the gym. Here you're like sardines in a can, here it's really packed in. You don't get no good views, the air ain't that good, not as good as Alaska air. It's not as bad as everybody says it is. The food could get better and the water could get better. Like I said, I'm surviving you know.

Jade: Okay. Um, a couple more questions about the night. Why was everyone looking for Conan that night? There was a lot of talk about different people looking for him, and trying to hook up with him that night.

Marvin: Maybe because he was, I don't know if I want to say this recorded, but he was a small time pusher, you know maybe a little weed here and there. I don't know about coke, but he pushed a little drugs here and there, maybe that's the reason why. He's pretty popular though, so it could have been either his popularity or whatever he had in his pocket they wanted to get at. Could have been either of those.

Jade: Would you be willing to name some of the dealers that were in your crowd back then?

Marvin: Umm, let's see. I didn't really have a crowd. I mean, I just pretty much said hi and good bye to those guys. I hung out with Eugene a little bit.

Jade: Not like the crowd, you four, but I mean your friends in Fairbanks.

Marvin: No, I really don't want to put no names out there. Not right now anyways. I can't really think of anybody right now anyways. Just Conan like I say, out of that little group, or in his group of friends he sold a little weed as far as I know.

Jade: And did you smoke marijuana that night?

Marvin: Ah, I think I did. Yeah, I took about four or five hits in my car. I think it was with Daniel Huntington. Yeah, he passed away, I guess he shot himself. But that's the only time I smoked weed that night. I won't lie, I smoked weed you know, I was young. Hopefully if I get out, I won't smoke any weed you know? I just want to be with my family.

Jade: Are you working at all here?

Marvin: I'm trying to get a job. I'm trying to get a job right now, yeah.

Jade: Doing what?

Marvin: Whatever they give me, I need that extra income.

Jade: Are you taking any classes?

Marvin: I'm trying to take a class too right now, ah drafting. Yeah, I guess the basic skills and then it goes to architectural and CAD, computer automated drafting and stuff like that. I want to start a basic skill and move on.

Jade: That's a good plan.

Marvin: Yeah I got to do something. Its been a long time you know. It's hard doing classes in here. The instructors ain't all that and sometimes it's hard to concentrate when I'm in here.

Jade: Going back again to the night, what was the reception like at the Eagles Hall? What was going on?

Marvin: There was a lot of fun happening there. It was packed and there was this good rock and roll band and everyone was trying to have a good time. I was trying to have a good time, seeing a bunch of people I hadn't seen for a while, shaking hands, giving hugs and whatnot. It was a lot of fun. I enjoy things like that, I enjoy dancing, receptions, whatever. First thing that comes to my mind, it was a lot of fun before I found out the next day that I was a suspect. It was packed in there though, there was people inside and then you'd see people outside coming in, coming and going.

Jade: Who were your friends at that time? Who were your close buddies?

Marvin: My closest buddies. I didn't really have too many close buddies. Most of the time I hung out with my sister and her boyfriend. They were my closest friends. I wasn't really into that young crowd that wanted to party a lot. I really don't like drinking you know, I mean if I did drink it'd be occasionally. You know at 19, I shouldn't be drinking. It was occasionally cause I'd seen what drinking did to a lot of my family members. Drinking and drugs, hard drugs anyways, I didn't want to be like that. I didn't want to drink all the time or do hard drugs you know. The only drug I've tried was marijuana, maybe some shrooms, but I never tried cocaine, acid, LSD, any heroine, none of that. I was too afraid I'd get hooked and really screw my life up.

Jade: Have you heard anything through the grapevine, through inmates you've met maybe in prison here about anyone else who could have been involved in the murder of John Hartman?

Marvin: I've heard some stories that maybe some black guys did it. I've heard some rumors, most of the time I've heard some rumors that black guys did it.

Jade: Do you know their names?

Marvin: A name was thrown out there, Nairobi something. Mr. O'Donoghue knows the name, I gave it to him. Nairobi was one of the names. There was some more names, but this was like four or five years ago.

Jade: You haven't heard anything since?

Marvin: No, no. I talked to O'Brien last week, I gave him a name of somebody that might know somebody, somebody that might know who actually did it. I guess he's my cousin, Ray Titus, he says something, he told his mom that he knows who did it. I guess he told her this like six or seven years ago when this first happened that he knew who did it and was scared and didn't want to say nothing. So I guess like this year he's said, okay. His mom asked him, you know who did it, you got to come forward. So he told her the name and his mom, she told my mom the name, and my mom shot the lawyers the name and I guess they really didn't really know what to do with the name. So I guess my mom told O'Donoghue the name.

Jade: Do you remember what the name was?

Marvin: Sonny, no I don't know if it was Sonny, but I think it was Nairobi. Nairobi Chandler, Nairobi Watson, something like that. And if my memory serves me correctly, that's not the first time I heard that name, I might have heard it four or five years ago. Somebody else shot that name out, he was bragging about it or something. It was a just a rumor going around that came to us in the jail somehow and I think I remember that being one of the names. Yeah, Nairobi Chandler, Nairobi Watson, something like that.

Jade: Okay well I guess that's all the questions I have. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Marvin: I just wanted to thank you for coming down here, visiting us, and working on our case you know. I just wanted to thank Brian and all of his students. Without Brian and his students, I wouldn't have as much hope as I do now, and have as much faith. You guys are the miracle, I think you guys are the miracle.

Jade: Brian also wanted me to tell you that he's not going to give up and that he's working on it until he solves it.

Marvin: That's good to hear. Yeah, I just wanted to thank everybody and thank all my supporters. The fight ain't over.

Jade: Have you had any contact with Eugene and George?

Marvin: Yeah I see Eugene almost everyday. We all share the same yard and rec area. I seen George the first day I got here. We shook hands and hugged and stuff. I guess he likes to stay inside so I haven't seen him too much lately.

Jade: Are there a lot of other Alaskans here that you knew from before?

Marvin: Yeah, there's a lot of people I know in jail. I don't have too many friends but I have a lot of acquaintances. I try not to make too many friends in here. The quality of people here is pretty bad. I try to keep to myself.

Jade: Do the Alaskans all stay together, are you all grouped together?

Marvin: Yeah, we all share the same rec yard, all live together you know. We have very little contact with other Inmates of this jail like the Hawaiians and INS.

Jade: So do you and the other guys, George and Eugene, speak about what happened?

Marvin: We speak about what's coming in our future most of the time. We speak about trying to get a new trial, seeing what's going on with our cases. We always speak about being free, that's the number one topic for us.