

<http://whatstheharm.net/satanicritualabuse.html>

Margie Grafton, Tim Palomo, Grant Self and John Stoll:

These Kern County residents were accused of having formed a "sex-ring" to sexually molest boys over an interval of several months in the mid-1980's. John Stoll had rented his poolhouse at the back of his house to Grant Self, a homeless man. Unknown to Stoll, Self was a convicted child molester. John had recently been divorced after a long and bitter custody fight. His wife is reported to have spent time in a psychiatric institution and is alleged to have had difficulty separating reality from fantasy. In 1984, Stoll's ex-wife and a pastor that she was dating filed a complaint against him for allegedly abusing their son. An unrelated charge was made against Grant Self. Margie Grafton and her boyfriend Tim Palomo were also charged. They had often visited Stoll to enjoy his swimming pool. The prosecutors may have concluded that the four defendants might be involved in a sex-ring, because they all had apartments in the same property.

Children were interviewed and asked repeated, direct, leading and suggestive questions by Deputy Erickson. He did not follow the California Commission's "*Peace Officers Standards and Training*" manual on interview methods. He said that he had never heard of the POST manual; he had never taken the training courses recommended in the document. Recent research shows that the types of questioning used by Erikson will often cause the children to disclose details about events that never happened. ² Unfortunately, these findings were not available to the Kern County officials at the time.

John Stoll was charged with 70 felony crimes; the other three defendants were charged with fewer. Their trial in the *Kern County Superior Court* started on 1984-SEP-24. Four children gave testimony. Child "A" answered that he didn't know or didn't remember to almost all of the questions raised by the defense attorneys. Child "V" admitted during questioning by a defense attorney that it is OK to lie, that it is OK to make mistakes while testifying. He said that he did not know what the oath was. At one point, he denied that any sodomy had occurred. In violation of court orders, he spoke to his mother and to a prosecutor overnight. The next day, he "*recalled*" acts of sodomy. One of the children testified that he had been in the Stoll house five times. Actually, he had never been inside. Under cross-examination, he was unable to describe a single item in the house.

There was no physical evidence to support the charges. The children rarely agreed on the details of various alleged molestations (e.g. time, place, adults present, children present). Some of the acts that the children testified about were physically impossible to commit. The defense attorneys asked that the children be medically examined. The court denied their request. No medical

examinations were ever performed on any of the boys. This was indeed unfortunate, because anal rape of a small child by an adult will cause obvious wounds that are easily detectable. A medical exam might well have proven that no sodomy actually occurred. The prosecution made many references to kiddie-porn -- photographs taken of the sexual molestations. As in other MVMO cases, no such photographs were ever found and introduced into evidence. The prosecution produced at court numerous erotic magazines such as Playboy and Penthouse. Some were found in rooms not rented by the defendants. This probably had the effect of prejudicing the jury. In fact, the magazines could have been used as an indicator that the defendants were **not** pedophiles. If an adult male enjoys "girlie magazines" they are probably sexually attracted to adult women; this would make it more probable that they were not attracted to little boys.

The defense attorneys were not allowed to present the POST manual as evidence. They had hoped to demonstrate the flawed nature of the child interview techniques. Stoll's defense was poorly prepared; his lawyer only had 24 days to assemble the defense; he was unable to locate two defense witnesses and to obtain copies of some records in time for the trial. The judge denied the lawyer's request for a delay in the trial. During the trial, John Stoll ran out of money. His lawyer repeatedly asked to be relieved of the case; these requests were denied. Dr. Roger Mitchell, a clinical psychologist, had conducted psychological tests on Graton and Palomo. He would have been able to give expert testimony on whether these defendants were sexual psychopaths, but his testimony was not allowed.

Following the trial two children, "J" and "C," admitted in public statements that they had lied during the preliminary hearing and the trial.

"As early as 1986, a yearlong investigation of the Kern County cases was done by the California Attorney General's Office. The investigation concluded that local authorities had used 'suggestive' questioning that led children to give answers that they wanted. At that time, the 'attorney general said there was both a shortage of corroborating evidence and that some alleged victims were simply parroting what they were told in questioning or what they heard other children say'." 15

All four defendants were convicted and received long sentences. Margie Grafton and her boyfriend Tim Palomo had their convictions overturned after eight years in jail by a *California Appellate Court*. The basis for dismissal was that a psychiatric profile which suggested that she was innocent was kept from the jury. They have not been retried. If they were retried at this time, the result would undoubtedly be an acquittal. The children's testimony could be easily shown to be suspect; there is no hard evidence to show that they are guilty, and no hard evidence to show that abuse actually occurred. Grant Self and John Stoll continued to rot in prison. 6,7

By 2004-MAR, Grant Self had been released from prison and is now "*...in a state hospital for mentally ill offenders. He can be kept there until authorities decide he is not a danger to others.*" ¹⁶ John Stoll remained incarcerated until 2004-MAY.

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Margorie Grafton

From 1984 through 1986 at least 30 defendants were convicted of child sex abuse and related charges and sentenced to long prison terms in a series of inter-related cases in Kern County, California, and an additional 8 defendants accepted plea bargains that kept them out of prison. Over time, 20 of the defendants who were sentenced to prison were exonerated, the earliest in 1991 the latest in 2005. In most of these exonerations the children who had testified that they had been abused recanted their testimony. In all of the exonerations there was evidence that the complaining witnesses – some as young as four years old – had been coerced or persuaded by the authorities make false accusations.

The Kern County cases are the oldest and largest of several groups of prosecutions that occurred in a wave of child sex abuse hysteria that swept through the country in the 1980s and early 1990s. Some (but not all) of these cases included allegations of satanic rituals. Many focused on day care centers. Nationally, there have been dozens of exonerations in child sex abuse hysteria cases.

Most of the Kern County child sex abuse cases were multi-defendant group prosecutions. In one of these group cases, Margie Grafton, along with John Stoll, Tim Palomo, and Grant Self, were accused of forming a “child sex abuse ring” to sexually molest boys over a period of several months in the mid-1980s.

John Stoll and Grant Self were the first to be accused of sexual abuse; they fell under suspicion on June 10, 1984, when Stoll's ex-wife, Ann Karlan, called the Kern County Sheriff's Department and said she believed that on a recent visit with Stoll, their 6-year-old son Jed had been molested by Self, who rented Stoll's pool house. Stoll and Karlan had gone through a bitter divorce, and Karlan was angry that a judge had granted joint custody over Jed.

When Kern County officials questioned Karlan, they asked whether she suspected Stoll of abusing their son. At first, she said she never considered that he would do that, but she later hinted that it was possible. At this time, hysteria over child-sex abuse had become widespread throughout Kern County. Based on Karlan's statements, police launched a full-fledged investigation to determine whether Jed had been sexually involved with John Stoll and other adults, and whether there were any other victims – despite the fact there was absolutely no evidence to suggest this.

Kern County officials interviewed Jed as well as five friends his who were known come over to Stoll's house to play. All of the boys were between six and eight years old at the time. When interviewed by investigators, Jed said that he had been forced to perform sexual acts by Margie Grafton, Grafton's live-in boyfriend Tim Palomo, and Grant Self. He was reluctant to talk about his father at first, but eventually, he also accused Stoll of sexually abusing him.

Using highly suggestive questioning techniques, investigators also elicited allegations of abuse from other boys. One friend of Jed's said that he had

State: California

County: Kern

Most Serious Crime: Child Sex Abuse

Additional Convictions:

Reported Crime Date: 1984

Convicted: 1985

Exonerated: 1990

Sentence: 16 years

Race: Caucasian

Sex: Female

Age:

Contributing Factors: Perjury or False Accusation

Did DNA evidence contribute to the exoneration? No

:

been molested by Stoll because he was afraid that if he didn't the authorities would deport his mother, an undocumented Mexican immigrant. The other boys initially denied that they had been sexually assaulted by anyone, but after being questioned repeatedly and at length – and being promised that if they admitted being abused, everything would be all right and they'd be able to go home – they gave statements saying they too had been sexually abused by Stoll, Grafton, Palomo and Self.

There were major inconsistencies among the children's statements. Nonetheless, all four defendants were arrested in June of 1984 and charged with child sex abuse.

Prior to the trial, the defense requested that medical examinations be performed on the children, but the prosecution argued that this would be an unnecessary violation of the children's privacy, and the judge agreed. The defense also attempted to present testimony by a psychologist named Dr. Roger Mitchell, who had conducted psychological examinations of Grafton and Palomo that apparently showed they did not fit the profile of a sexual predator, but the judge refused to allow this testimony.

On September 24, 1984, the defendants' joint trial began. Six boys testified against Stoll, claiming that he and his co-defendants had sexually abused them. Much of their testimony was contradictory and there was no other evidence to support their claims. Nonetheless, based on the children's testimony, in September 1985 a jury convicted all four defendants of a total of 36 counts of child molestation. Stoll was convicted on 17 counts and sentenced to 40 years in prison.

Shortly after the trial, at least two of the children recanted their testimony.

On December 18, 1989, the Supreme Court of California reversed the convictions of Grafton and Palomo, concluding that the psychological exams conducted by Dr. Mitchell had been improperly excluded at trial, and that, given the inconsistencies in the children's testimony and the lack of physical evidence, Dr. Mitchell's testimony could easily have affected the jury's decision. They were released, and charges were dismissed in 1990.

Stoll remained incarcerated, however, because Dr. Mitchell's testimony was not at issue in his case.

Stoll's attorney eventually persuaded the Northern California Innocence Project to investigate his case. Innocence Project investigators tracked down the child witnesses (now adults), and in interviews, four completely recanted their testimony and one said he did not remember being abused. Only Jed Stoll stood by his original testimony.

On December 26, 2002, Stoll filed a petition for writ of habeas corpus in Kern County Superior Court, arguing that his conviction was based on false testimony. He also alleged that Kern County CPS workers and police used coercive and manipulative interviewing techniques that resulted in unreliable testimony of the child witnesses. At his evidentiary hearing, all of the child witnesses testified; again, four recanted, one reported having no memory of being abused, and Jed maintained that he was abused by his father. Stoll's attorneys argued that Jed's mother had prejudiced him against Stoll.

On April 30, 2004, the Honorable John Kelly of the Kern County Superior Court vacated Stoll's conviction, finding that the techniques investigators used to question the children resulted in unreliable testimony. Four days later, on his 61st birthday, Stoll was released from prison after prosecutors dismissed all charges. He served 20 years in prison – the longest sentence of any of the wrongfully convicted child sex-abuse defendants who were exonerated in Kern County.

The California Attorney General and State Board of Control investigated the case, and on May 18, 2006, announced their determination that Stoll had not committed any of the crimes of which he was convicted, and he was awarded \$704,700 as compensation for the years he spent in prison.

Separately, in 2009, Kern County agreed to pay Stoll \$5 million for his wrongful prosecution and imprisonment.

- *Alexandra Gross*

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