

2011?

## Notes on Discussion with Mel Paunovich by Chris King

Dad and I met him at Peabody's for lunch. Not sure of exact date of meeting; I'd say it was about six weeks ago, probably in March. (Dad could probably get the exact date from his credit card receipts, but he eats there all the time, so I'm not sure how easy that would be to do.) Apparently he reached out to dad. Dad remembered he had also reached out to him after one of the early newspaper articles on the case, maybe in 2009. The meeting lasted a little over an hour. I took some notes on my iPhone during the discussion, mostly proper names, but they were lost when my phone was damaged. Here are a few high points from the discussion:

Paunovich said he just wanted to reach out to dad to see if he could help with the case in any way. Dad and he discussed the call setting up this meeting and the previous call Paunovich had made to him in 2009. Paunovich pulled out several newspaper articles to prove his bona fides as an investigator and evidence handler. One article was about his work on a murder case that the paper cited as the first prosecution to use DNA evidence in Michigan. I only remember that the victim was female.

Paunovich indicated he worked on the Stebbins case. He said he was present at the crime scene and processed the evidence at the drop-off site. He said he knew the medical examiner was a drunk who did shoddy work and often failed to do tasks altogether. He said the ME sometimes had unqualified assistants conduct autopsies when he was drunk or absent. Paunovich thought the ME would not process the evidence correctly, so he called L. Brooks Patterson and Dick Thompson and got their permission to remove the body from the scene and take it to the police department to check for trace evidence. Paunovich said he pulled the hairs from the clothing himself. He was very proud of the decision to do that work himself, as the evidence would have been lost otherwise. When people criticized the move at the time, he pointed out that Patterson had agreed it was the right thing to do.

Paunovich indicated he gave the hairs to a female lab technician (do not recall the name) who thought they were animal hairs when he believed they were human hairs. He said there were other hairs on the clothing that were indeed animal hairs, but he was convinced some hairs were human.

He tossed photos of the deceased victim Mark Stebbins on the table; there were two photos back to back in a clear vinyl jacket. One showed Stebbins' face at the crime scene, eyes closed and the hood of his jacket up. The other showed a shirtless body from the waist up as it lay on some sort of examining table. Paunovich described the orientation of the body as it was found at the scene; I don't remember all of the details, except it was near some sort of brick wall and Mark was laid on his back with his hands were folded over on the chest or stomach. He said there were ligature marks on Stebbins' wrists and neck and a wound on his scalp.

Paunovich said he had always thought the murderer was a member of law enforcement or extremely close to someone in law enforcement because "he seemed

to know exactly what we were doing and where we were looking." Paunovich cited the following example. Based on theories that the murderer always returned to the scene of the crime, and after some conversations with Danto, they dressed up some sort of dummy in clothing like Mark Stebbins wore and placed it exactly as the body was found at the scene. The police staked out the crime scene for several days with this dummy there, but police saw no suspicious activity. The day they stopped the stakeout, they found a funeral card from Mark's funeral placed right where the body (and dummy) had been. Paunovich was convinced it had been left by the killer. He wondered if the card was still in evidence and if it could be checked again for prints or trace evidence using modern technology.

He told us about several other cases he had worked on, including busting a former Detroit Police Chief (I think it was William Hart) for stealing money from drug busts. He said sources told the police Hart had purchased cars and homes for cash, and indicated it was his idea to use the IRS to investigate. He said they nailed Hart, and

Paunovich said the entire law enforcement system was rife with corruption. On one of drug bust, a federal agent of some kind he worked with tried to convince him to steal the cash found at the scene and split it with him before it was logged in as evidence.

In another case, he was involved in the bust of a very prominent drug dealer (I believe the name was something like Bobby "the Greek" Manassas). When the drug dealer realized he was facing significant jail time, he asked to cut a deal and would only speak with Paunovich. The drug dealer told Paunovich he could supply him a list of "at least 25 cops, judges and prosecutors" who were on the take in return for a reduced sentence. Paunovich indicated he took the request for the deal to L. Brooks Patterson, who did not pursue it at all.

I asked if Paunovich was suspicious of Danto, and Paunovich said he was, but he seemed to think Danto had an ironclad alibi for at least some of the murders.

I asked him what he thought of polygraph results, and he said they were worthless. As an example, he told us about an acquaintance of his from high school who had been accused of murdering his wife. His wife had gone missing without a trace. The acquaintance said he had no idea where she was and volunteered to take a polygraph test. He failed. He swore he was innocent and asked Paunovich to be a

character witness of sorts for him. Paunovich did not believe him and tried to get him to confess, but the acquaintance insisted he was innocent. Some time later, the wife showed up out of the blue; she had simply fled the state for reasons unknown and now wanted a divorce.

In the course of the discussion Paunovich listed the departments he had worked in

He told us how he got his law degree at night and was now a practicing defense attorney. He said he often represented drug dealers, as "they had the money." He made some comparison to people accused pedophilia cases, noting he had known of shocking cases he could never take on, including a case in which a grandfather had molested his own infant grandson.

Paunovich concluded by saying he was sorry we had been treated poorly by some people in law enforcement and the prosecutor's office. He was disappointed the case was never solved. He said he had heard the task force was now looking into the case again, but that he had not been contacted. He said something like, "They've never called me, or any of the people I know who worked on the case." He said they should not ignore the "old guys" who worked on the case in the past, as they could be helpful.

I told him that I'd pass his name on to Cory Williams and said I was sure someone from the current investigation would speak with him.

He said he had ideas he'd like to make sure the task force was following up on, including that funeral card at the Stebbins drop-off scene. He said he hoped police were checking any current suspects against the photos and videos of the attendees at the victims' funerals to see if any of them were present.

Addendum: I asked him if he'd seen "Making a Murderer," the Netflix documentary on the Steven Avery case in Wisconsin. He said he had not. I told him he should watch it because he might find it interesting. I asked if cops ever planted DNA and he replied, "All the time."