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CKLN-FM Mind Control Series -- Part 13

Dr. Stephen Kent

Interview on Cults and Ritual Abuse

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Wayne Morris:

Good morning. You are tuned into the International Connection once again. Today is show #23 in a series on mind control we are presenting here on CKLN, and today we are interviewing Dr. Stephen Kent, a sociologist at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. Dr. Kent specializes in studying abusive cults and accounts of ritual abuse. Here is that interview:

I am talking to Dr. Stephen Kent. Thank you very much for joining us Stephen.

Dr. Stephen Kent:

Thank you very much for asking me.

Wayne Morris:

I wonder if you could briefly tell us what your background is, and what is the work that you are currently doing.

Dr. Stephen Kent:

I am a sociologist of religion, and I specialize in the study of controversial religions. These are the groups that are outside the mainstream. These are the groups that are often smaller, but the groups that most people pejoratively call "cults". As part of that research, I got involved in studying abuse accounts that people were providing to me from their involvement in some controversial religions. By no means is it the case that merely because a group is new or small, does it mean that it is involved in any kind of abuse scenarios. But certainly a lot of abuse does go on in some of these small groups. As part of that process I was getting really extraordinary accounts about physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Then in October of 1989 I attended a conference specifically on ritual abuse -- a three day conference -- the first day or day and a half was on the kinds of groups that I had been studying, then the final day and a half was more on groups oriented around the worship of satan. I came away from the conference saying, "something is going on," but I had at that time no direct experience or interviews with people. I also had been collecting whatever material I could find on allegations involving satanism, and I had done some historical work about satanic allegations in the 17th century ... so I had some large conceptual background.

It was March 1990, when my first account came. This person was having memories, and she called the university -- usually it is the case that these calls are about unusual religious activities wind up going into my office -- so this phone call was re-routed to my office. This person did not identify herself. I get calls like this from time to time, so I am not too surprised about that. But she asked me a question about a symbol. I am a collector and I work with a lot of religious materials but I had never heard about this particular symbol, so I asked her a number of normal questions -- what was the context of the symbol, was it on anything, were

people around. After about the third or fourth question, I remember thinking "oh my gosh she saw this in a ritual". I got up and closed my office door, and she became the first person to disclose. I spent a lot of time talking with her. Her case eventually led to a police investigation with essentially no results, but the pressure of trying to make sense out of her account led me to begin a fairly large, and I think, in-depth, investigation of satanic allegations. That investigation led to the publication of three academic articles on the subject.

And even now, about seven years later, I still from time to time get new accounts. There is one person I have been trying to talk to for about six years. I now get accounts and queries through the internet oddly enough through e-mail. People hear about me, and contact me and so on.

Wayne Morris:

When you say ritual abuse, what do you mean by that? What constitutes ritual abuse?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

Ritual abuse is any kind of systematic patterned disempowering violations. Ritual abuse can take place in a wide variety of contexts. They don't necessarily have to be religious in nature; however, ritual abuse is systematic, patterned, disempowering violations -- can take place in any kind of deviant religious setting. It is simply the case that many of the accounts that have come to me suggest, if the allegations are true, that the people involved in the alleged violations, believe that they were engaged in worship of demonic figures -- what we would call "satanic figures". But I hasten to add that the issue around ritual abuse can go on in mainstream deviant settings. There was a case reported in the Toronto Star a couple of years ago about a healing group in Toronto in the sixties that had collapsed unto itself, and got involved in very abusive ritual abuse of children. (See Toronto Star, Judy Steed, Feb. 12, 1995 "Priest tells of cult horror in dad's rectory: Sixties cult - story and headlines in 1968 tell of a report condemning Canon G. Moore Smith of St. Matthias Anglican Church in Toronto for using bizarre rituals and brainwashing to control parishioners")

Wayne Morris:

And what would be the ritual aspect in that case? I am not familiar with the case in the Toronto Star, but in a general sense, if it is outside a religious context, what is the ritual aspect?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

In the allegations of ritual abuse that are say, outside a religious context, these kinds of abuses could involve a perpetrator who serially violates one person or one child repeatedly. In these cases the kind of violations would be patterned and the patterning can be important from the victim's standpoint because each time the abuse begins, the victim knows what's coming, having been through it several times before. You hear from many victims and alleged victims, that they dissociated, that they suddenly "rose up to the corner of the ceiling and were gone", that they created different personalities to take the abuse. Probably they were able to do so because they had been through ritual patterns many times, and they know things at age 3 and 4 what is coming down the road, so they escape the only way they can. These are often children, even adults are disempowered and can't do the normal kind of reaction which is either to fight or flee. Consequently, these people, especially children, flee the only way they can, which is psychologically. Emotionally they dissociate.

Wayne Morris:

How prevalent is multiple personality disorder of some sort among the children coming forth with claims of ritual abuse?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

Well, keep in mind that I am not clinically trained so you always want to take what I say about clinical psychological issues with a grain of salt ... but my experience suggests that quite a number of people who claim to have been severely, repeatedly sexually abused as children manifest what appears to be multiple personality, dissociative identity, and so on. Some considerable debate exists in the psychological and psychiatric literature about the reality of multiple personality, and it does seem that, in my own non clinical

sense, that some kinds of treatments by psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors can make these conditions worse, but I am convinced from the people with whom I have spoken that what is often called multiple personality disorder does exist in and of itself, and that existence can stem from repeated abuse, especially children.

The first person with whom I spoke made allegations about having ritually abused, but as an adult. It was an important case for me because it seemed very clear that she had dissociated, but she had not formed personalities. My own sense about the dynamics of the formation of multiple personalities suggests that it is most likely to occur among people whose personalities are not well formed -- that is to say, fairly young children. It is probably easiest for them to create fantasies because all the elements of their personalities -- who they are, their relationship to family, to friends, their social sense of themselves -- those aren't particularly well developed yet. So, again, when adults go through systematic ritual abuse, it doesn't surprise me at all for them to say they dissociate, frequently have memories come back in floods or rushes that they can't control. But I don't see the adults forming multiple personalities unless the abuse happened at a young age as children -- again, I am not clinically trained, but that's what my experience suggests to me.

Wayne Morris:

And in your experience with a lot of the people you have come in contact with that have claimed or made allegations of ritual abuse as a child, do you find that a high percentage of these do have some kind of dissociative disorder.

Dr. Stephen Kent:

Again, not being clinically trained, I can only give my impressions, but yes, it certainly seems very, very clear that many of the people with whom I have spoken talk about different personalities, will describe in some detail the processes of dissociation. They will give me diaries that have different handwritings, sometimes they will be talking to me and they will go into different voices. I remember one vivid example. I was talking to a person with whom I have been in contact for a long time -- she called me, and she was in some kind of distress. I said "I will call you right back," made some phone calls, and returned her call. Five minutes. This person was 30 years old, and sounded like a five or six year old when I called and she answered the phone. It was the same person, but it sounded like her in a different personality. I suggested that instead of staying in her apartment all day -- it was a beautiful day -- there was a big festival going on in Edmonton -- I suggested that possibly she could go out there to get her mind off of these things. The little tiny voice said that, "oh, I can't ride the bus," and I knew this person rode the bus all the time, and I said, "why not?" And this little voice said, "because I can't read." And there was no indication that this person was making up these issues. In her case, she was one of three daughters, and a second of her sisters also was in treatment for what at the time was called multiple personality disorder. So two of the three sisters in this family had very bad psychological problems. And you have to ask the question, "well, how does something go so wrong in a family? Is it a genetic issue or is it environmental." That is to say, is there a bad gene in the family, or did these two sisters go through fairly horrific systematic abuse that caused personality fragmentation ...

Wayne Morris:

Can you tell us what similarities there are in the accounts of the survivors, especially by those where the abuse happened when they were children?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

There is some research on the similarities of accounts. All of them, all of them talk about severe emotional abuse, sexual abuse. Many of the accounts contain references to ritual murders, murders in which these people claim they were sometimes forced to participate. Many of these accounts talk about ritual murders in the context of sacrifices. The sacrificial descriptions almost always involve drinking of fluids out of a chalice or bowl. It is remarkable how many accounts contain descriptions of what sound like chalices. Some people who claim to know or speculate as to what the fluids are in the chalices, and almost always suggest that it is blood, or a blood mixture. Sometimes people suggest urine might be mixed in. Lots of stories about eating flesh, about a victim being killed, and parts of the victim cut off and given to people to eat. Sometimes these people talk about being forced to eat parts of the alleged victims, and so on. Almost all the accounts contain

people in robes. Sometimes the robes are different colours. High ceremony -- that is to say -- there are some accounts of people being abused at the end of say, poker games or something -- but most of the accounts that I get contain allegations of rituals where there seems to be a leader performing systematic ceremonies involving daggers -- often involving chants. When someone mentions chants, without trying to lead them, I try to get them to talk about the chants. And many, many of the people say the chants are not in English, they just couldn't understand them. It is remarkable in these kinds of small details to get these general kinds of similarities in stories. Sometimes -- very frequently -- most frequently both, if not one -- will be involved in the allegations. Sometimes relatives. That is a very quick overview scenario about the content.

Generally I find that many of these accounts are broadly similar in content, but usually different in details. Part of what I have tried to do is to collect accounts, wondering whether accounts from independent people ever would match up. One way of doing this kind of qualitative research is to get similar accounts from unrelated people. To get these kind of accounts, then you have a fairly good indication that something may have happened -- it is always important to rule out extraneous features, ie. the media, the same therapist, and so on. I get similar accounts with different details.

I was actually faced with a real dilemma. How could one explain these broad similarities, but particularly, the differences. These accounts were coming from people in various countries -- people giving accounts of alleged rituals that were happening in various countries. Literature was coming out of Europe, Australia, South Africa, and so on. I was faced with a real dilemma. How could one possibly make sense out of all these similar accounts from all over the world, that were different in detail? I spent months trying to figure this out. I finally came up with a possible answer, it was so terribly simple. One estimation is that if these groups existed, then they were all inspired by a similar source. When I tried to figure out what a common source was, I spent months going through very esoteric arcane occult books -- and the material so abstract that it just didn't ring true that some of the farmers, or teachers, or real estate people about whom people were making allegations -- and military personnel, and so on, could have understood these texts. The more possible answer was that people may have been inspired by sections of the bible. That is to say, if one looks in the Hebrew bible old testament, there are lots of discussions about the God, Yahweh, in competition with the very pagan gods, Baal, Ashterah, and so on. Pagan gods required human sacrifices, especially child sacrifices. Moreover, in the Christian new testament, Jesus is recorded as talking a fair amount about the power of satan ... Jesus always claims power over satan ... but it is very clear in certain portions of the bible, that satan is the god of this world.

It struck me like a thunderbolt -- that if people were deviant and they were striving for what they considered to be power in this world, and they operated in a religious context, one possible interpretation is that they would go to various portions of the bible, and whenever God or yahweh instructed them not to do something, they would construct rituals to do exactly what God said not to do. Moreover, Jesus talks about the power of satan, or uses satanic images to dismiss his opponents, then deviants would construct ritual around those satanic images. With that focus on the bible as being a possible source for deviations around the world, for me the mystery got solved. then of course, the issue became more complex.

A number of religious books, scriptural books and quasi-religious books, have influenced and had an impact on groups around the world. So we have different Mormon texts, different Masonic texts, and so on. And these books could be the sources of inspiration for deviants inside of those traditions. It is certainly the case that mainstream Christians, mainstream Freemasons, mainstream Mormons would be appalled at the stories I have heard. And again, I cannot tell you that these accounts are definitive, or true, but nonetheless, normal members of these traditions would be shocked, appalled to hear the kinds of things I have. But every tradition has its deviants. Moreover, every tradition probably has its sexual deviants. So if people are striving for power in this world, and happen to be a member of these particular traditions, it is plausible to me that they would pick images in these traditions and twist or distort them. It is also possible too that there could be sexual deviants who want to sanctify, to give a religious overview, or hue to their deviant sexual activities; consequently they could offer up their sexual deviances to what they consider to be a higher power, in this case, satan or some variations thereof in order to give their deviations this kind of higher, overview sanctification.

Wayne Morris:

How do you know that people haven't picked up these kinds of inspiration from the media itself, or entertainment, particularly horror shows and shows about satan and so forth? How did you rule that out as the source of this?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

Well, it is difficult to rule it out definitively, but one thing I do is simply ask people, and you cannot always assume that people give accurate answers, but more strikingly, some of the images people were giving me, are not ones that I have seen in any media accounts or outside sources. That is to say, they involved issues the people themselves could not make sense of. Some very obscure things. It took me years to find what could be plausible explanations for some kinds of activities. If you like, I can give one or two examples. One example that comes to mind is a person who talked to me about having a mouse put in her mouth. I got this account a number of years ago, and at the time I had not a clue about what that could have meant. Well I was fortunate to get the account on tape. Several years afterwards, Maclean's Magazine had an article about a federal commission that was going across the country interviewing women about family violence. And the magazine had about two sentences on what it called "ritual abuse". The two sentences said something like, "among the worst accounts that this commission has heard involved a woman in British Columbia who talked about having mice put in her mouth," and it went on to another statement I will come back to. {see: Status of Women Canada, Federal Report, Ottawa 1993 "Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence, Achieving Equity - Chapter 4 'Under-Acknowledged Forms of Violence'}. The other statement was one the Maclean's article linked to the bible. By that point I had already figured out that a possible source of inspiration was the bible, so I went running to my Concordance, and looked up "mouse, or mice". There it was. In Leviticus, in the _____ Laws where Yahweh is telling followers which foods are unclean, one of the unclean foods was mice, so if you are trying to offer homage to a god in opposition to the Judaeo-Christian God, whenever Yahweh says not to do something, you can start a ritual around it. So if Yahweh says, "don't eat mice" you put mice in people's mouths in a ritual setting. The other passage in the Maclean's article referred to the woman saying she had been "whitewashed", she had a white paste or paint put on her body. The article traced that activity to a passage in the New Testament, I believe it is in Matthew, where Jesus is railing against his opponents, I think in this case, the Pharisees. He says something like, "and you opponents are like whited sepulchres, or whitewashed tombs" in some translations. "White on the outside, but inside full of death, decay and rotten bones." Many of my people talked about having something painted on them, and sometimes they talk about colours, white, or white and black, sometimes they don't know what it is that is smeared on them. If their accounts are true, it could be a paint to indicate that their bodies are like whited sepulchres, whitewashed tombs, or gravestones. Or it could be some hallucinogenic, could be bug repellent, although I doubt it.

It is instances like that where people tell me very obscure facts that they can't make sense out of, that I have never seen, at least at the time, in the media, that I have never seen in any kind of horror shows, or what-not. Issues that make no sense to them, that make no sense to their therapists, make no sense to law enforcement officials, and yet people are convinced that these are the experiences they have been through. These kinds of facts that are strongly suggest to me that they didn't get them through external sources such as the media, or external therapy sessions.

Wayne Morris:

This just seems so horrific and outrageous what these people are giving accounts of ... and I think a lot of people will find it hard to believe that ritual abuse exists, and it goes on. How do we know it's happening, and what attempts have been made by law enforcement or researchers to corroborate this, or to prove that it does exist, or it doesn't exist?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

The received sociological or socio-scientific wisdom now is that these accounts most certainly do not exist. I hold a minority opinion on that. Or at least let me say that I am far more open to the possibility that some of these accounts are in fact accurate. When the accounts first started coming forward, they attracted quite a lot of attention in the therapeutic community as well as in the media. It didn't too long for a backlash against the accounts to come forward, and also I think, a growing skepticism on the part of law enforcement. Many law enforcement agencies would undertake investigations and not come up with the kind of definitive proof they would need in order to state clearly that these recovered memories were in fact accurate. Several years ago, some researchers did a large survey, I think they contacted 11,000 people in law enforcement and therapy and

so on, who themselves claimed to have received some 12,000 sets of allegations. According to the study not one of them had been definitively proven.

A lot of social scientists would say that we have to look at other kinds of explanations for why they occur. In my own case, I am much more open to the possibility that some of these accounts are essentially accurate. I maintain this open-ness for a number of reasons. I am familiar with the content and the dynamics of some police investigations. Among those investigations of which I have some familiarity, a few of them have been in my estimation conducted quite properly. That is to say, they got accounts, and the accounts didn't match. In other cases, however, I am far less pleased with the nature and the content of the investigations. Keep in mind that investigations on this issue are very complicated. They usually involve allegations of abuse that happened years, and in some cases, decades ago. People who come forward with these allegations are usually imprecise about times, dates, the people involved. Sometimes, very frequently, the people making the allegations put restrictions on who investigators can contact because they are very panicked. I know there was one big investigation in Western Canada where quite a number of family members were coming forward with allegations of abuse. The police at one point went to the father, and said, "Sir, we hate to tell you but your daughters are talking about having been ritually abused by neighbours." Only afterwards did the daughters have memories of the father being involved in the ceremonies. But of course, by that time, had there been any evidence, the father and his friends got rid of it as soon as he got tipped off by the police. When I see activities on the part of investigators like the one I just described where there were multiple people making allegations, and police not handling the investigation well ... I suspect that in some of those 12,000 cases there was bad investigation.

I have done a couple of investigations and sometimes parts of people's stories pan out, other times they don't. I had one very articulate, intelligent person who said, "find this shed ... it was owned by (she named the person) ... look in the far right hand corner five feet over, five feet down, dig and you will find a pickled fetus." Law enforcement wasn't interested, so I went out with a local reporter, found the shed, we got permission from the current owners to dig. First indication of problems was that the corner of the shed identified had something over it that had been there since the time she was in there, so we started changing corners, and we dug and we dug and we dug, and found nothing. We flew her out to that shed, and she dug with us, all of which we have on videotape because we were so certain we were going to find something, and we found nothing. Here we had a very clear, precise memory. We go there and it proved to be wrong. So I have learned that the mere intensity with which people believe something to be true, is not a necessary indication of accuracy. This harmoniousness between intensity and accuracy has appeared in some psychological research. But it is also the case too, that in some of the accounts I have gotten a level of corroborative evidence which points in the direction of the accounts being essentially accurate. Part of the trouble with say, police investigations, is that police are under some pressure to get cases closed. Academics, on the other hand, can stay with a case for years. So I have, you might say, the luxury of working on these allegations over the span of a career, whereas police officers often are only on a case for a matter of months. Moreover a lot of the police who get involved with these investigations have little, if any, background not only in cases of sexual abuse but also investigating ritual allegations. And finally, the police departments tend to be sexist institutions. They may not be the best type of individuals to be able to deal with the content of what comes out in these allegation scenarios, so in no way can I, or should I, dismiss such a large study that points out 12,000 cases, none of which have been definitively proven.

But I know from the inside that investigations are much more complex than people would ever imagine, and a number of factors can go on as part of the institutional nature of police work to derail investigations. If police get allegations about a body they found yesterday, or they found in a ditch then police departments are willing to throw enormous resources to try to solve that crime. If in contrast, allegations come forward about a murder that happened 30 years ago, there is no body, there are no artifacts, and so on ... and some of the perpetrators are dead ... the ability of police to commit resources to it are very limited.

Wayne Morris:

Well understandably, it is much more difficult to prove those kind of cases that happened decades before. What percentage of the cases, for example, of those 12,000 had some kind of corroborative evidence?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

I would have to go back and look at the study and find out. There were also studies done in Britain that have more or less dismissed the existence of intergenerational satanic abuse, although it did acknowledge that some sexual perpetrators could use images as part of the control mechanisms, or the abuse scenarios in their illegal or criminal activities. To find out exactly what percentage in these studies may have used satanic symbols, I would have to go back and check. What you have in the academic community now, are a number of social scientists, some prominent law enforcement officials, even some people in the psychiatric community who are saying that ritual abuse allegations involving intergenerational deviance are simply not true. In contrast you have a couple of academics like me who are saying that we should slow down to rushing to judgement here. You have a number of counsellors whose experience inside the safe confines of their offices, tell me different stories from what the larger research apparently reveals. You have an intense division within the academic and therapeutic communities, this intense division immediately spills over into implications not only for counselling, but for court cases and so on. The debates are quite serious and consequences are quite important.

Wayne Morris:

I know there are a number of states in the U.S. which have an active statute specifically about ritual abuse, and there is proposed legislation in many other states. Has there been any legislation in Canada specifically dealing with ritual abuse, that you are aware of?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

I am not aware of any specific legislation in Canada. Some people would say that existing legislation is adequate -- that sexual abuse is sexual abuse, regardless of the kind of content or context in which it occurs. So many people say that no need exists for new legislation.

Wayne Morris:

Have there been any convictions in Canada where there might have been some ritual abuse elements or specifically, of ritual abuse? In those cases, how was the issue of ritual abuse handled?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

Prescott, Ontario is a tragic but fascinating instance of ritual abuse -- that is to say systematic, patterned abuse involving intergenerational perpetrators in a community context. There were literally hundreds of people involved including both perpetrators and victims. Some small indications exist that the prosecution, perhaps wisely, didn't pursue that some of the people were involved in satanic rituals in the context of these abuses. The name in the Prescott investigation -- Joshua -- Joshua was supposedly a little brother who one of the victims indicated was murdered. Police never found any bodies or bones, so they cannot ensure that this little fellow actually existed. There was discussion that he had been murdered, and that the murder had involved satanic ritual.

Wayne Morris:

Was there documentation of his birth?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

Not as far as I know. My information is secondhand from Judy Steed, so you will want to talk to her about it. I have spent a fair amount of time, however, with one of the prosecutors and one of the counsellors. In some ways the Prescott, Ontario case is something of a model for the systematic careful way an investigation should be handled. {see: Our Little Secret: Confronting Child Sexual Abuse in Canada, by Judy Steed, Random House of Canada, Toronto, 1994}.

Wayne Morris:

Have there been other connections with child pornography in some of the other cases, or accounts of cases of ritual abuse that you have come across?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

Allegations about child pornography are very widespread. Again there hasn't been the kind of definitive proof that I would need to be able to say these allegations are true, but I do have some accounts where people who are now adults who talk about some adult, usually a father, farming off the child for reasons of child prostitution when they were younger. This happens in more accounts than you might think, and I have a fairly recent account of this activity in the case I am working on right now.

Wayne Morris:

How many people have you come across who have been giving accounts of ritual abuse, and what is your sense of how widespread this is?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

I stopped counting a while ago, but it was well above seventy and these people, in terms of their contact with me, may range from a simple phone call. Many of the people eventually let me turn on a tape recorder and tape their stories. People send me diaries, journals, letters, and so on. I have internet e-mail messages, so I get contact from a wide variety of people. Again, when you ask how widespread is this phenomenon, I would be very cautious in terms of speaking as a social scientist where, in order for me to make a scientific statement, I have to have unimpeachable evidence that I could present to you or other researchers that would lead everyone to come to the same conclusions. I cannot give that kind of definitive research, evidence. What I can do is provide a great deal of suggestive evidence, and because the evidence is still suggestive, it is very important that researchers not close the door yet on the possibility that some of these allegations are true. Having said that, with the appropriate social scientific qualifications, I have gotten reports from people right across this country, from people inside the US, from people who grew up in Britain ... I did a telephone interview with somebody in Australia although I believe her alleged abuse took place in this country. I have seen published accounts in quite a number of European countries and other countries, other English-speaking countries, so something is going on ...

Critics would say that therapists in all these countries have received the same sort of shoddy training ... well ... it is the case that therapists can induce or accentuate existing problems. In a couple of instances I have seen the negative impact of therapeutic intervention very dramatically -- but again, many therapists with whom I have worked, seem to be quite competent, quite caring and moreover, quite professional. That is to say, these therapists are very attuned to issues about not leading clients into memories, not using any kind of recover techniques that might impede or bring into question the content or quality of what they are remembering, and so on. For me the extent of ritual abuse is still an open question. It is not an open question to many of my colleagues.

Wayne Morris:

Do you think there have been an increasing number of allegations coming forward in recent years, or do you feel the ritual abuse of children is a new phenomenon or ...

Dr. Stephen Kent:

Absolutely no indication exists that the abuse of children is a new phenomenon ... if anything, I would suggest that child abuse could have been worse in the Western world in earlier historical periods and no doubt it is pervasive in other parts of the world, especially in some developing countries. What sociologically interesting is the outbreak of the number of accounts that have occurred fairly recently in this country, in Canada. The earliest account I have come across about alleged ritual abuse was from the Winnipeg Free Press in 1959, a person from Britain was on a speaking tour and had given a lecture, I believe in British Columbia, although the WFP picked it up, talking about a child sacrifice that had allegedly happened back in his home town in Britain. I even tried to talk with him but to no avail. Going through the literature in the 1960's, because I have done a lot of work on the counter-culture religions of the late sixties and early seventies, there are a couple of very chilling accounts that appeared in these alternative press contexts ... one in Texas, one may have been in California ... where reporters went to rituals and in one case the reporter said it was very clear that the person tied up was about to be sacrificed, and he fled in panic. So we have a couple of accounts of satanic activities in the late 60's by people who wrote about it before there were any kinds of debates about

whether ritual satanic abuse went on. This did not necessarily involve intergenerational satanic abuse, but certainly they contained strong indications of ritual sacrifice and various kinds of violations. Many people would say that the rise of the women's movement at the end of the 1960's paved the way for feminist therapists and therapists being more sensitive to issues about abuse against women and children -- certainly it seems to me that a number of women finally felt permission to come forward with these accounts believing that therapists or the community at large finally would give them a voice, would listen to them.

Interestingly, and sadly, one of the accounts I got from a 50 year old man -- just terrified, absolutely panicked -- who complained he could not find a counsellor who would let him talk about his ritual abuse. He said all the counsellors he ran into were working with women, and they had no experience with men, and he was just badly traumatized. So ... people would locate the cultural and you might say, therapeutic, permission to come forward with these accounts in the context of the more sensitive environment for issues about abuse. Of course there has been a backlash against issues and allegations about child abuse, and abuse against women. It looks like the False Memory Syndrome Foundation is the most dramatic, but a number of other organizations have claimed that parents, often men, are the victims of these allegations and these bad therapeutic techniques. It is a complex world from cases in which it seems very clear that parents or alleged abusers were in fact wronged. There have been a number of cases where parents have successfully sued their adult children's therapists for "leading" them into these memories. There have been some cases in Ontario where therapists were using questionable techniques that seemed to induce memories amongst clients.

But some of the backlash is combined with attempts to cover up ... that is to say, some of the people who are involved in the denial of the reality of levels of abuse, almost certainly have been perpetrators themselves. Consequently their attempts to deny the reality of abuse is another form of abuse. Very nasty debate, very nasty debate ... sometimes involving extremely clever people so it is difficult for the people in the public to sort out what is accurate versus what is nonsense versus what is another form of abuse cloaked in pseudo scientific terms.

Wayne Morris:

...In an already complex issue to begin with. What is your sense of how many women versus men have made allegations of being affected by ritual abuse, and how many of them have accounts of it happening when they were children versus adults?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

When I had about 55-60 people, I made a count, and it was just a handful of men who have spoken to me. I would be reluctant to give an exact figure, but a tiny proportion of people who have come forward to me are men. There might be some reasons for that. My general impression is that men in our culture are far less willing to go to therapy about abuse. Men seem to have a tradition of being required to swallow their emotions, bury them, hide them, and so on. I heard of one person who would not speak to me because he had a high profile job and he was afraid in doing so, his life would fall apart. And he would lose his job. I had one person speak to me about it one time, and months later I had occasion to call him back, and he said, "I said it once, and I am getting on with my life, you have got the account, don't call me again." And that was his way of coping. Most of the accounts I get are from women, but it is important to say, by no means all. It is important to say that, because in many of the accounts I get, little boys are involved as abuse victims. If these accounts are true, then where are they?

Wayne Morris:

Well I have also heard suggestions that a lot of the male victims of this abuse end up in jail, that they have behavioural problems because of the abuse, and many of them end up in prison.

Dr. Stephen Kent:

It wouldn't surprise me. Just as a general scenario that many child sexual abuse victims themselves -- it sets them off in very difficult lives. One of the vicious tragedies of child abuse is that it steals from children the ability to build their emotions on a solid and healthy and loving emotional background. Without that background, all other human development is very shaky ... all the stages of human development they go through is built on a house of cards, built on a foundation where love and tenderness get confused with other

kinds of emotions and deviant activities. So it wouldn't surprise me that a lot of people who are abuse victims, not to mention even ritual abuse victims, would wind up in prison, treatment centres. Many of the people with whom I have spoken have had difficult combatting substance abuse of various kinds, but it doesn't appear that the substance abuse caused the memories. It seems more plausible to me that the memories caused the substance abuse.

Wayne Morris:

Again, how many of the people you have worked with have reported abuse as a child, or as an adult?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

One of the issues that comes up is whether the adult, when they were children and allegedly being abused, reported it to anybody. And from time to time people say they did in various ways, but if these accounts were to, say a school nurse back in the fifties, the chances of that school nurse being around are very slight. The chances of that school nurse remembering that account are very slight. It is the kind of fact that is very difficult to find. I had one person who was trying to track down a family doctor because she is convinced that he knew about the alleged abuse she was going through. So getting hold of old records is very, very difficult ... that kind of hard documentation that has gone on. Interesting debates, or developments, that have gone on in the False Memory Syndrome Foundation about the issue of early confirmation ... what is so extraordinary about FMSF is that the debates swirl around a number of high powered academics. The founders were Ph.D.'s ... he was a math professor, she was a professor of educational related fields. The daughter is a Ph.D. psychology professor at University of Oregon. As these debates swirl, the brother of the father who co-founded FMSF, wrote a letter saying that he suspected the allegations of child abuse in the household were true. It is not definitive proof, but here you have one family member speaking out against another in support of the adults' alleged victim. Very, very complicated issues about the Foundation. Probably the most complicated story about verification comes in the context of the McMartin pre-school case. This is one that both sides use as verification of the accuracy of their accounts. As you know a number of children came forward with ritual abuse accounts in a nursery or day school run by the Buckey family. A mother and a son were indicted. I think it was the largest trial in California history ...

We have been listening to Dr. Stephen Kent, a Sociology Professor at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. He spoke about the phenomenon of similar ritual abuse allegations internationally, and the common thread of how they seem to be engaging in behaviour in defiance of parts of the bible. There are an increasing number of people making allegations that they have been ritually abused by family members and cults. We have also heard in other shows on this series on Mind Control how ritual abuse has been used by government mind control doctors as a way of further traumatizing child victims of trauma based mind control. Stay tuned next week as we continue this interview with Dr. Stephen Kent, and for people who are interested in transcripts of this radio series, they are available at www.mk.net/~mcf ... that's the mind control forum ... you can just look under the CKLN Radio series title. Also tapes and transcripts will soon be available at the offices of CKLN in Toronto for anybody interested in picking up any of the previous shows. This is show number 23, and we are going to be continuing this series.

Wayne Morris:

Good morning. This is show number 24 in a series on Mind Control, each Sunday morning from 9.30 to 10.30 on CKLN. Today we are going to be hearing Part 2 of an interview with Dr. Stephen Kent a professor of Sociology at University of Alberta in Edmonton. We talk about the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, ritual abuse and cults, and allegations against Freemasons involvement in group sexual abuse of children. Later in today's show we will hear coverage of a ritual abuse conference that Dr. Stephen Kent spoke at in Thunder Bay in 1994. But first, the second half of the Stephen Kent interview:

Dr. Stephen Kent:

... I think the largest trial in California history ... and they got off ... the son was re-tried and he got off. One of the factors that prevented conviction sounds like very sloppy interviewing techniques on the part of a key therapist. Nonetheless the kids had made allegations that there were tunnels under the school. Police dug and

didn't find tunnels. This is very damning evidence from a law enforcement perspective, and from a jury's. Now, the kids say there are tunnels. You look for them, you don't find them. Problems. In the midst of the second trial, the property had been sold and the school was about to be torn down, bulldozed. The parents hired a private archeologist to do a last-minute dig. Sure enough, he found tunnels. He found very tunnel-like structures that the children had been talking about. One tunnel led to a building next door to the daycare centre, which was awfully similar to what the children had in their accounts. He found a plastic bag with a copyright date on it from 1986, which indicated that these tunnels had been filled with dirt some time after 1986. He had evidence of tunnels, evidence that the tunnels had been filled in recently with dirt and various debris, but the evidence never came up in the trial itself. Once again, you have a very complicated case where therapists probably did a bad job of interviewing, police may have done a very bad job of investigating because it took a private individual to find the tunnels. The evidence never wound up in court.

Wayne Morris:

Since you brought it up, what is your opinion on the FMSF in terms of the work they are doing? What do you think the effects they have had on the field of dealing with this abuse?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

Some of the so-called "science" the FMSF has advocated is bogus. The bottom line is if they serve a positive function at all, it is to make therapists much more rigorous about the kinds of interview techniques that go on. But much of what the FMSF advocates goes certainly beyond "science" and enters into the realm of literal harassment. At times the kinds of unprofessional, and I was going to say undignified, but that's probably not a term the social sciences should use ... but certainly unprofessional interventions that the mother used against the daughter when she was up for promotion at the University of Oregon ... writing letters against her on FMSF letterhead ... is beyond the pale in anything that should go on in a scientific context. It is a family tragedy as well but it shows that the group is not nearly committed to objective science but is also committed a kind of ideological advocacy that often dismisses contrary facts. Moreover part of the danger of the FMSF is their cleverly coined term "false memory syndrome", which if you talk to people in the mental health community, is a misrepresentation of what a syndrome actually is. So it put into the legal context and cultural context a very catchy word that may actually misrepresent the delicacy with which science is trying to get at some of these memory issues. Moreover, I have a particular problem with at least one section that an FMSF person wrote, Richard Ofshe co-authored a book, "Making Monsters" and he is involved with the Advisory Board of the FMSF. Ofshe was involved with a satanic ritual abuse allegation case in Olympia, Washington. This is the famous Paul Ingram case -- Ingram was, I believe, the third highest ranking cop in the Olympia, Washington police force. His daughters and wife were coming forward with allegations about sexual assault and abuse, and some of those allegations shaded into satanic ones. He got arrested, and his arrest was quite disturbing to the Olympia police, his buddies arrested him. They brought in Richard Ofshe because they knew of his work with so-called cults, what they didn't realize was that Ofshe had worked with allegations of forced police confessions. From spending time with the cops, Ofshe got suspicious that they may have been leading Paul Ingram into their questions, so Ofshe met with Paul Ingram and created on the spur of the moment what the literature at the time called "a little experiment". That is to say he made up this story, gave it to Ingram, and then waited to see whether Ingram would create memories around the story. The trouble is the story he made up was close enough to what he had been saying, it could have been true, or at least elements could have been true. When Ofshe reaches the point of writing "Making Monsters", he describes the "little experiment" and it becomes an "experiment" ... that is to say he misrepresents a hunch or the spur of the moment, poorly designed, poorly implemented query that he initiates, and elevates it to the level of a scientific experiment. In fact when a judge was ruling upon one aspect of the case, the judge dismissed Ofshe's "little experiment" for being unprofessional in design. There is a lot about the book one could discuss, but in terms of sociological comments, that goes beyond bordering on misrepresentation about what happened.

Wayne Morris:

Do you know any other information about some of the other people on the FMSF Advisory Board?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

I do know a bit about Ralph Underwager. You have probably gotten the Ralph Underwager story from other people, but Underwager was a so-called expert in hundreds of child abuse cases, always on the side of the defence, that is to say Underwager is the person who would proclaim ideological difficulties in children's accounts, would proclaim children were too young to know the difference between right and wrong, between lying and telling the truth. He would try to punch holes the prosecution's charges in a number of ways -- and he was testifying in cases around the world.

A couple of things finally happened with Underwager. First, the notorious case in Australia regarding a child abuser, "Mr. Bubbles". The Australian equivalent to the US tv program, Sixty Minutes, did a devastating critique on Underwager's alleged credentials. Around the same time a New England group of social workers commissioned a study by a well-respected psychologist who worked on child abuse and assault and systematically researched the work that Underwager and his wife, Hollida Wakefield, had published and the Underwager-Wakefield scholarship was abysmally bad. It misrepresented facts, statistically it was bad, gave interpretations to minor points in major articles and sometimes misrepresented the points of major articles. Underwager essentially was not doing science. So Underwager as an expert got discredited in many places, although interestingly he still became an expert in the Martensville, Saskatchewan case. More damaging, perhaps, to Underwager's reputation was when he gave an interview in a Journal called "Paedika", it's a pedophile journal out of Amsterdam, Holland in which he said peculiar things about the supposed right of pedophiles to show their love to children any way they wanted. Because of that Paedika interview, Underwager was forced to resign from the FMSF Advisory Board. His wife, Hollida Wakefield, as far as I know, is still on the Foundation's Board.

One of the people on the Board whom I know a little bit about, is Dr. Margaret Singer. She had a long history of working with so-called contraversial religions, what some people call cults. She testified on behalf of Patty Hearst back in the mid 1970's. Much of Margaret's work has been in the context of supporting parents who had a significant strain with the counter culture movement, in which Margaret was intimately involved -- concerned with helping parents re-establish contact, or, if you will get back their adult children who had converted to contraversial religions. She had done some interviews with alleged satanic abuse people but was not convinced by them. Her involvement on this FMSF Board seems to be part of her continuation of support for parents, a continuation of her work with the so-called cults, and possibly with the Hearst family itself. She is a person on the Board who I suspect is very well intentioned, but she is also a supporter of the family. From evidence I have read about the dynamics of the Freyd family, when the kids were growing up, makes that family clearly dysfunctional. I would question Margaret Singer's judgement through her support of the Freyd parents on this particular instance, regardless of the kind of work she does previously fighting abuse in devious religious or therapeutic contexts.

Wayne Morris:

Are you familiar with Dr. Jennifer Freyd's (daughter of Pamela and Peter Freyd who founded the FMSF) recent book, "Betrayal Trauma"? She has a theory around that ... what do you think of it?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

I am aware of it, but can't really comment directly on it. I have a graduate student who just read it, and was really quite impressed by it. What's impressive about what Jennifer has done is that she has taken the personal experience of family tragedy and transformed it into research opportunities. Many of us are in academics because it gives us a vehicle to get at, and engage in the world. It gives us a somewhat systematic and rigorous way to engage in the world. In her case, she is working on very complicated personal issues, but through the rigour of science. As far as the content goes, you would have to rely on other people to get specifics about the content and its accuracy.

Wayne Morris:

We have been talking about cults and other organizations that are allegedly involved in ritual abuse. Can you name any of these groups?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

I am not sure of the groups you have been talking about ... let me say very generally that many of the controversial groups that I hear about are involved in patterned, systematic abuse of their members, often children. People always ask for names and naming groups is always very difficult because of potential lawsuits and whatnot. I can talk about some of the published research that I have done and I most comfortable with this because it is in the public realm already. I had done a study of the leader, founder of The Children of God, now called The Family, David Berg, because the group's doctrines had been highly sexualized. It is impossible to understand this group without appreciating the sexual content of their doctrines ... which essentially come directly from its leader. I had written this account, it had been accepted in the Journal of Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, was supposed to be published by JAI Press out of Greenwich, Connecticut. The Children of God - The Family - found out about the publication before it came out. They contacted a lawyer in California. The lawyer in California wrote a letter to the publisher, an academic who had not even read the piece, and a group representative himself wrote a letter to the publisher, all insisting that my article not be published, and none of them had even read it. The publisher, Herbert Johnston, did not have liability insurance for his company, and so for fear of a possible lawsuit, he withdrew the article. I had the page proofs in my hands at that time, that's how close the piece was to coming out. What I had argued in the piece was that David Berg himself had gone through some unfortunate sexual experiences himself as a child, that took place in a very restrictive, abusive Christian environment ... a Christian environment that was by no means healthy. It also involved the use of corporal punishment and so on. David Berg had a great deal of sexual confusion, this exploded into the theology he developed when he gained control of the group in the late sixties - The Children of God. So, in essence, Berg translated his sexual confusion into group theology. People could pretty much guess what I was going to argue from the title of the article and so the group has essentially carried out academic censorship. Now the article ended up published, but the place where it got published was a far less prestigious journal.

What we often find in cases of controversial religions that abuse, is that these groups do not have independent monitoring agencies or bodies, that is to say the place where abuse is most likely to happen are in independent religious organizations whose leadership controls any kind of oversight agencies who might look at any kind of board of directors. Having said that however, we know that clearly there has been a long history of child abuse in churches that have this hierarchical management - the cases of abuse in residential schools by Anglicans, the United Church, and of course, the Catholic Church. What happens in these instances, for example the Catholic Church, is that the organization becomes committed to preserving its own public image and preserving its own financial status. Moreover in the Catholic Church, we've got pressures inside the organization to maintain numbers of priests. There is a problem in North America in getting young men into the priesthood, so to open up the practices of priests to examination by external agencies threatens the sheer numbers, not to mention image, financial matters, and so on. The Catholic Church in many ways has participated in cover ups of early allegations of abuse and the church very clearly now says these policies have changed but every now and then you hear about very aggressive tactics that lawyers representing the church take for its clients. By no means have you heard the last about abuse within mainstream religious organizations. I have concerns about abuse that may be going on in overseas communities where the public ability to gather information and discuss it is not so nearly well developed. In North America we have a press that, despite a number of rather unfortunate constraints on it, from time to time gets out very good stories. For example the kind of work you are doing now, where people talk about very controversial issues in a public forum - a lot of countries overseas don't have these kinds of structures.

I know in a number of controversial groups that I study - groups that have headquarters in overseas countries or ethnically based in overseas countries - many times children from North America end up being sent to a school overseas. When they get sent to these schools overseas, they are separated from their parents, and they are working in environments that have few, if any, external controls. So the possibility of these kids getting abused in these schools is much, much higher than it would be if kids operated in a public school system.

Wayne Morris:

Now I know you have spoken about the involvement of the Masonic Lodge or some members of the Masonic Lodge and allegations towards them of being perpetrators of ritual abuse. Can you talk about how you first received this information?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

Early on in my research when people were coming forward with accounts, some accounts appeared about deviant Freemasons - some of the people making allegations were indicating that their fathers had been Freemasons and that somehow their alleged abuse they thought was connected with the Lodge or Freemasons. Occasionally, abuse accounts, and I can't say definitively, but if they were true, seem to have occurred inside Masonic Lodges and so on. I was really quite perplexed by the appearance of Freemasonry in a fairly significant number of accounts. I was not getting any allegations about other kinds of philanthropic or civic groups. I was not getting accounts about Kiwanis or Lions Club or Knights of Columbus or Rotarians or whatnot, it was only allegations about deviances involving Freemasons sometimes in Masonic Lodges. My sense all along is that even if some of these allegations are true, ordinary Masons would be appalled about the allegations I was hearing but nonetheless, I was faced with the dilemma of trying to make sense out of what I was hearing. I undertook an investigation about Freemasonry, and I had already published an encyclopedia about Freemasonry several years earlier, in the 2nd edition of the Canadian Encyclopedia so I had some background. What I found is that related to Freemasonry are countless splinter groups involving just men, sometimes women get involved, in traditions involving high ceremonialism, elaborate ritualism and so on. For example if one goes back several generations, one can even find Masonic connections to a group like the Solar Temple. These are people who, I often call them "ritual junkies". They love the pomp and ceremonialism that they see in Freemasonry, but they want to go further with it. Freemasonry does not have a developed sense of a demonic figure in it. There aren't these kinds of rigid satanic vs. god images that appear in Christianity. What I did find however were some mentions of Lucifer, but more importantly the sense in some of the upper level rituals, that God was a threefold character. Jahbulon, Jahweh - 'bul' referring to Jahweh - The Ba'al reference is a reference to pagan gods in the bible, old testament gods who required child sacrifice. Ordinary Masons would talk about the god, Jahbulon, and not really think too much about what they were saying. But it is plausible to me that Masonic deviants, these people I call "ritual junkies", might see in this figure you combine both good and evil, you combine a higher god with a god who requires child sacrifice. It is part of my attempt to come up with a plausibility structure as to why deviant Freemasons may be involved in these kinds of allegations, I found a point of entry, you might say, that would allow deviant practitioners to develop rituals in the context of what they thought could be worship to a higher god.

Wayne Morris:

The people making allegations against certain of these deviant Freemasons - do you have a sense of what positions they held within the Masonic organization, whether they were lower or higher ranking Masons?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

I don't know for sure. I know that some of the people who have made allegations (that haven't been proved) have named fairly high ranking Masons. I also know that some ordinary members hear these allegations and they are in disbelief -- to these Masons, these allegations are part of a long history of persecution towards them because of the secrecy and so on. It is certainly not my intent - I have no axe to grind with Freemasons. It is a peculiar group in the context of issues about women's rights and equality and so on - and so there are ways to discuss Freemasonry in the context of male exclusiveness and so on, but I have no axe to grind with the Freemasons at all. Once I got I challenged on the Masonic issue, I started finding out there are people right around North America who have also made allegations that they have been ritually abused by Freemasons. There are a number of organizations based in the States that specifically insist that deviant Freemasons had abused them. Even in Canada, there is one organization whose leader is absolutely convinced that she is a survivor of deviant Masonic abuse. So when I was able to see that the accounts I was getting were part of a larger North American context, I became even more intrigued with the kinds of specific allegations I had been receiving.

Wayne Morris:

As you said, the Masonic Lodge has had a long history of being persecuted. Is there any indication that the allegations being made against them may be part of some kind of propaganda campaign against the Masonic Lodge?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

I am very wary of so-called information that comes out of a conservative Christian context. A number of conservative Christians see Freemasonry as being involved in forms of the occult and devil worship, so

organizations that are related to these conservative groups and the information they put out is highly suspect, so I do my best to stay away from that kind of information. I don't get the sense though from most of my informants that they have these kinds of axes to grind about Freemasonry. They don't seem to be involved in these conservative Christian contexts. Most of them have no interpretative context in which to place their own memories about the Freemasons. For them they feel extremely isolated with these kinds of accounts. They have no sense of other people in North America making these kinds of allegations. I cannot place most of the accounts that I have received in a context of some sort of vengeance against the Masons.

Wayne Morris:

Do you feel that the people you have come in contact with making allegations have any kind of knowledge of what Freemasonry is about?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

I certainly don't get that sense from people. Again, these are people for the most part women, and as you know women are excluded from Masonic ritual and practice, so it wouldn't be impossible for them to gain internal knowledge about Masonic rituals, but it takes a lot of effort. You have to go out and actively seek the information. I just don't get any sense that these people have a vendetta, or at least most of the people, against Freemasonry.

Wayne Morris:

Within the accounts coming from the survivors, do you get the sense that what they are telling you in terms of the rituals, are specifically Masonic, are there specific Masonic elements to the rituals themselves?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

Some of the contents of the rituals seem to take place in Masonic Lodges. Many people talk about alters, many people talk about black and white floors, some people talk about pillars in the ceremonial area, and so on. I have had some people who have had these memories, and try to get a context for them, because their fathers are Masons. They will actually try to get into Masonic Lodges so they can look at them and see if the Lodges have any semblance or similarity to what they are recalling. Ordinary Masons would be appalled at these kinds of things. I have no absolutely no indication that any ordinary Masonic ritual is involved ... anything even close to child abuse. It's the deviants within Freemasonry, and possibly some of these splinter groups that hold the most concern for me. It is entirely plausible for me to imagine that deviant Freemasons would pull some material from some of the extremist writings of Aleister Crowley or take some of his statements about children and sex literally, or take some of his statements about child sacrifice or human sacrifice and take them literally and build rituals around them. The Crowley-ites insisted that he was talking metaphorically, but if it is written down, any tradition is going to have fundamentalists and literalists. People who read it, think it is true, then act upon it.

Wayne Morris:

Are you aware of what the response has been from the Masonic Lodge to the allegations concerning ritual abuse, and has there been any attempt at any kind of internal investigation?

Dr. Stephen Kent:

I am not aware of any kind of internal investigation. I met with some Masons in Thunder Bay and my impression was that what I was talking about was so far from their experience inside Freemasonry, that they couldn't even grasp what I was saying. It would be unfortunate to make judgements based on a meeting of just a couple of hours, but I had no indication that these particular people were involved in any way with what I was hearing. In fact, during the meeting they invited me to explore Freemasonry and I declined the invitation. I think most Freemasons say these allegations are nonsense. I had one practicing Mason contact me, because he was concerned. I had another practicing Mason contact me because he saw me as part of this anti-Masonic movement and thought what I was saying was dangerous and inaccurate. I have had some responses from Freemasons but not a lot. I have some friends, not close friends, who are Masons and this

stuff seems to be wholly outside their experience but I have gotten repeated accounts, and they are similar to those from right across North America.

Wayne Morris:

I would like to thank you very much. It has been extremely fascinating talking to you, and thanks for joining us in this radio series.

Dr. Stephen Kent:

It is my pleasure to speak about a very controversial and contentious issue.

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