

## The Edward Morris Confession, Part 2 of 3

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Of the **Baker City Herald**

Oregon State Police Sgt. Randy Crutcher slides a cassette tape into a Sony recorder, thumbs the play button and sets the machine on his desk at the OSP office in Baker City.

The first voice is his own.

Crutcher announces the place — Baker City — and the time — 2:34 p.m. on Jan. 4, 2003.

The next voice is that of Edward Morris, prime suspect in the murder of his seven-months pregnant wife and their three children.

For the first few minutes the conversation sounds like one between friends, not between a detective who is trying to elicit a confession from a suspect in a mass murder.

Crutcher asks Morris if the Subway sandwich the police provided was OK.

"Absolutely wonderful," Morris replies.

"We still have the second half here if you need it, Crutcher says.

This exceedingly civilized exchange seems surreal given the horrific nature of the events that led to it.

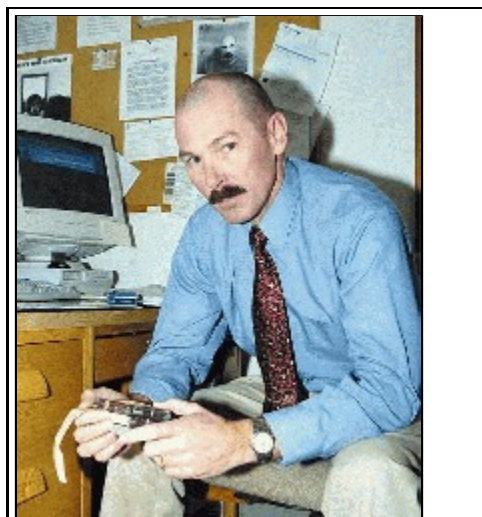
But that is how things are done, Crutcher said.

Questioning a suspect without making sure he is comfortable could give a defense lawyer a basis on which to argue, before a judge, that the suspect was coerced and therefore anything he said is inadmissible as evidence, Crutcher said.

The case never did go to trial. Morris pleaded guilty in September 2004 to seven counts of aggravated murder. Morris was sentenced in November 2004 to four consecutive life terms.

Law enforcement officials agreed earlier this December to discuss the case and review Morris' confession with the Baker City Herald.

The confession proved critical in sending Morris to prison for the rest of his life.



**Sgt. Randy Crutcher teaches interview and interrogation techniques for the Oregon State Police. He was called in on his day off when Edward Morris was captured — only to find a suspect more than willing to talk about his crimes.**

Baker City Herald/S. John Collins

Morris' defense attorneys never filed a single motion claiming police had coerced Morris or questioned him in any way that tainted the confession.

"There was nothing from the police conduct point of view that would have interfered with them using the entire statement in trial, had the case gone to trial," said Charles Fryer, a Hillsboro attorney who assisted Glenn Faber, the Seaside lawyer who was Morris' chief counsel. Faber declined to be interviewed for this story.

"The folks in Baker City went by the book," Fryer said. "They got everything they needed in the time they had."

"Let's say all we gotten was (the taped confession," added William Porter, Tillamook County district attorney, "we'd have had enough."

Crutcher was determined to not make a single mistake with Morris.

Throughout the preliminary exchanges, before the word "murder" is spoken, perhaps the most notable aspect of Morris' answers to the benign questions is his politeness, which at times borders on the formal.

Morris refers to Crutcher several times as "sir."

He uses the word "correct" instead of "yes" when answering in the affirmative.

Two years later, Morris' politeness still stands out to Crutcher.

"Morris is a man who, if you ran into him on the street and talked to him, I don't think you'd have a clue that, one, he did this (killed his family), and two, that he was capable of doing it."

But as the interview continues this cordial chat suddenly turns sinister, even as Morris' friendly tone remains.

Crutcher asks Morris if he is warm enough.

"A little bit chilly," Morris answers. "I guess I could zip (my coat) up.

"I took the (coat) liner out because I was in Phoenix, where I planned to go into town and kill people."

Although later in the interview Morris would go into far greater detail, this is the first time he admits what he intended to do after he killed his family: become a "hit man" who murdered strangers, stole their credit cards and pilfered their bank accounts.

But Crutcher isn't yet ready to discuss murders that didn't happen.

He concentrates on murders that did.

He asks Morris if he planned to kill his family.

"Unfortunately, yes," Morris answers.

For the next two hours Morris' voice dominates the tape.

Crutcher asks an occasional question but most of the words that vibrate

out of the tape machine's two-inch speaker are Morris', explaining how and why he murdered his family, and what he did between the moment he drove away from the bodies and the moment he walked out of the Baker City Rite Aid and saw two police pistols pointed at him.

"I try to never interrupt," Crutcher said of his interview technique. "That takes a tremendous amount of discipline, but I know that whatever he says he's telling us for a reason."

And Morris, Crutcher says, was an ideal suspect to interrogate, because he likes to talk.

"My job at that point is just to get this guy to give his account of what happened," Crutcher said. "Once he got where he was comfortable with us he felt he could tell his side of the story. I asked him to go back to wherever he felt was important to start."

And as Crutcher listened, contributing as few words as possible, he recognized that, in between trivial matters such as Morris' difficulties handling the motor oil dipstick in his minivan, Morris was proving that not only did he murder his family, but that he wanted very badly, at least for a while, to get away with the crime.

"He did everything he could to ensure that he wouldn't be caught," Crutcher said.

And that, Crutcher knew, was a crucial matter for any prosecutor, because a man who tries to elude police probably does so because he knows that what he did was a crime.

And a man who knows right from wrong has little chance of convincing a judge or a jury that he's not guilty because he's insane.

At one point, for example, Morris told Crutcher that as he drove along a freeway he tossed out the window the pair of shoes he was wearing when he killed his family. Morris said he knew he left footprints in the snow near the murder scene, and he was afraid police could connect the shoes to the murders, and thus to him.

"He's just hanging himself, and I just let him talk," Crutcher said.

The main issue, Morris tells Crutcher, was money.

"I haven't been a very good provider lately," he says. "I felt like half of a person. Miserable. Terrified."

He says he had "blown nearly \$40,000 in the last six months."

Morris says he wanted to give more to his wife, whom he describes as "beautiful."

"I knew she was worthy of so much more than I had provided."

He can think of only one solution to his family's financial woes.

"All my life I wanted to be a hit man for the mob," Morris says. "I even tried to kill people in Portland before I killed my family."

He describes how he hid a hammer inside his coat and then went to downtown Portland. He said he planned to walk behind someone, preferably a well-dressed person who appeared to be wealthy, hit the

person on the head with the hammer and steal the person's wallet.

"I couldn't do it," Morris tells Crutcher.

So Morris decided he needed a stealthier weapon: a handgun equipped with a silencer.

But he figured his plan would fail, because he could never build the silencer without his wife "finding out."

And in any case, he said, Renee would never approve of his new career.

"So I had to get rid of my family," Morris says.

He started scanning newspaper classifieds, searching for handguns.

But he soon was frustrated, he tells Crutcher, because most of the ads were for rifles or shotguns, and the handguns were more expensive than he expected.

"I should have known God was against me from the start," Morris says, with a rueful-sounding chuckle.

On Dec. 17, 2002, two days before the murders, he visited a gun store.

Morris says he purposely picked a store in Southeast Portland, several miles from his home, a place where he figured no one would recognize him.

He told the gun shop clerk that he wanted to buy handguns to protect his family.

Morris said he also bought a gun safe, so as to demonstrate his concern for his family's safety.

He said he didn't want the clerk to know "I was going to kill my family."

Morris says he was not accustomed to lying.

"But I found it was easy, and I'm good at it," he tells Crutcher. "And I don't like liars."

Morris says he bought one .38-caliber revolver and two .22-caliber semi-automatic pistols. He can't remember the name of the store, although he believes it was on 82nd Drive. Morris says he's sure sure police could confirm the name by checking his credit card records.

(They did check, and Morris told Crutcher the truth. The store is on 82nd Drive, and those credit card records show Morris spent \$1,172.87 at the store on Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2002.)

Morris says he told the clerk that one of the .22 pistols was for him, the other for his son.

The gun store employees, Morris says, "were really nice people."

Two days later, Morris told his wife that he had rented a home on the Oregon Coast for the night.

That evening, he says, he stalled Renee because he didn't want to leave until well after dark.

Morris told Crutcher he was worried that if he left too early a driver might come by while he was killing his family.