

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

By JODI MILLER
S-E Staff Reporter

Following a long week of often torturous testimony, the families of Joshua Thomas Schaefer and Nicholas Dewayne Kaiser celebrated the conviction of John Douglas "Chooey" 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 of 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 experts, 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 Whidby 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 in 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 of days, too soon for his 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 parents' 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



Kim Kerpan clutches the hand of a friend following the verdict.

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 the 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 was 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 30th birthday the week before the murders, he also bought his son a .22 caliber rifle, a 550-round box of ammunition, a Bunsen 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 on 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 sh**. 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 had made statements to the DEA, although there is no evidence that there was ever a threat to Schaefer.

Kaiser told Cunningham that he and 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 and 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 handed 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 the 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.

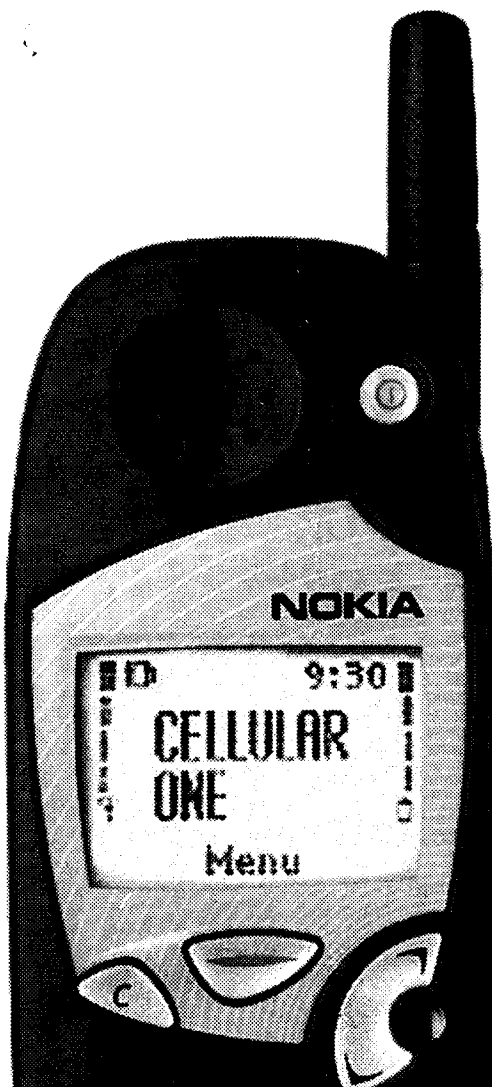
He couldn't find the gun, so Cunningham went outside and asked Kaiser and Schaefer if they wanted something to eat. They agreed, and he went inside to get a pan.

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."

(Continued on page 11)



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Kaiser's father and grandmother are relieved after the guilty verdict.

Grange

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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 \$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 whole 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 what 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 Cunningham's and Williams' stories: whether Cunningham had water in the pan, how the bodies were loaded, who dug which grave, who said "it's 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 indicted 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 only to 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 the 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 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.

Simeone tried unsuccessfully to convince the jury that "this is a frame job."

"There are numerous ways in which the story doesn't line up," Simeone 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 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 at Walla Walla State Prison.

Pfc. Holman thru basic

Marine Corps Pfc. Joseph C. Holman, son of Kathy and Dave Holman of Chewelah, recently completed basic training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego.

Holman successfully completed 12 weeks of training designed to challenge new Marine recruits both physically and mentally.

Holman and fellow recruits ended the training phase with The Crucible, a 54-hour team effort, problem-solving evolution which culminated with an emotional ceremony in which the recruits were presented the Marine Corps Emblem and were addressed as Marines for the first time since boot camp began.

Holman is a 2000 graduate of Jenkins High School in Chewelah.

Seaman Joseph graduates from Coast Guard training

Coast Guard Seaman Apprentice Ayer L. Joseph, son of Debra Rotter of Colville and Gary Ayer of Colville, recently graduated from the U.S. Coast Guard Recruit Training Center in Cape May, NJ.

During the eight-week training program, Joseph completed a vigorous training curriculum consisting of classroom academics and practical instruction on water safety and survival, military customs and courtesies, seamanship skills, first aid, fire fighting and marksmanship. A major emphasis is also placed on physical fitness, health and wellness.

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