Witness: Rachel Clara Latham

Date: 2004-12-06

Proceedings held December 6, 2004

Called by: Defense

Phase: Penalty

Examinations: Direct – Pat Harris

Day 1 of 1 for this witness

Court: San Mateo County Superior Court, Redwood City (People v. Scott Peterson)

Source: https://pwc-sii.com/CourtDocs/Transcripts/LathamRachel.htm

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Direct Examination by Pat Harris

HARRIS: Rachel, if you would, you are the daughter of, we just heard from John Latham, you're his youngest daughter, is that right?

LATHAM: That is correct.

HARRIS: If you would, just give us a little bit of your background as far as, you grew up in Alaska?

LATHAM: I did. I grew up in Alaska for the first 13 years of my life and then I went to part of eighth grade and ninth through twelfth grade in San Luis Obispo and Los Osos.

HARRIS: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt. Was it very different growing up in Alaska than coming to California?

LATHAM: It was. It's a whole different world up there.

HARRIS: What was different, why was it different?

LATHAM: I think the lifestyle that my family leads is very different. It's tied in with, it's tied in with the seasons and my dad's a diving outfitter so we spend a lot of time out doors.

HARRIS: Would you go with him on certain times, those kind of things?

LATHAM: We would all go up, we have hunting camps up in the interior of Alaska, we would all go up there in the fall for big game hunts and the rest of the year we are located in Yakatak.

HARRIS: Why was the decision made to actually bring you down to California, put you in school there?

LATHAM: My parents gave us the opportunity to get a better education down south.

HARRIS: And was that important to you?

LATHAM: It was important to me. They gave us a choice and both my sister and I chose to go to California even though that meant giving up a lot for them and for us. They didn't see us a good portion of the year, we lived with family and friends in California and my sister and I did not live together, we lived in different towns part of the time in fact.

HARRIS: When you say you didn't live together, you lived where?

LATHAM: I lived with Aunt Jackie and Uncle Lee for part of eighth grade and for ninth grade, and after that I lived with friends.

HARRIS: And your sister lived where?

LATHAM: She lived in Los Ottos with family friends for three years, and then with another friend in San Luis Obispo for her senior year of high school.

HARRIS: When you lived with Lee and Jackie, did they have a large house, small house, medium size house?

LATHAM: They had a very small house in Morro Bay. They just moved up there and semi retired. And, actually, in order for me to live with them they had to clear out their office. So they chose to clear out their office and allow me to live with them. And I remember Jackie, she'd pay her bills at the kitchen table and clean it up every night and they let me have that space the entire time I was there. It was very generous of them.

HARRIS: After the ninth grade going into your tenth grade year you did not live with them after that, do you know why?

LATHAM: I do now. Jackie has some health problems and it was because of that I didn't live with them anymore. They told me that they would have loved for me to have continued living with them, but it wasn't possible.

HARRIS: What was it like living with Lee and Jackie?

LATHAM: It was, it was a lot of fun. She's very loving. She's one of the most generous people I know. She's always trying to bring family together, planning things to have people have a good time.

HARRIS: What's Lee like?

LATHAM: Lee was very loving, very sweet, but also quiet and sort of reserved. He'd often do his own thing, he'd go golfing and a lot of times on weekends he'd be doing his own thing and Jackie and I would be hanging out. But we always, they would always take me on whatever trips they were going on. At the time Uncle Lee was into the missions and we'd take trips up to San Juan Bautista and various missions and they'd always take me with them, you know, I was part of the family. I was like a daughter.

HARRIS: They treated you like a daughter?

LATHAM: Definitely.

HARRIS: You had two different points in your life early on you had contact with Scott. And I want to talk about the first one.

LATHAM: Okay.

HARRIS: Beginning when you were actually living in Alaska would you come down to California and actually visit with your relatives?

LATHAM: We would. My parents made an effort to come down. They wanted us to know our cousins and our family and they also wanted to see their family. So every year we'd come down and spend some time with Jackie and Lee in San Diego and the family and we'd stay with them.

HARRIS: What was the age difference between you and Scott, what was the age difference?

LATHAM: I believe it's eight years.

HARRIS: So you're like his younger, younger cousin?

LATHAM: And at that, when you're younger it seems you're a lot younger.

HARRIS: What were your memories of when you were young visiting, what were your memories of Scott?

LATHAM: I always remember Scott taking the time to spend time with my sister Ana and myself. And she's just a little bit older than I am, about a year. And he was probably in junior high or high school. But, nonetheless, he'd take the time to take us out in his play golf cart, take us for a

little ride down the street. And we probably never been in a golf cart before that. And one day, you know, we were curious about, we were asking him about the golf balls and we were curious about what they were made of, what was inside them. And he said, well, let's find out. So we went in the garage and he put the golf ball in the vice grips and we busted it open, found out what was inside of it. And, you know, bounced it around the driveway and took it in to show our parents. He was always willing to take the time out, even though he probably had more fun things to do during that time in his life than hang out with his young girl cousins. He was willing to spend the time with us.

HARRIS: Did you always find him to be sweet?

LATHAM: Yes.

HARRIS: A gentleman?

LATHAM: Yes.

HARRIS: You also seen him for Thanksgivings when he'd come to Alaska?

LATHAM: That's true. He'd come up with his brothers and parents to Yakatak.

HARRIS: When you would see them interact, the family sort of interact, how was Scott with the rest of the family?

LATHAM: He was right in there with everyone else. I mean, he was the youngest, but he was always in there with everyone. He went hunting with the guys. They'd go bird hunting and Aunt Jackie and my sister and my mom and I would usually stay at home during the day. We may go on a walk or something, but he was always in with the boys.

HARRIS: Now you had a second opportunity to get back in touch with him when you moved to San Luis Obispo, is that right?

LATHAM: That's correct.

HARRIS: That was during the time period that Scott was going to school there and working there?

LATHAM: Yeah, he was at Cal Poly at the time.

HARRIS: Where would you see him then?

LATHAM: Usually it was at Jackie and Lee's house or at Abba's, the restaurant that he worked at. We'd go there on a pretty regular basis and he would wait on us.

HARRIS: Let me just make sure that the jury is clear, when you say Abba's, that's not technically the name of the restaurant, is it?

LATHAM: No, I don't think so. We just called it Abba's.

HARRIS: You just called it Abba's. That was the name of the owner?

LATHAM: Yes, that's correct.

HARRIS: It's actually Pacific Cafe?

LATHAM: Yes, it's Pacific Cafe. Sorry.

HARRIS: Go ahead. You were saying?

LATHAM: So we would see him at the Pacific Cafe. He would be waiting on us. He'd also come over to the house on a very regular basis and I was living with Jackie and Lee at that time. He would, he would come over to help them with yard work. He would come over, Lee and him would work on their cars. He was always around.

HARRIS: Did he also pick you up from school?

LATHAM: He would. He would pick me up from school. I participated in after school activities and if Jackie and Lee couldn't pick me up he would come pick me up from playing field if I was playing softball. He would come pick me up after school if I had some other activities. He was always willing to help out. I think that had a lot to do with Jackie and Lee's relationship with Scott, too, their, quote, relationship, they were willing to help each other out.

HARRIS: I'm sorry, in what way? I want to ask you to elaborate on that. That had to do with their relationship?

LATHAM: How they would help each other out?

HARRIS: Yes.

LATHAM: I think they had a great positive relationship. And, like, if Scott needed, you know, something done, they would do it for him and vice versa. If they needed some help in the yard or an errand run, there was no hesitation.

HARRIS: Did he also regularly come to your soccer games?

LATHAM: He did and Laci did as well. They'd come to my soccer games, they'd come to football games, and Jackie and Lee did, too.

HARRIS: You got to meet, while you were there in San Luis, that was the time period that Scott had met Laci, is that right?

LATHAM: I actually remember the first time that Jackie and Lee met Laci as well. I was there and we all went to lunch at a cafe in Morro Bay.

HARRIS: How was that?

LATHAM: It was a fun time. I remember really liking her from the beginning.

HARRIS: Did you have the opportunity when you say you'd come over their house, did you ever have the opportunity to watch him interact with his parents?

LATHAM: Definitely, yes.

HARRIS: What would you say his relationship, from your viewpoint, what was his relationship like with his mother?

LATHAM: He was always respectful and loving. I mean, he'd be joking around, but he was always very sweet and he'd ask her, you know, mom, do you need anything moved and he'd help and if she did she'd tell him and he would do it.

HARRIS: How about his relationship with his father, what was your viewpoint on that?

LATHAM: They were, they were joking around, but always loving. And they'd do activities together. They would go golfing together.

HARRIS: You told me last night about another side of Scott that had to deal with his, while he was in Morro Bay in the area and dealing with a lot of the elderly people around. If I could just ask you a little bit about, first of all, could you tell us who are Sue and Bill Warren?

LATHAM: Sue and Bill Warren are good friends of the family and to me it seems sort of like they were like pseudo-grandparents to Scott.

HARRIS: How would you see him interact with them?

LATHAM: Very loving, sweet manner. Scott, they would play golf together, the guys would. And Sue wanted, she would come over for dinner or we would go out for dinner. We saw them quite often.

HARRIS: And did there seem to be genuine affection there?

LATHAM: Definitely, yes.

HARRIS: Would he help them in different projects and different things?

LATHAM: Yes.

HARRIS: How about, you mentioned another family called Campbell's?

LATHAM: The Campbell's, they lived right across the street. And they were an elderly couple as well and Scott would always be helping them, as well as there was a neighbor next door who was elderly and she couldn't get around too well. And if she needed some bricks moved or something built, he was there. There was also another woman down the street who had multiple sclerosis and Scott would do gardening work for her and help her out as well.

HARRIS: At some point did your relationship become close enough with Scott and Laci that they actually offered to have you live with them?

LATHAM: They did. When I was a sophomore that year after I lived with Jackie and Lee, they actually offered to have me come and live with them and they were still in school in San Luis and, I mean, they were in college. I just got done with college a little bit ago and I don't think, I don't know if I would have been able to do the same. You know, you're living with your girlfriend at the time and you invite your little cousin to come live with you. It was very, very generous on their behalf.

HARRIS: The times that you spent with Scott, the times you were there in San Luis particularly, did you find him to be a person who cared about others?

LATHAM: Definitely, yes.

HARRIS: Did you find that he had a positive influence on the people around him?

LATHAM: Yes. He may have been quiet about it, but it was definitely there, yes.

HARRIS: Has he had a positive influence on you?

LATHAM: Yes, he has.

HARRIS: How so?

LATHAM: I've always seen Scott as a leader and someone to look up to. He, like I said before, he may be quiet about it, you may have to go and talk to him. He might be a little standoffish to someone who didn't know him, but if you get to talking to him he's very down to earth, very loving, and he's willing to help. That means a lot.

HARRIS: How would putting him to death affect you personally?

LATHAM: I think it would break my heart. I think it would be horrible for the family and destroy everything. We used to have, we used to have family reunions and they were really fun and wonderful times. And, I mean, we haven't even, we haven't had one in the last couple years, I don't think I would ever, it would never be the same for the entire family. It just wouldn't.

HARRIS: That's all I have.