

PSY 1001 memory discussion activity

As you read this case for your upcoming discussion section, please be thinking about the following questions:

- Which elements played a role in creating Paul's "memories"?
- What evidence of his potential innocence was ignored?
- Why do you think Paul confessed to these crimes?
- Why would people ignore some of the evidence?

Content adapted from the following article: *Imagining Satan: How invented memories and a modern-day witch hunt landed one Spokane man in prison (The Local Planet; May 8, 2003; By Tom Grant)*

Paul Ingram grew up in Spokane, oldest of seven kids in a devout Catholic family. He attended Spokane Community College, where he met his wife, Sandy. They had six children and after 17 years in police work, Paul became one of the top three law-enforcement officers in the Thurston County Sheriff's Department, Chief Civil Deputy. He was chairman of the Thurston County Republican Party. He and his wife were active members of The Church of Living Waters, a fundamentalist Protestant congregation.

But in the summer of 1988, a religious divination occurred that would destroy the Ingram family. Ericka Ingram, then 21 and still living with her parents, attended a church retreat. One of the speakers was Karla Franko, a former actress and stand-up comic turned charismatic Christian who believed she had been given the gifts of prophecy and spiritual discernment.

On the last day of the retreat, Ericka seemed down and Franko said that she prayed over the girl. 'You have been abused as a child, sexually abused,' Franko announced. Ericka sat quietly weeping, unable to respond. Franko received another divine prompting, which told her, 'It's by her father, and it's been happening for years.'

Ericka wept, but did not say a word. However, she and her younger sister, Julie, 18, moved out of the Ingram home shortly after returning from church camp. Six weeks later, Ericka told her mother she had been repeatedly molested by her father. The abuse had stopped 13 years earlier in 1975, Ericka said. She linked the abuse to poker parties at the family's old house attended by a number of Paul's friends in the Sheriff's Department.

Sandy immediately confronted her husband and Paul denied it. But Julie backed up her sister, saying Paul had molested her five years earlier. Sandy called Associate Pastor John Bratun, who had already heard about the allegations from counselors at the retreat. "Bratun told Sandy that the charges were probably true, because children didn't make up those kinds of things."

However, Ericka and Julie had a history of making unsubstantiated allegations, both of which arose out of church camp discussions. Ericka had accused a man of attempted rape in 1983, but police found that it was merely a married man who had given Ericka a ride and put his hand on her knee. Then in 1985, Julia claimed to have been sexually abused by a neighbor. The county prosecutor dropped charges because of inconsistencies in Julie's stories.

A week later, Paul was arrested when he went in to work. Sheriff's detectives had interviewed Ericka and Julia. Given that the complaint targeted one of the department's highest-ranking officers and was linked through the poker parties to many others in the department, it seems extraordinary that Thurston County deputies decided to investigate their own. And it also seems extraordinary that investigators saw nothing unusual in the constantly changing details of the girls' stories.

On the very first day of interviewing, the time of the assaults changed. Julie had told her mother that Paul's last assault on her was five years earlier, but after being informed about statutes of limitations, she told police the last assault was only three years in the past. Ericka had previously told her mother that the abuse ended in 1975, but now she told investigators that she caught a sexually transmitted disease from her father just one year ago in 1987 and that a doctor in California had treated her. No such medical evidence would ever emerge, but investigators were convinced they had a case.

The most powerful things that Thurston County Sheriff Gary Edwards would use to support his case against Ingram when the matter came before the Pardons Board in 1996 was Ingram's initial "confession."

But here's what the Sheriff's Department's own report shows that Paul Ingram, who had just spent a week praying about the matter, actually said to Sheriff Edwards: "I know if this did happen we need to take care of it. There may be a dark side of me that I don't know about." Paul also told the Sheriff: "I can't see myself doing this." At that point the Sheriff asked him if his children were lying. "I taught the kids not to lie," Paul said.

This would prove to be one of the crucial internal conflicts for Paul. Paul did not believe his daughters were liars. But if they were telling the truth, then something devilish must have been hidden inside him. Following the initial interview with Sheriff Edwards, Paul Ingram entered a realm in which the pressure to confess was intense. He was placed in an isolated cell where the lights were on nearly all the time because he was under a suicide watch. His interrogators were his friends and coworkers, people he'd known and trusted for years. Yet for the next six months, he would have almost no contact with anyone who was critical of the charges, including his own attorney.

Police interviewed Paul nearly two dozen times over six months. They came up with an idea called "experimental confession," telling Paul that if he confessed, he would begin to remember what really happened. Pastor John Bratun told Paul that he was possessed by evil spirits and did a sort of exorcism in the jail. Bratun also told Paul to pray and try to visualize what really happened, for God would not allow any thoughts other than those that were true to enter his memory.

The confessions began to flow. A pattern emerged in the very first interrogation, which lasted several hours. Paul would be told about the crimes of which he was accused. He would say he couldn't remember. Then he would pray. Detectives describe Paul going into a "trance-like thing" where he visualized what happened. And then he would begin to describe it, usually in third person.

"I would've removed her underpants or bottoms to the nightgown," he said after praying in that first interrogation.

"Now, do you mean 'would've' or did you?" the detective asked.

"I did," Paul said.

But Paul's visualizations never matched the accusations of his daughters. Police would return to interview the girls and new revelations would spill out of them. And throughout the interviews, Pastor Braton - who was also Thurston County Sheriff's Department chaplain - was contaminating the investigation with what he called a "crossover technique" in which he counseled the girls, then brought their accusations back to Paul, which led to new visualizations of horror. Still, the details failed to match.

Paul began visualizing people in robes kneeling around a fire. He confessed to cutting the bleeding heart out of a live cat. He even confessed to killing a prostitute in Seattle in 1983, implicating himself in the Green River killings. The Green River Task Force looked into it, but found nothing in Paul's statement that matched the facts.

Soon Ericka was also telling of people in robes around a fire. In her story, a large group led by a priestess gathered in the barn behind the Ingram house and sacrificed babies. Some of the detectives were actually beginning to get suspicious of Ericka's stories because they changed with every telling. But the case was about to become one of the most notorious cases of satanic ritual abuse ever investigated by police.

As Ericka would tell a national television audience several years later, when she appeared on the Sally Jesse Raphael Show, she claimed her father belonged to a group of Satanists. Others in the group included judges, doctors and lawyers in the community. At one point in the show, she would claim that virtually all the investigators were in on it. The cult would gather in barns or empty churches and hold its rituals. They killed at least 25 babies, she said, including one they aborted from her.

As part of the investigation in 1988-89, Ericka and her sister helped the police draw maps of where the bodies were buried. Investigators brought in a forensic archaeologist, Dr. Mark Papworth. He excavated the Ingram's back yard where the evidence had supposedly been concealed.

As an archaeologist, Papworth was trained to look for evidence of pits or holes that had been dug in the past. According to a 1996 interview with Papworth, any time someone digs a hole, evidence is created in the soil so that the boundaries of those pits or holes can be identified for thousands of years. "The fields around the Ingram houses had no pits. There were no holes. No one had ever dug a hole there," he said.

And he found nothing of interest. "I found one bone. I believe I identified it as an elk toe bone. And it was in not a pit form. It was in a slot, a long narrow troughlike depression in the sub-sod that looked very much like a dog had dug it out, put it in there and then scooped the dirt back in there," he said.

Papworth tried to explain to Undersheriff McClanahan that there was no evidence. "On this one occasion I said, 'Neil, there's no evidence. None at all. Zero.' And he said to me. 'If you were the devil would you leave any evidence?' and, I, my hair stood on end and I realized at that point there was no talking to him beyond that and I excused myself."

In fact, nothing that Paul Ingram or his daughters said could be corroborated with any physical evidence. The girls said they'd been cut, tortured, even nailed to the floor. A doctor found no

scars, except for an appendectomy scar on Ericka. No abortions could be documented. No bones could be found. No venereal diseases were treated. Ericka even told one doctor who examined her during the investigation that she was a virgin.

Investigators spent three-quarters of a million dollars investigating the Ingram case. They flew night helicopter patrols, hoping to spot the fires of a satanic cult meeting in progress. All they found were a few fraternity keggers.

But the strongest evidence that the entire Ingram saga was nothing more than a fantasy was delivered by one of the people called in to assist with the investigation, Dr. Richard Ofshe. Police had a theory that Ingram couldn't remember raping his children repeatedly over 17 years because he repressed the memories as soon as the abuse occurred. Similarly, they thought that after Ingram took part in satanic rituals his memory and that of others would somehow be blacked out. Ofshe devised an experiment to test the validity of Paul's visions. He asked Paul if he recalled an event that Ofshe knew had not occurred, an event in which Paul supposedly made his children have sex with each other while he watched. The children in the Ingram family specifically denied that any such event had taken place. And Paul's initial reaction was that he did not recall such an event.

Ofshe assured Paul that his children remembered the event. He provided some details of the event, such as where it happened. Then he asked Paul to go back to his cell and pray on it.

When Paul emerged from his cell the next day, he handed Ofshe a three-page written confession detailing the imagined event. The confession looks like a screenplay, complete with dialogue. Ofshe tried to get Paul to admit that the confession was false, but he maintained that it was real.

So he did. Paul Ingram pleaded guilty to six counts of third degree rape. Ofshe called to ask him to withdraw his guilty plea before sentencing. But Ingram insisted on the plea, saying that he didn't want his daughters to be forced to testify. He told Ofshe that a trial might "emotionally damage them for the rest of their lives." Paul would eventually be sentenced to 20 years.

Thurston County Sheriff's Department quickly washed its hands of the case. Two days after Paul pleaded guilty, charges were dropped against the other two men arrested in connection with the cult. That prevented the facts of the case from ever being weighed by a jury.

