

Prosecution Rests in Dasen Trial

by Hal Herring

The prosecution in the trial of Dick Dasen rested on Thursday, May 13th, after learning that their last witness was still recovering from complications following childbirth, and would have to make an extraordinary effort to appear in court. Prosecutors Lori Adams and Dan Guzynski also dropped the charge of promotion of prostitution related to that witness, and cleared the way for defense attorney George Best to begin his battle to prove that Dasen was tricked into his encounters with underage sex partners, that a tremendous number of predatory women took advantage of an aging and wealthy man renowned for his generosity, and that the sex acts were independent of the money that those women received.

The prosecution rested at the end of a week of testimony that defined just how strange and difficult this case really is, and what a strange burden of decision will be born by the men and women of the jury. The week was a tug of war of emotion and perception. For the Kalispell Police detectives who sifted through the concrete evidence of over 2500 checks, totalling over \$5 million, there seems to be no doubt that crimes have been committed, and that they have done their job—in this case a long, arduous one—in bringing a malefactor to hand. Detectives Jim Brendan, Roger Nassett, and Kevin McCarvel, a former undercover agent with the Northwest Drug Task Force all testified for the second time concerning their investigation of the Dasen case.

Nassett said that he and his officers found about \$3 million in checks written to women over the course of five years. When George Best asked, “And you found a lot of checks written to men, also, didn’t you??” he was trying to establish that his client was simply in the business of helping people, but the question backfired. Nassett answered, with a tolerant smile, “\$37,000.? Changing subjects, and trying to cast the shadow of doubt over all the witnesses’ stories, Best then asked, “In fairness, would you say that drug addicted people are more likely to lie??” Nassett answered, “I wouldn’t say that they are more likely to lie than somebody who has stolen something. It all depends on the person. Just because they are on drugs doesn’t mean their morals go away.?”

Among the four women who testified this week about their sexual arrangements with Dasen was Amanda Veyna. Veyna offered what was arguably the most damning testimony yet heard about the relationship of the money that Dasen paid to to the sexual acts that he participated in. Under cross examination by Prosecutor Dan Guzynski, Veyna related, “He asked me if I understood what the arrangement was. I told him that I understood that he would perform oral sex on me and pay me a thousand dollars.?”

Guzynski: “What was his response??”
Veyna: “He said that was correct.?”

Veyna, 29 years old, is different from

the other witnesses in the case so far, and very different from the women who have testified this week, two of whom were involved, through their boyfriends, in the manufacture of methamphetamine. Veyna had a short run-in with methamphetamine, but it was far in the past, and she has worked since to educate local youth about the perils of the drug, and worked in HIV outreach and education programs around the Flathead Valley. She is soft-spoken and highly articulate, and was taking classes at Flathead Community College when she first met Dasen through an acquaintance at a tattoo parlor where she sometimes hung out with friends and helped with some of the work. At the tattoo parlor, Veyna met Tammi Matthews, of Great Falls, who had an “arrangement?” with Dick Dasen, and who did not hesitate to introduce her to him, as well. Rather than explaining her arrangement, Veyna said, Matthews simply drove her to the Super 8 Motel and called Dasen on his cell phone for him to come and meet her.

At that time, the summer of 2003, Veyna said she was “struggling pretty intensely. My ex-husband was not paying child support—I get like \$78 a month, not working, trying to go to school. And it was summer, school was just about to start up again, my kids needed school supplies, they were also starting soccer, and rent was due. I really didn’t have any money whatsoever.?” In the course of about ten meetings with Dasen in the summer and fall of 2003, Veyna would receive checks totalling about \$17,500.

Veyna testified that twice Dasen discussed with her the possibility that what they were doing was illegal, but both times he dismissed her worries. “He said that rumors had been going around about for years since the Outlaw (the hotel that Dasen built in the 1970’s), that Jim Dupont (the Flathead County Sherriff) was a very good friend of his and knew that it wasn’t true. He also said that if if he were to get arrested he would just claim that he was just

helping people and happened to be having sex with girls on the side.?

Guzynski asked, “So he indicated to you that the sex—that he would tell the authorities that the sex and the money were separate?? “Yes.?” “Did you believe them to be separate?? “No,?” Veyna said.

In a stark contrast to Ms. Veyna, the defense called Ms. H, a woman now eighteen years old, who grew up in a tiny community in the mountains west of Kalispell. Ms. H was 17 when she appeared with another underage girl, Ms. K, in photos of lesbian scenes taken at the Dasen residence. Ms. K has already testified in the case. Both girls received money from Dasen.

Ms. H made her appearance in old blue jeans and a fleece jacket, and seemed to want to make it clear that she cared very little for the authorities that had called her to the court, or the process that the court represented. Ms. H made an almost hostile witness to both the prosecution and the defense, wary to the point of sullenness, disdainful. Guzynski kept his questions extremely short—he seemed very wary, too. He presented the pornographic photos of Ms. H and Ms. K that the jury had seen before during the testimony of Ms. K some weeks ago, and asked, “Do you recognize who’s in those photos?? “Yes, I do.?” How old were you when those photos were taken?? “Seventeen.?” Guzynski stopped his questions after nine minutes and returned to his seat. The reasons for his wariness were soon revealed, as George Best took over the cross examination.

After telling the court that she was introduced to Dasen by Leah Marshall, Ms. H said that she had lied to Dasen over the telephone, telling him that she was over eighteen. She said that she had never had sex with Dasen, although Marshall had indicated to her that someday she would have to do so to keep getting help from him.

Best asked, “Did Dick Dasen ever tell you that?? “No.?”

“Did Ms. K ever tell Dick Dasen that she was over 18?? “Yes, she did. I was there when she said it.?”

“What happened at his house in West Valley?? “K and I had sex in front of Mr. Dasen.?” “Was this you and K’s idea?? “Yes.?” “Did Mr. Dasen force you to do this?? “No.?”

“And he took photos?? “Yes.?” “With your full permission?? “Yes.?” “After you had told him you were 18?? “Yes.?” “After K had told him she was 18?? “Yes.?” “Did you meet with Mr. Dasen again?? “Yes, and I got \$500.?” “Have sex?? “No!?”

Best asked her how she used the money that she received from Dasen. “Gas, movies, clothes, a stereo for my mom’s car. I bought a blanket, some food, a lava lamp....?”

Under hard questioning from Dan Guzynski, Ms. H denied ever saying to police and others that Dasen never asked either her, or Ms. K’s age. Both Guzynski and Best concentrated on the fact that Leah Marshall had “implied” that, as Ms. H put it, “down the line I would have to have sex. At the time, I was on drugs and it didn’t seem like such a bad idea.?”

Ms. H’s disdain, or distance, just like the various demeanors—sad, forthright, traumatized, self-assured—displayed by most of the women and girls who have testified in this case, could not survive her time on the witness stand. In response to Guzynski’s question about whether Dasen would have given her money without the sex acts, Ms. H said, “I think he would have given me money without the sex...?”

Guzynski, somewhat exasperated, asked, “If he had never given you a check, would you have let him take the pictures?? Ms. H thought for a long time, head bowed, and then said in a

choked voice, “No, probably not.?” She then broke down into sobs, her face so clenched that her forehead was stark white. When told she could leave the stand for a break, she was crying so hard that she had to be helped from the courtroom. When she returned later, she said that she had never told Dasen her age.

If Ms. H was a witness guaranteed to produce questions in the minds of the jury, the two-hour video of Dasen being interviewed by the Kalispell police detectives following his arrest at the Blue and White Motel on February 7, 2004, must have boggled them completely. In the tape, Dasen is relaxed and friendly, conversational, even after Detective McCarvel reads him his Miranda rights. He says there’s no need for a lawyer, that he has nothing to hide. When McCarvel asked why he is involved with so many different women, Dasen replied, “My wife spends winters in Arizona, and frankly, I like sex....They started coming to me for help, a long time ago, and it evolved into this sex thing.?”

McCarvel asked, “When did all this start?? and Dasen replies, “Years and years ago, seven or eight years. I started helping people about twenty years ago... until my secretary left last year, we were helping 120-130 people, handled paying their bills, their expenses...? Why, McCarvel asked, was it mostly women that were getting the help? Dasen answered without a pause, “The wife is more willing to ask for help, so that’s who I met, and then I started seeing a lot of single moms... it became a single mom ministry and then it evolved...I never felt it was prostitution. I always felt it was wrong. That it wasn’t right. But I always said, ‘You don’t have to do this....?’

Dasen said that he did feel that he had some kind of addiction. “It’s not the sex, it’s the helping.?” How, Detective Roger Nasset asked, is it helping them to have sex with them? Dasen replied, “It’s some sort of rationalization they

feel. If they get this money, they have to do something for me.?

Throughout the interview, Dasen maintains his conversational and genial tone, even after being left for over an hour in the interview room alone, while the detectives made calls to city and county prosecutors to ask for their advice and direction as to how to proceed. Talking with Nassett, Dasen describes being lied to by some of the women, and being ripped-off and blackmailed by others. "I get ripped off a lot,?" he said, shaking his head, bemused by his own gullibility, "as my secretary would testify. But that's not my problem. It's their problem. I'm not a vengeful person.?"

Dasen said that no one, not even his secretary, knew about his sexual involvement with the women and girls who came to his office to get money. "My secretary doesn't even know. ... My business friends don't know. My friends would be devastated if they knew I was in here.?" Asked if his wife knew, Dasen responds hotly, "Of course not! She knows I help people.?" He makes it clear that there are plenty of people who, as he puts it, "just came in and got a check, got help...there's hundreds of women that I've helped and not had sex with. There's single moms who offered sex and I didn't do it. I'm not trying to justify it...?"

But Dasen has a curious inability to recall the names of the women he is sexually involved with, other than Leah Marshall and a few others. He searches his mind for the names in response to questions from Nassett, and the names, it appears, are just not there, or else he can recall only the first names, and that often only after prompting by the detective.

Nassett asks if he would have given the women so much money without the sex. Dasen replied, "Yes, without a doubt.?" Asked about how many of the women had used the money to have breast augmentation, he replied, "about half a dozen of them.?"

Dasen says that he was actually happy when the detectives caught him in the "controlled meeting?" that led to his arrest. Nassett tells him that he, Nassett, can sense that "there's a burden being lifted from your shoulders. I know you are a churchgoing man, and we have to be accountable for our actions.?" Dasen tells him that he will cooperate anyway that he can. "I'll cooperate completely. I'm not concerned about myself. I'm concerned that a lot of innocent people will get branded for something they didn't do.?" He says repeatedly that he will pay a penalty if he has done something wrong, but that he does not believe that he has. There is only one underage girl mentioned in the interview, the girl who testified that she lied to him about her age, and gave him a false name. Dasen says only that he had heard that one of the women "was eighteen.?"

"Is this going to stop??" Nassett asks. "You tell me to stop, I'll stop. That's what I need,?" Dasen replies. "The sex will stop. But what about the helping? How can I stop that??" Later he says, when told that he should not have contact with any of the people involved, "...many, many people on that list have true and ongoing needs...?"

Perhaps the interview is best summed up in Dasen's words, uttered midway through. "Obviously, there is something going on in my own mind. I was trying, in my twisted way, to make things better.?"

It was a difficult and disturbing place for the prosecution to rest. On Friday morning, the defense called its first witness, Susan Dasen, Dick Dasen's wife of 43 years.