

Interview with Howard Mitchell by Bill McMinn on September 29, 1994

HOWARD: To put it all in a nutshell, she called me, I think, around 9 or something like that, him and her called me, wanted me to come get them, come over and have a New Years Eve drink --

BILL: Okay, now, you're talking about Hank and --

HOWARD: I'm talking about Hank and Twila --

BILL: And Twila. And this was about 9:30? Something like that?

HOWARD: Yeah, I don't remember the exact time. I knew in my mind -- I remember it being kind of late to be calling me after all -- after that long, you know. I said, okay, I'll be over there and pick you up, you know. And I farked around for, oh, maybe 30, 45 minutes. Then when I went over there, Twila was there and she ain't drunk or anything, you know. And he was passed out on the couch.

BILL: Hank was passed out?

HOWARD: Yeah. And I tried to wake him up, you know. I jerked on his arm and everything and tried to get him to -- get a response out of him, you know. And there wasn't no response at all, so I guess Twila felt like, you know, cause they did want me to come get them, you know, so I brought Twila over here by herself, you know.

BILL: Did she bring any vodka with her or anything?

HOWARD: Yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah. She brought a bottle of vodka.

BILL: Okay. What happened to that bottle of vodka?

HOWARD: Oh, there was two or three people drinking out of it. I don't drink vodka at all.

BILL: Was it left here or did she take it --

HOWARD: No, she took the bottle home. She took the bottle with her.

BILL: Okay. Did you take her back home?

HOWARD: Yeah. Uh-huh. I pulled in her driveway and I kissed her and said, Happy New Year, you know. I mean, you know, not a -- a friendly kiss, you know. We been friends for a long time, you know. And then I come back home, you know. That's all there was to it. She did act kind of apprehensive while she was over at my house, you know.

BILL: Did she say anything about them fighting or anything or --

HOWARD: No.

BILL: And when they called you, did they both seem like they was in pretty good spirits?

HOWARD: I thought they was, yeah. I didn't see --

BILL: Did you talk to Hank on the phone that night?

HOWARD: Yeah.

BILL: Did he appear to be pretty drunk to you or --

HOWARD: No. Of course, I mean, you know -- when you try to look back and you try to remember everything that happened, so and so, you know, it's kind of hard to do, but I don't remember him sounding all that drunk or anything else. But he was definitely on something because when I went over there, I mean, I jerked on his arm and everything else, said come on, get up, you know --

BILL: Did you ever see him use any drugs of any kind?

HOWARD: Xanaxes. And then he had some kind of pain pills, but I don't know what they are. Twila had Xanaxes herself. But I don't know what kind of pills his pain pills were.

BILL: All right. So she seemed a little apprehensive when you let her out?

HOWARD: Yeah.

BILL: Did she act like she really didn't want to go back in there or --

HOWARD: Well, when she was over at my house, she acted that way. And when I took her home, I don't know, she just got out of the car and went back in the house, you know.

BILL: -- she was wanting to go back home, or was she --

HOWARD: She just acted like she didn't feel comfortable.

BILL: Okay. Who else was over here that night?

HOWARD: Oh, God. Jimmy Hayes and Narinda, who we call Uncle Robert, Robert Duvall, or something like that --

BILL: Okay. Where does Jimmy Hayes and his -- and Narinda live?

HOWARD: They live in Amarillo now.

BILL: Okay. Where did they live at the time?

HOWARD: They had an apartment here in Pampa somewhere.

BILL: This other fellow you mentioned -- If you name the people off, if you would, tell me if they

still live in Pampa or where they live now, if you don't mind.

HOWARD: All right. Amarillo -- Jimmy and Narinda live in Amarillo --

BILL: Do you know who he works for?

HOWARD: Yeah.

BILL: Where would I find him if I wanted him?

HOWARD: He went to work for -- what's that electric company out there, the guy's got his own business -- it's on, like you're going to the old folks home, it's on Kentucky Street there on the right.

BILL: Baker? Not Baker -- Larry Beck.

HOWARD: Larry Beck. That's where he worked at the time.

BILL: Okay. All right. Now, you don't know where he works in Amarillo?

HOWARD: He works for an electrical company over there.

BILL: Okay. All right. Now, who was this other fellow you was talking about?

HOWARD: Well, we call him Uncle Robert. His name is Robert Duvall. I think something like that. And he lives on Yeager Street, I believe it is. And Doug, he lives right down here on the same street I live on, Scott Street. There's a little brown trailer house right there --

BILL: Okay. What's his name?

HOWARD: And that's Twila -- Doug? His name's Ward.

BILL: Oh. That's Twila's brother.

HOWARD: Twila's brother and that's -- Bob's his uncle.

BILL: Okay. All right. So it would be Robert Darnell.

HOWARD: Something like that.

BILL: And he was over here that night?

HOWARD: Yes.

BILL: What time did he leave?

HOWARD: Well, according to my daughter, she said right after I took Twila home, but I don't really

know cause, like I say, I wasn't paying that much attention, you know. He's -- he's real quick tempered and stuff, you know, so I really didn't hang around with him or nothing. You know, I'd be nice to him, he's nice to me and all that --

BILL: How old a fellow is he?

HOWARD: 62 or something like that? Something like that.

BILL: But he does have a pretty quick temper?

HOWARD: Oh, yeah.

BILL: Did he and Twila have any problems that night?

HOWARD: Not that I noticed.

BILL: He got along with her well?

HOWARD: As far as I know, yeah, but like I said, you know, I wasn't paying that much attention. But I wasn't really drunk. I really wasn't drunk, you know. Sometimes, you know, I was just basically doing it more for them than I was for me. You know, the party deal, cause I didn't -- I went to sleep probably, I don't know, 11 o'clock or something like that. Whenever I took her home, I come back and talked a little bit in there and laid down on the couch and went to sleep, you know.

BILL: About what time do you think you come back home? Was it after midnight? Or was it before

HOWARD: No, it was before midnight.

BILL: Do you have any idea about what time it was?

HOWARD: 11:30 maybe. Something like that. I remember it was almost time. I didn't feel like staying up and listening to bullshit, you know.

BILL: Okay. Did Mr. Darnell say anything about going back by Twila's or anything or did he just leave?

HOWARD: Huh-uh. He just left. He left when I was gone, if I remember right.

BILL: Okay. Who else was here?

HOWARD: Well, like I say, Doug was here and --

BILL: Was Darnell with Doug or was he --

HOWARD: By hisself.

BILL: Darnell was by hisself?

HOWARD: By hisself, yeah.

BILL: What time did he get here?

HOWARD: Oh, I'd say, maybe a hour before -- I'm guessing. I'm really just guessing at it.

BILL: Well, that's alright.

HOWARD: Maybe an hour before I went and got Twila, something like that. And he drinks vodka. He is a vodka drinker. He can take a bottle of vodka and turn it up and drink it like iced tea. You know, I mean, gulp gulp, he can drink it.

BILL: Was he in pretty bad shape or not?

HOWARD: Not really. He handles hisself -- like, if I drink as much vodka as he did, I'd be keeling over, you know. But he handles it, you know.

BILL: Okay. What else can you tell me?

HOWARD: There was some more people over here, but I don't remember who the hell it was. I don't know. I really don't know. The main thing about Twila, though, is she was apprehensive, it seemed like something was wrong, you know. But whether it was with Hank or somebody -- I don't see how there'd be anything wrong with Hank because Hank wasn't even -- Hank was passed out, you know. She came over here and two or three people took a drink out of the bottle. I didn't cause I don't drink vodka, you know. And then I took her home. It was that simple. I didn't know anything like this was -- I didn't even believe it when I was heard about it, you know, but it was true, you know. And the next day I heard stories about Hank was hiding in the attic and the kid walked down and told that oldest boy, he walked down and told this woman about Hank had stabbed him and all this shit and all that shit, then I find out ain't none of that true, you know, so -- whatever.

BILL: So that was more or less hearsay?

HOWARD: Yeah, but I -- in my mind, you know, I drink, you know, and been around people who do drink, and anybody that I know of cannot be that screwed up and turn around and jump up an hour later and start killing people, you know. I just don't -- I don't see how that's possible. Especially if he was taking Xanaxes -- or whatever kind of other pills he got. I don't believe he did it myself, you know. I just don't think he did. If he did it, I hope to hell they hang him, but -- I hope to hell they hang whoever did do it, but I don't think it was him. And I don't like Hank that much. He was a real egotistical type, tough guy that ain't really tough, you know.

BILL: Did he ever attempt to make any moves on you?

HOWARD: Yeah. About two or three times.

BILL: What did he try?

HOWARD: Well, like, we was going to fight and stuff. Then he'd back down. He'd back down every time.

BILL: Did he ever pull a knife on you or anything?

HOWARD: Huh-uh. No. Never did pull nothing on me.

BILL: Did he ever threaten you in any way other than --

HOWARD: No. He was just a blow hard, is what I figure. I just don't believe Hank did it, you know. Everybody else in town I -- any of his people says, if I say anything about I don't think Hank did it, boy, they get madder than hell at me, you know. But I just don't believe the guy did it. I just don't believe it. Cause I know enough about drinking and stuff and when a guy's out like he was out, he's not going to jump up no 30 minutes or hour or two hours later and have the ambit -- have the, you know, the fire to go around killing people. Why would he kill her anyway, you know? I think somebody went in there and killed everybody and left him alive so he gets the fucking blame for it, is what I'm thinking.

BILL: Who do you think might have done that?

HOWARD: I don't want to say that, cause --

BILL: Well, we need to know, you know. If you got --

HOWARD: Yeah. I got an idea. The thing is, I don't want the guy to come and try to kill me, you know. You know what I'm talking about --

BILL: I don't think that will happen, but I'd like to know some names. If you --

HOWARD: I think Robert is the one that done it, you know.

BILL: What makes you think that?

HOWARD: I -- he was -- the way I heard it, he been in the penitentiary, like, 30 years, you know, for murder, you know, and he always carries a gun and he --

BILL: Have you ever seen a gun on him?

HOWARD: I seen his gun, yeah, in his truck, pickup, yeah. But I don't know one gun from another as far as guns -- I'm not a gun freak, you know. But he's quick tempered. He had one -- this girl named California Kim. Do you know her?

BILL: I've heard of her.

HOWARD: Yeah, well, she -- him and her got in some kind of drug deal where she was supposed

to buy some drugs, took him \$350.00, I think it was -- took him -- he never did get none. He wind up in an empty handed deal and he was over at my house one time and he grabbed her by the throat, slammed her up against the wall and said, I'll kill you, you son of a bitch, and she was pregnant, you know. And we stopped him, you know, talking ? and stuff. And then Doug and this Uncle Robert and Sherry, I don't know her last name, but they was out at the lake and he has, Robert got a camper. Well, Doug, he gets drunk and passes out. Sherry, she was passed out too. But anyway, she wakes up and he's trying to -- he's got her pants off and trying to get her panties off and she got to kicking and screaming and she woke Doug up, you know. And so Doug talked him out of that bullshit, you know. And then later on, why he come to town and he stuck a knife in Doug's stomach, like that, and said, I'll kill you, you son of a bitch, and then he got it up to his throat and said, I'll cut your fucking head off. Now that's strictly confidential, because Doug told me don't ever tell nobody, but to me, I'm talking about a man's life, you know. I'm talking about Hank's life. I don't like Hank, you know what I mean? I don't really dislike him, but I'm not -- we're not compadres or none of that shit, you know. But I just don't, my conscience won't let me keep my mouth shut, you know. I don't want to see nobody killed that didn't do it, you know.

BILL: Okay. Well, that's the kind of information that we didn't have, you know.

HOWARD: I told a detective that, I sure did. I told Harold Comer that. And that's the truth, too, I'll take a lie detector test or anything else on it, you know.

BILL: I'll take you at your word.

HOWARD: I don't like being involved in none of that shit, you know what I mean?

BILL: Well, it happens, you know, and --

HOWARD: I got stuck on it.

BILL: And you get in it whether you like it or not.

HOWARD: Yeah. Yeah.

BILL: Howard, I may have to visit with you a little more, if you don't mind, a little later on.

HOWARD: All I'm doing really basically is I think the man they got is innocent and the other guy is guilty. I really believe that. If I say anything around them about I don't think Hank did it, boy, they probably ?. Like I'm the enemy or something. I'm just saying, hey, if he didn't do it, damn it, you know. But they don't want to see nothing. They don't want to see nothing specially since they're in their family. They don't want to see him as guilty.

BILL: Where does he live, this Robert Darnell?

HOWARD: On Yeager, I think. Doug down there knows where he lives.

BILL: Okay.

HOWARD: Just don't tell him you been down here talking to me cause --

BILL: I won't tell him that.

HOWARD: I believe this much. If he finds out I said anything like I said, he's going to come over here and try to kill me and I ain't got a goddamn gun or nothing else. I had a neck operation and all that stuff, you know. I can't defend myself against him, you know. That's why I'm scared to say anything, you know.

BILL: I'm going to have to talk to him, but I sure won't tell him where my information come from, but I'm going to have to talk to him. I sure am.

HOWARD: I ain't been involved in any of this shit. I don't like this at all, but at the same time I can't just keep my mouth shut and see somebody that didn't do it, you know.

BILL: Yeah.

HOWARD: And I could be wrong, you know. I could be wrong, but I don't think so. I'm 52, you know what I mean, I know a little bit.

BILL: Yeah. Okay. Can you think of anything else?

HOWARD: No, but I'll think before you get back next time.

BILL: Okay. I'll probably be back one day next week. I'll drop back by and visit with you a little bit and see if you can think of anything more that --

HOWARD: The 4th I have to go to Amarillo for a doctor on my neck, but other than that I'll be pretty -- you got my phone number and everything, don't you?

BILL: I don't think so.

HOWARD: It's 669-2228. I'm one number away from --

BILL: From all 2s.

HOWARD: No, from crime busters.

BILL: All right. Thank you, Howard.

HOWARD: I'll tell you what. I just hope you get the guy that's guilty.

BILL: Okay. All right. We thank you.

HOWARD: Thank you, too. Hang in there.

BILL: This was an interview with Howard Mitchell, 904 East Scott Street, Pampa, Texas. It's 3:10 P.M. on September 29, 1994.