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Douglass "Drove" Murder Investigation

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LOS ANGELES – On Monday in Los Angeles Superior Court, the defense for accused murderer Laura Douglass opened its case by calling the private investigator responsible for tipping off police to Douglass' possible involvement in the murder of Raychel Wagner. The unorthodox move is rendered bizarre when considering the fact that the investigator was originally hired by Douglass herself.

Private Investigator Nick Graves explained his hiring by Laura Douglass and by doing so also introduced the Painseeker web site and how deeply involved the site was in the Los Angeles D.A.'s decision to press charges against Douglass for first-degree murder.

Graves explained that he was hired by Douglass in August of 2001 to investigate the murder of her close friend, Raychel Wagner. He was also asked to post his findings on a web site. While the site was originally intended to celebrate Wagner's talent, Douglass informed him that the unsolved murder had become a distraction and needed to be addressed.

Graves also detailed how Douglass had to put pressure on Lance Wagner to give Graves a section of the site dedicated exclusively to the investigation. Defense attorney Les Levin repeatedly drove the point home with the jury, clearly using the opportunity to taint Wagner after being humiliated by him on Friday.

When asked to characterize Douglass' involvement in the investigation, Graves' answer

was straightforward, "She drove it." When Levin asked him if he felt that her behavior was indicative of a murderer, Graves responded, "In my personal opinion, it didn't make sense. Her behavior wasn't consistent with a murderer."

Assistant District Attorney Thomas Andrews, given the opportunity to cross-examine Graves, reminded him that he was the person who brought Douglass' lie and possible motive to the attention of the police. Andrews openly questioned Graves' credibility, because he was testifying for a person who he informed the police was a murderer. Graves, clearly angered by the charge, responded that he informed the police of the "possibility" of Douglass' guilt, and stated that they were responsible for their own investigation. He was also quick to point out that he was not testifying out of financial responsibility to Douglass, as he was currently employed by Lance Wagner.

Andrews asked Graves if he remembered a comment that he made to Detective Wakefield when he mentioned the "possibility" of Douglass guilt, specifically a reason why Douglass would go out of her way to hire him and then at the same time admit that she lied to police about her alibi. Graves admitted that he remembered commenting that he thought it was possible that she had doubted his professionalism. Andrews cornered him into admitting that he had used the term "patsy" in his original comment, but drove further until Graves admitted to stating that he believed that she was working with Sharon Wolfe.

On re-direct, Les Levin asked Graves to recount the problems that he had passing the information

on to Detective Wakefield. Graves stated that Wakefield admitted that he was too busy with current work to spend time on a case as old as the Painseeker case. When pressed by Levin, Graves admitted that he “sensationalized” his points to get Wakefield to listen, but maintained that he never lied or misrepresented his conclusions at the time.

Levin also asked Graves about the origin of the tip that Douglass and Wolfe were working together. Graves confessed that the tip had come from a reader on the Painseeker web site.

On his way out of court, Levin admitted that he did not feel the day had been a complete success. “It could have been stronger, but there were some key elements to our case that for the most part went uncontested.”

He added, “Still, I think we’ll have a better day tomorrow.”