

Grange found guilty in double-homicide

The murder of a narc and his friend just outside of Northport reveal the dark underside of a national LSD drug ring

Statesman Examiner, By Jodi Miller

February 21, 2001

Following a long week of often torturous testimony, the families of Joshua Thomas Schaefer and Nicholas Dewayne Kaiser celebrated the conviction of John Douglas "Chooley" Grange, 26, in the June 11 double murder of their sons, both 21.

Grange was convicted of two counts of first degree murder. The use of a firearm during the murders will add some time to his sentence.

All the victims' family members burst into tears when the guilty verdicts were read Saturday evening after the jury deliberated for just six-and-a-half-hours. The verdict followed five long days of testimony from Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agents, family members, drug dealers, fire and ballistics, detectives, two men who helped burn the bodies, and finally the killer himself.

"For a Stevens County jury," Stevens County Prosecutor Jerry Wetle told jurors, "this may be a first... This side of society is not one we normally see. Today, this week, you got to see it."

Testimony centered around establishing the presence of a national LSD drug ring run by Rainbow Family members, and a hit that was placed on Kaiser after an April 24, 2000 bust in which he was caught in the midst of preparing pure LSD for sale. According to Pierce County Sheriff's Detective Warren Dogeagle, it was the first bust of an LSD lab since 1981.

Dogeagle testified that a Bremerton man arrested for LSD named his source. That source then named Kaiser, who was arrested at his Whidbey Island home, along with girlfriend Shauna Daniels.

"(Daniels) came out of the back area where Nick was, and we confronted her first in the hallway," Dogeagle said. Nick was preparing blotter acid and liquid vials of LSD."

Dogeagle testified that Kaiser was diluting pure LSD, and still had rubber gloves on when he was cuffed. To make blotter acid, he explained, pure LSD is diluted and soaked up in a fibrous paper, then dried and sold.

While detectives were combing Kaiser's apartment, a number of people stopped by "to visit". A few people were arrested that afternoon, he testified. "Nick wanted to cooperate with us," Dogeagle said. "He wanted to know what he could do to cut his losses."

Nick named a few of the people he dealt to, setting up a "reverse" deal (busting someone lower on the hierarchy) with one of them. That person was arrested. He was attempting to set up a sting with his source in San Francisco, but the source became more and more suspicious and the deal never happened.

Drug dealers in general have "a very good word of mouth system," Dogeagle said, and it's "almost instantaneous that news gets out. Dealers often keep track of court arraignments and

any information that is public record.

Being arrested is a red flag in the “industry,” and Kaiser was released within a couple days, too soon for him crime. Kaiser’s cover story, Dogeagle testified, would be that he was arrested for marijuana, but the story was apparently wearing thin—his source eventually asked to see Kaiser’s court papers for the charge.

Kaiser had told Dogeagle that he traveled to San Francisco about twice a month and would rent a hotel room. His source would meet him there, and deliver to him anywhere from 10,000 to 70,000 dosage units of acid.

‘In June, he stopped calling

Kaiser was cooperating with law enforcement through May. “In June, he stopped calling us,” Dogeagle stated. The last time he heard from Kaiser was on June 9, just two days before his murder.

Kaiser violated his agreement with authorities and traveled with Schaefer, an old friend, to the Northport Barter Fair, held June 9 through 11.

Schaefer, of Mendocino, California, “actually went up to be a friend to him,” testified a weeping Kim Kerpan, Schaefer’s girlfriend and the mother of his child. “Nick had told us he got a marijuana charge from the local police. He was calling us in May, and the beginning of June. He was crying on our voice mail.”

According to Kerpan, Schaefer felt sorry for his friend who said his girlfriend had broken up with him because of the arrest.

Kerpan left Schaefer to go to her parent’s house, the first time the couple had been apart since they met. Two days later, Kerpan said, Schaefer called her to ask if he could go with Kaiser to the Barter Fair. “He asked if I cared and I said no,” Kerpan testified. “He was just going to be a friend.”

Kerpan last heard from Schaefer on the morning of June 10, when she was cut off from a cell-phone call he made. It was the last time she ever heard from him, and days later, she and Schaefer’s parents reported him missing.

Kerpan became fearful for the man she called her husband after she contacted Shauna Daniels, Kaiser’s ex-girlfriend. “I called her, but I wasn’t able to speak with her because she had already gone into hiding,” Kerpan said. She left a message and Daniels called her back.

“I asked her if they could truthfully be in any danger and she said, ‘yes.’ She told me Nick got caught with a bunch of LSD and they were actually making it,” Kerpan said.

Daniels, in fact, had a restraining order against Kaiser “because she had a gun put to her head in Portland,” Kerpan said. The people told Daniels, Kerpan testified, that if she was ever with Kaiser, she was going to die.

The next time Kerpan talked to Daniels, “she told me that she changed her story,” Kerpan said. “She said, ‘I didn’t want to have anything to do with this, so it didn’t happen.’”

Kerpan and Schaefer had themselves been arrested, but never charged, in February, 2000. DEA special agent Brian Nehring testified about the arrest, which occurred near Washington, D.C.

Schaefer and Kerpan were seen exiting a home that was being watched in connection with an investigation to nab Jerry Ashworth, a major LSD manufacturer who worked between Washington D.C. and San Francisco.

Kerpan and Schaefer were arrested and Schaefer gave statements regarding Michael Watkins, who was apparently the owner of most of the drugs seized in the home. Kerpan maintains that Watkins told them it was okay to speak against him, since she and Schaefer had a baby.

Watkins was arrested, somewhat based on statements Schaefer gave," Nehring testified. But Ashworth remains a federal fugitive, and, were he apprehended, Schaefer's statement may have been vital for a conviction.

Grange's roommate pleads guilty to criminal assistance

Jeffrey Cunningham, who pled guilty to first degree rendering criminal assistance for helping to burn to bodies in Kaiser's vehicle, testified against Grange. He and Grange were roommates at the Crown Creek Cabin, where the murders occurred.

Cunningham moved to the cabin in the spring of 1999 to grow pot for the man he said runs the Portland "branch" of the drug ring, Rob Schultz.

But Cunningham wasn't inept with pot. "I wasn't good at it, didn't know how to do it," he testified. "I tried. It just didn't work."

Schultz decided Grange might do better and told Cunningham he wanted Grange to move up with him.

"He said it would be a good idea if John came up here and lived with me," Cunningham, who never looked at Grange throughout the trial, said. "John's more of an influential guy than I am, I guess. He could represent Portland better than I did, I guess, show more of a presence."

Grange apparently had also agreed to work on the cabin for its owner, Lou Ash. Because the cabin had neither running water nor electricity, Douglas Grange, John Grange's father, bought him a generator and some extension cords.

When Douglas Grange came to Crown Creek for his 50th birthday the week before the murders, he also bought his son a .22 caliber rifle, a 550-round box of ammunition, and Bunson burner, some pots and pans, silverware, and various other items from the Colville Wal-Mart.

Dane Williams, who lived in a cabin just a mile from the crime scene, also testified against Grange. Williams, who is not a member of the Rainbow Family, also pled guilty to first degree rendering criminal assistance for his part in helping to burn the bodies. He and Cunningham's testimonies were the same in the overall story, but rife with inconsistencies, which appeared to be the sole hope of the defense.

Both witnesses, Wetle admitted in his closing, were "the worst witnesses in the world." But

Cunningham's highly emotional testimony and obvious disturbance over the situation may have helped convince the jury of his story.

Cunningham, a heavy drug user, was either drunk or high throughout the weekend of the murders. Following the murders, he was "spun" twice—overdosed on LSD, a form of punishment employed by members of the drug ring.

Cunningham said he met Kaiser in Portland in 1996.

"I lived on the streets most of the time and Nick was always around," Cunningham explained. "I met him sitting in the corner one day."

The two belonged to the Rainbow Family for four or five years, he said, and he continued to trust Kaiser even after Kaiser told him that he had turned some names over to the DEA.

'It made no difference to me what Nick did.'

"It didn't really bother me at all," Cunningham, who often referred to Kaiser as "Nickie" testified. "It made no difference to me what Nick did. Nick's my friend."

Cunningham heard Kaiser was at the Northport Barter Fair, and he "followed the sound of the nitrous tank and found Nick."

Kaiser was with "a guy named Josh from Mendocino Valley," Cunningham recalled. "I told Nick that he was in some serious shit. I didn't believe he was on the (Fair) lot. I didn't think he'd show up somewhere like that. He knew San Francisco wanted him dead...He didn't seem too worried about it. Evidently, Josh was going to speak to people in California on Nick's behalf."

Kaiser apparently never knew that Schaefer planned to go to California, then to Hawaii, where he would leave the country.

"Josh said he was going with them, at least to Hawaii," Cunningham said. "He asked if he could get work here for money for the road."

By "work," Cunningham clarified, Kaiser meant he was looking for drugs to sell. Cunningham told them he could get them five pounds of hallucinogenic mushrooms, and the three planned to go to his cabin on Crown Creek, southwest of Northport, the next day. From there, Cunningham would run to a nearby supplier's house return with the product.

On Saturday, Cunningham and Grange left the Fair to get firewood from a nearby slash pile. Cunningham thinks they left again to call Schultz to tell him Kaiser wanted a meeting. Schultz told him to "stay away from Nick, otherwise they wouldn't talk to me either."

Cunningham said that he then handed the phone to Grange, who spoke with Schultz for a while. The call was not able to be verified through any phone records.

Williams reported that he, too, had called Schultz that night, then hand the phone to Grange. That call was able to be traced.

On Sunday, Cunningham left the Fair with Kaiser and Schaefer around noon. They passed

John Grange at the gate on their way out.

The three stopped at a gas station in Northport for food and to “smoke a bowl,” Cunningham said. Then they went on to Crown Creek cabin, where he saw Grange’s Bronco parked in the trees alongside the house, an unusual spot.

Schaefer and Kaiser asked about all the brass on the ground outside. Cunningham told them it was from target practice, and went inside to get the .22 caliber rifle that Grange’s father had purchased for his son just three days earlier.

He couldn’t find the gun, so Cunningham went outside and asked Kaiser and Schaefer if they wanted something to eat. They agreed, and went inside to get a pan. When he came outside, Cunningham said he saw Williams crossing the lawn. He greeted him, introduced the three, then headed down to Crown Creek to get water for macaroni and cheese.

‘This is going to happen now.’

Cunningham said he got water, and was just starting to come back when he met Williams, who said, “This is going to happen right now. Then, I heard the shots.”

Cunningham didn’t know how many shots were fired. “Half a dozen, maybe more, maybe less,” he guessed.

The two ran up to the cabin to see Schaefer and Kaiser laying in the fire pit. Cunningham remembers Grange standing near the stairs to the basement.

Cunningham said he took his pan of water and started washing off Kaiser’s face.

“There was blood everywhere,” he said. “I couldn’t see any specific entry or exit wounds.” They were bloody from the tops of their heads to the middle of their chests.

“I was moved from Nick, and Nick was pulled up the side of the house a little bit and then picked up.”

When Cunningham was asked by both lawyers to repeat how he had washed off Kaiser’s face, he grew upset, nearly crying, and asked “Why’ve you got to ask me (screwed) up shit like that, man?”

At another point, upset with rehashing what he’d already testified to, Cunningham told Wetle, “I’m done doing this.” The court took a recess and Cunningham returned to the stand.

Both Cunningham and Williams say that after the murders, Grange threw Kaiser over his shoulder and loaded him in Kaiser’s Bronco. Cunningham believes Schaefer was loaded through the passenger door. A blue blanket covered one of them—Williams thought it was Kaiser, while Cunningham believed it was Schaefer.

A shovel and pick-axe were loaded into the vehicle. “They got there somehow,” Cunningham said. “It might have been me, I don’t remember.”

Grange told the two to bury the bodies while he stayed and buried the gun. They drove up the hill, stopping once because Kaiser’s head fell onto Cunningham’s lap.

They stopped at a clearing and began digging. Williams dug closest to the road, and Cunningham began a second grave a few feet away. Who used the shovel and who used the pick-axe was unclear—Cunningham didn't remember and Williams thought he used the pick-axe, although the grave both say Williams dug showed only shovel marks.

The attempt was aborted soon after, but not before each grave was about four feet long and one-and-a-half feet deep.

The two drove the vehicle farther up the old logging road and parked it between some trees. They put a rag in the gas tank and tried to light it like a candle," Cunningham said. "It didn't work."

They tried to siphon gas out of the tank with a new garden hose, pieces of which were recovered from the crime scene. It was too long, and Cunningham, then Williams, tried to cut it with the shovel, but nothing worked.

The two took a pot pipe, and a new bottle of rum off of the victims before they left. Cunningham said he poured some of it out," he said. "There's spirits in the bottle, spirits in the land."

Too hard to dig

On the walk back to the cabin, Williams saw the pipe and told him it was "sick and wrong" and to get rid of it. Cunningham threw it into the woods.

They returned and told Grange that it was too hard to dig.

"He said, 'I figured as much, you were back too quick,'" Cunningham testified.

Grange ran underneath the house and got a can of gas they kept for the generator. "The three of us drove up to the top of the hill," Cunningham said. About three-quarters of the way up, Williams got out to watch for cars. Cunningham and Grange "poured some gas on the car, lit another fire," he said. "It caught in flames. I got back in the truck. We went down the hill and picked up Dane."

Back at the cabin, "I threw my shirt in the fire pit, because it had blood all over it," Cunningham remembered.

Williams recounted a similar version of events. He arrived at Barter Fair on Sunday around noon with a friend, he said. He saw Grange at the gate, and decided to leave with him because he'd forgotten his wallet and the pot he was going to sell.

In the car, Williams said, Grange told him, "It was going down, that they're going to threaten him. He said he hopes Nick comes out by himself, said he felt sorry for anyone else who comes out. He had done it for the family before, as far as I knew, threatened people. He was going to make sure Nick didn't visit anybody or come around anymore. Jeff had spoken earlier about him being a part of the 'wrecking crew' in Portland.

"The month prior to this, Rob had mentioned doing away with Nick," Williams continued. "The reality of him actually killing them wasn't believable. A lot of people make a lot of

accusations and threats that don't get carried out."

Williams apparently was asked to also get his .22 to threaten the victims with. He refused, and after they parked the car, which was "to be hidden out of the way of sight," at the Crown Creek cabin, he went down to the creek. He said he got "spooked" and ran back to his own cabin.

"I kind of had some thoughts going through my mind about what was said the month before," he said. "I had a lot of thoughts. I wasn't sure if he was going to shoot him, if he was going to threaten him."

Figuring whatever was going to happen had "already transpired," Williams ran back to the Crown Creek Cabin. He saw Cunningham and was introduced to Kaiser and Schaefer.

Then, he said, Cunningham motioned to him with his head and the two walked down to the creek together. He claimed that Cunningham never made it to the creek to get water in the pan, and that the two stopped and talked for about five minutes.

Williams and Cunningham told him, "He's in the basement. It's going to happen now."

Williams said that after they heard the shots, they ran back up to the house. According to him, Cunningham reached the scene first. Cunningham believes Williams was first.

At the scene, Williams said, "Choey was standing in the middle of the path with a .22 in his hand. He said, 'Jeff, come on.'"

Williams claims he panicked and ran back and forth between the cabin and the creek while the other loaded the bodies. At one point, he said, he helped Cunningham drag Schaefer by the foot, and saw bullet holes in Schaefer's forehead and cheek. He remembers Grange wrapping Kaiser in the blue blanket and throwing him over his shoulder.

'I killed them. You guys bury them.'

Then, Williams said, "I was under the steps of the cabin looking for a pick or a shovel. Grange said, 'Bury them, you guys bury them.'"

"I found a shovel," Williams continued. "Jeff grabbed a pick."

Williams remembered having to ride with his elbows against the dashboard because Kaiser's body was pressed against the back of his seat.

When they stopped to dig the graves, Williams said, Cunningham was, "beside me, pretty upset, digging also. He was borderline crying. I just want to get it over with, get out of there."

Williams agreed that he had yelled at Cunningham on the walk back for taking Schaefer's pipe. He concurred that, when they got back, Grange expressed surprise at how quickly they'd returned, and that, Grange went beneath the house for a gas can.

When they drove back up to Kaiser's car, Williams said he asked to be let out to watch for cars, but Grange wouldn't stop. He asked a second time, nearer to the victim's car, and they let him out. About 10 minutes later, they dropped him off.

The three then went to the Whitebird Tavern in Northport, where Williams played pool with one of the bartenders. When they returned to Williams' cabin, they found Cunningham's former girlfriend, Maija Soucie. Soucie was looking for a ride back to Portland.

Soucie testified that she felt very unwelcome, and that "it was very heavy, thick air. It was very uncomfortable, very sensitive, and I felt a lot of tension. I certainly felt the uneasiness of having me around—or anyone around, for that matter."

Cunningham wanted to leave with her for the night, but Grange wasn't happy about the idea. Cunningham was dogged, though, and Grange relented and loaned them his truck, telling them to be back early the next morning. The two then headed off to the Crown Creek Cabin.

A drunken Cunningham then told Soucie. "He only said Nick," Soucie, also a friend of Kaiser's, testified. "He was in so much fear, pain. I've never felt him so lost. He was hurting for Nick. It was a friend of his. He was in total disbelief that it came to this."

Cunningham told her that the shooter "was Chooey," and that Williams had been "in a state of panic, running up and down the road, just scared, freaked out. I was in shock," Soucie said, "but I remember what he said.

The two stayed at the Crown Creek cabin. The next morning, late, they met Grange and Williams coming to get them. Grange was furious because they were late, and the three packed up. Williams borrowed the vehicle then, and went a few miles away to pick up five pounds of marijuana—although Williams said he borrowed his mother's car.

Williams returned and the three re-loaded the car. They dropped Soucie off at another friend's, and between the three of them, left five dogs behind.

'Shot in the head, both.'

On the ride to Portland, Williams said, Grange told them what happened while they were at the creek. "He told us how he took them out," Williams recalled. "He mentioned that he took Josh out first with head-shots. Nick was lying down at this point to cover his ears, and he shot Nick next. He said they were shot in the head, both. He was pretty nonchalant, like something he had to take care of that was just business."

They arrived at Schultz's house in Portland at about 2 a.m. Cunningham "ate a whole bunch of valium, drank a bunch of booze, and went to bed," he said.

The next day, Grange told Schultz that "he was the one that shot him. Dane told him there was some other guy that was there, as well."

"Rob seemed to act surprised," Williams said, "but ...I felt it was an act. He asked me, 'you're not going to have a momentary lapse of reason and go to the authorities?' 'I told him no.'"

A few days later, Williams bought a 1987 Porshe with the money from the pot he'd been fronted and apparently didn't intend to pay for it. He also got an apartment with it.

A \$100,000 reward put up by an unknown person was rumored for the person who killed Kaiser. Williams said Grange and Cunningham discussed it, while Cunningham said Grange and Williams, a "greedy" person, discussed it.

“They said there was a \$100,000, but I didn’t know if there was or not,” Cunningham testified. The reward was apparently supposed to be distributed through Schultz.

Grange and Cunningham then embarked on a Phil Lesh tour with some other kids from Portland. “Nobody was really talking to me that much. I was kind of out there,” Cunningham said, adding that he didn’t believe he had yet been cut off from the family.

But then, “Somebody fed me a bunch of LSD,” he said. “I was high until the Montana Gathering, maybe a couple of weeks.” At the Rainbow Gathering in Montana, he “got spun out there” again, he said.

Cunningham was arrested in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where he was helping his mother move after she received threats. Williams was arrested in Vancouver, Washington.

Both were apprehended after Maija Soucie confessed to detectives that she knew of the crime. “At first, I was in denial about it,” Soucie said, “Then, I just realized I couldn’t keep something like this to myself.”

Defense attorney Robert Simeone called only a few witnesses for the defense. He brought Cunningham back to the stand, who told him, “I’ve never seen John be violent. I didn’t think he was going to kill Nick.”

Simeone verified the numerous contradictions between the Cunningham’s and William’s stories: whether Cunningham had water in the pan, how the bodies were loaded, who dug which grave, who said “its going to happen now,” who rifled through pockets, and where Grange was standing when they ran back from the creek.

He challenged whether the two walked back on the road or through the woods after they attempted to dig graves, which seat the boys thought they were sitting in when they drove back to Kaiser’s car with a gas can, and whether Cunningham ever called Schultz on Saturday night.

Simeone called Soucie back to the stand, who testified that Cunningham only told her that Kaiser was killed. Sergeant Jim Caruso and Detective Loren Erdman were grilled on the buried gun that was never recovered.

Simeone also challenged Williams’ various statements—in his first statement, he said he was uninvolved, and went straight home after the Barter Fair. The five statements following it gradually increased the degree of his involvement.

Caruso maintained that Williams was “minimizing” his involvement to protect himself. False statements like Williams’ may be made because, ‘they’re involved and afraid of getting in trouble,’ Caruso argued, “or they are afraid of retribution.

Simeone wondered which, if any, of Williams’ statements was to be believed. And Grange clearly indicated Williams for the murders.

When John Grange took the stand, he presented his version of the story after Simeone painted him as an “unsuspecting, unassuming” man who most recently was employed in a group home for mentally disabled children.

Grange minimized his friendship with Schultz, and admitted that “I do smoke weed.” But he said his dealings with marijuana were small scale, and intended to only keep himself in supply. “It wasn’t a money-making thing,” he said, the only witness to address the jury directly. “It was a matter of sharing amongst me and my friends.”

Sold his gun for \$60

Grange said that, on Sunday, he sold the gun for \$60 at the entrance to the Fair. He needed gas money, he said, because he was supposed to meet two friends in Portland for dinner the next night.

He heard that the mushroom deal was going down. “(Jeff and Echo (Kaiser’s family nickname) and his friend were going to take off, get five pounds out by the cabin,” Grange said. “I told them I didn’t think it was a good idea to do a five pound deal with a narc. Jeff said it wasn’t a problem. The way he understood it, Nick had worked everything out.”

Grange said Williams borrowed his truck to chase Cunningham, to whom Williams had fronted pot earlier. Williams believed Cunningham was going to run with the pot, Grange asserted.

Grange said he hung out with his friend “Bill” for the remainder of the day, although no such person appeared at the trial.

Six hours after he left, Grange said, Williams returned, “Kind of nervous.” He said Williams offered to take him out to dinner as a sort of apology, and Grange, Williams and “Bill” ate at the Whitebird.

Grange claimed that he told his father before he left Friday morning, after purchasing hundreds of dollars worth of supplies for his son, that he was returning to Portland. His dad, who testified that he was surprised to see his son in Portland, forgot, Grange claimed.

Grange said he was angry with Cunningham and Soucie the morning after the murders because they were making him late for a dinner date he had in Portland. A statement that he was looking forward to a nice dinner in Portland because there’s no good restaurants in the area appeared to draw ire from some of the audience and jury.

Grange’s sugary demeanor disappeared when Wetle cross-examined him, and his attention turned from the jury to the attorney. Wetle had succeeded in igniting Grange’s temper when he pursued the fact that Grange had left his dog of two years behind.

“Dane let my dog out of the truck twice and he ran away,” Grange nearly yelled. He exhibited the same anger when Wetle asked how he was going to pay for the nice dinner if he was selling his gun for gas money. Grange said his friends were taking him out.

Someone tried unsuccessfully to convince the jury that “this is a frame job.”

“There are numerous ways in which the story doesn’t line up,” Someone argued. “There’s only one reason—Mr. Grange wasn’t there.”

Wetle called Grange’s testimony “very, very well-rehearsed” and convinced the jurors that the inconsistencies between Williams and Cunningham were the result of shock and trauma.

“There are consistencies and there are inconsistencies,” Wetle said, “and the scary thing about it is the consistencies couldn’t be there if it didn’t happen. (The inconsistencies) are all about what they did. It’s nothing about what Grange did. The person that killed Josh Schaefer is a cold-hearted-son-of-a-gun.”

Following the reading of the verdict, the father and sister of Grange wept alone in the courtroom. Pat Schaefer, the mother of the victim, Joshua Schaefer, offered condolences.

“We’ve all lost sons today,” she told them.

Grange is scheduled to be sentenced on March 29. He faces a minimum of 53 years in jail, and is expected to serve his time in Walla Walla State Prison.