Witness: Ricardo Cordova

Date: 2004-10-21

Proceedings held October 21, 2004

Called by: Defense

Phase: Guilt

Examinations: Direct – Mark Geragos; Cross – Birgit Fladager; Redirect – Mark Geragos; Recross – Birgit Fladager

Day 1 of 1 for this witness

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

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Direct Examination by Mark Geragos

GERAGOS: Good morning.

CORDOVA: Good morning.

GERAGOS: I'm going to call you Judge Cordova, and I assume to say, you are a judge?

CORDOVA: I am, but Mister's fine.

GERAGOS: Okay. Where are you currently employed?

CORDOVA: Stanislaus County Superior Court.

GERAGOS: I'm not going to ask for your address, but you live in the neighborhood where Scott and Laci Peterson lived back in 2002?

CORDOVA: Yes, I did.

GERAGOS: Okay. Did something unusual occur on 12/23 at about 10:15?

CORDOVA: Someone knocked at my, on my door. I was, I think, already asleep, and my daughter alerted me to someone on the, on the front door, so I got up and answered the door.

GERAGOS: Okay. And what happened?

CORDOVA: There was a man walking away from my door, on the lawn. So I opened the door and asked him what he wanted and talked to him.

GERAGOS: Did you, did he indicate or make any indications to you as to why he was there?

CORDOVA: He was asking for money to help, I think his girlfriend had been stranded up in the foothills near Greely Hill, visiting, I believe, a sick relative, and her car had broken down, and he said she had the ATM card or the checkbook and was asking to borrow money from me.

GERAGOS: Okay.

CORDOVA: Or I guess for me, for me to give money to him.

GERAGOS: At the time, you weren't a judge at the time, I take it?

CORDOVA: I was not.

GERAGOS: Okay. You were a lawyer in the Public Defender's office?

CORDOVA: Yes, I was.

GERAGOS: Okay. Was there something about that story that didn't ring true to you?

CORDOVA: The, the person mentioned that he had gone to other houses in the neighborhood and that other people hadn't been home, and I was the only one that had been home. So that sounded a little unusual to me.

GERAGOS: Okay. Did you have a belief as to what was going on there?

CORDOVA: I thought he was probably casing the neighborhood to see who was home. It was just before Christmas, and that seems to be a prime time for burglaries.

GERAGOS: Okay. And specifically on Christmas day, did you talk to a Detective Sebron Banks of the Modesto Police Department?

CORDOVA: Yes, I did.

GERAGOS: Okay. Did you know, prior to that did you know Detective Banks?

CORDOVA: Yes, I did.

GERAGOS: And specifically did you talk to him about this person that had come to the house on the 23rd?

CORDOVA: Yes, I did.

GERAGOS: Okay. And what did you do? What, what happened after that?

CORDOVA: I, the person that had come to the house mentioned that he had been staying in the neighborhood with a car, where a white station wagon was. So I walked with him towards the house with the white station wagon. And arrived near the corner of Encina and Edgebrook, excuse me, Covena and Edgebrook.

GERAGOS: Covena and Edgebrook. Do you know that to be close or in the close vicinity of the Petersons' house?

CORDOVA: It was around the corner from their home.

GERAGOS: Approximately how many feet away?

CORDOVA: I guess about a hundred and fifty feet or so.

GERAGOS: Okay. Would it, is it fair to say that you then saw some, you observed a pair of women's sandals with a flower pattern lying in the roadway there?

CORDOVA: Yes, I did.

GERAGOS: Did you point those out to the detective?

CORDOVA: I did. They were near the, they were off the pavement. There's no gutter there, but it looked like it was in the grassy area off the pavement into the first, the house's yard, and I saw some sandals, flip-flop, looked like women's flip-flops to me.

GERAGOS: Okay. Did you point those out to Detective Banks?

CORDOVA: Yes, I did.

GERAGOS: Okay. And when you pointed them out to Detective Banks, did Detective Banks do anything?

CORDOVA: He didn't. He left the sandals there.

GERAGOS: Okay. And that was what date?

CORDOVA: That was on Christmas morning. The 25th of December.

GERAGOS: On the 25th of December? Okay. Did you make any indication that you thought that the sandals might have something to do with anything?

CORDOVA: I, I think I made a comment: I wonder if these have anything to do with that.

GERAGOS: With what?

CORDOVA: With Ms. Peterson's disappearance.

GERAGOS: Okay. Specifically the, at some point on the 26th of December were you driving in the neighborhood?

CORDOVA: Yes.

GERAGOS: And did you observe a Modesto police search team?

CORDOVA: Yes, I did.

GERAGOS: Did you recognize somebody, a Doug Ridenour?

CORDOVA: Yes, I did.

GERAGOS: Did you tell him about the person who had been what you believed casing his home, the, on the 23rd?

CORDOVA: I briefly told him about that, and he suggested that I wait and talk to the sergeant that was in charge of the, of the search. And I waited and did that.

GERAGOS: Okay. And at that point did you wait and talk to somebody?

CORDOVA: Yes, I did.

GERAGOS: Okay. At some point did you, at that point talk to a neighbor of yours?

CORDOVA: Yes, I did.

GERAGOS: Okay. And the neighbor indicate also that another, a person had come by their house as well?

CORDOVA: Yes.

GERAGOS: The same person?

CORDOVA: That's correct.

GERAGOS: Okay. Then on the 27th or 28th did you run into a Detective Reid from Modesto PD?

CORDOVA: I think Detective Reid had come to my home and my wife had spoken to him, and she called me and asked me to call Detective Reid. So I did.

GERAGOS: Okay. And at any point did, did it appear to you that Detective Reid had any of this information that you and your neighbor had given them about somebody casing the neighborhood?

CORDOVA: He didn't acknowledge either way whether someone did or did not.

GERAGOS: Okay. Had you actually, when you were there on the corner, actually pointed to these sandals in the street?

CORDOVA: Yes, I did.

GERAGOS: And who was there with you when you did that?

CORDOVA: Detective Banks.

GERAGOS: Okay. What day was that?

CORDOVA: That was on Christmas day.

GERAGOS: And did Detective Banks pick these shoes up?

CORDOVA: No, he didn't.

GERAGOS: Okay. Had you previously met the Petersons at a community meeting regarding neighborhood issues?

CORDOVA: Yes. I had met both Scott and Laci Peterson through some issues with the planning commission and city council concerning a housing development that was proposed in the neighborhood.

GERAGOS: Okay. Did you, you talked to Laci Peterson at that meeting?

CORDOVA: I did.

GERAGOS: Okay. Did Laci Peterson tell you how, that she would encounter,

FLADAGER: Objection. Calls for hearsay.

JUDGE: Sustained.

GERAGOS: When you talked to Laci Peterson, wait, a statement by Laci Peterson is hearsay?

JUDGE: Yes.

GERAGOS: We've had nothing but statements by Laci Peterson.

JUDGE: I'm not going to argue with you. It's hearsay.

GERAGOS: Okay. You had a conversation with Laci Peterson about what was, her encountering people in the park; isn't that correct?

CORDOVA: I don't recall if I did have that conversation with her. I've had that conversation with others, but I don't know about with her.

GERAGOS: Okay. I'm going to show you a report my investigator did. If you would read that silently to yourself.

CORDOVA: Okay.

GERAGOS: Does that refresh your recollection?

CORDOVA: Yes, that does refresh my recollection.

GERAGOS: After your conversation with Laci Peterson, were you concerned about some of the things she was doing in terms of confronting people?

FLADAGER: Objection.

GERAGOS: I'm asking for what,

JUDGE: His state of mind.

GERAGOS: Yeah.

JUDGE: It's overruled.

GERAGOS: Yeah. Did he cause you some concern about what she, the kind of boldness of what she was doing?

CORDOVA: Yes.

GERAGOS: On, specifically you at some point were interviewed by Detective, or Investigator Bertalotto; is that correct?

CORDOVA: Yes.

GERAGOS: Okay. And did you ever tell him, or he asked you about these shoes that you had noticed, correct?

CORDOVA: Yes, he did.

GERAGOS: Okay. Did you tell him you did not believe that the shoes had anything to do with the disappearance of Laci Peterson?

CORDOVA: I don't believe that I did, because I did not know or do not know to this day whether they have anything to do with it or not.

GERAGOS: Thank you. I have no further questions.

Cross Examination by Birgit Fladager

FLADAGER: Good morning.

CORDOVA: Good morning.

FLADAGER: The sandals that we're talking about that Mr. Geragos brought up with you, do you recall what they looked like?

CORDOVA: Yes.

FLADAGER: And can you describe them for us?

CORDOVA: They were platform flip-flops that were probably an inch and a half, two inch heels with maybe an inch soles on them that were an orange flower pattern.

FLADAGER: Okay. Do you remember telling Detective, or Investigator Bertalotto, you had an interview with him in June of 2003, that they did not look like a pair of walking shoes, certainly not a pair of walking shoes for a woman who was well along in her pregnancy would wear walking on an uneven route?

CORDOVA: I, I don't believe that I told him that. I think I was, that was suggested to me by someone else, but, and I may have said that to him, but that was, I, I didn't know if she was wearing those shoes or not.

FLADAGER: Okay. Because as you sit there today, and back in December of 2002, you had no indication at all that these sandals had anything to do with Laci Peterson, correct?

CORDOVA: That's correct.

FLADAGER: And you, they're sort of like summer sandal kind of shoes? Is that how you remember them being?

CORDOVA: Yes.

FLADAGER: And this is in December at this time, 2002?

CORDOVA: Yes, ma'am.

FLADAGER: You saw them still on the front lawn a few days later; is that right?

CORDOVA: That's correct.

FLADAGER: And then a day or so later they were gone; is that right?

CORDOVA: I'm not sure, some time later I noticed they weren't there, but I don't know when that was.

FLADAGER: Okay. And Mr. Geragos asked you a question about whether you were concerned about something Laci was doing. And is that based on something that her husband, the defendant in this case, and Laci said the two of them were doing together?

CORDOVA: I believe that's correct, yes.

FLADAGER: The individual that came to your house on December 23rd at about 10:00 o'clock at night came up and essentially was asking you for money; is that correct?

CORDOVA: That's correct.

FLADAGER: And indicated he needed, because he had a girlfriend he needed money?

CORDOVA: Yes.

FLADAGER: She was stranded. Have you ever in your work at the Public Defender's office come across people running scams similar to that?

CORDOVA: Yes.

FLADAGER: And these scams were perhaps people who are in need of money or, are homeless or have some other problem and decide, if they go knock on a door and present some sort of a sad story, that there are a lot of people out there who are kind enough to go ahead and give them money?

CORDOVA: That's correct.

FLADAGER: And that's with some frequency?

CORDOVA: I believe so, yes.

FLADAGER: Do you find that that's done more frequently, or in your experience do you find it's done more frequently in nicer neighborhoods, more affluent neighborhoods?

CORDOVA: More than likely.

FLADAGER: No further questions.

Redirect Examination by Mark Geragos

GERAGOS: The, along the lines of what Ms. Fladager was asking you, you found that during that very same time period you were representing, or your office was representing, somebody who was using that as a modus operandi for burglary in casing houses, correct?

CORDOVA: Yes, that's correct.

GERAGOS: And that's one of the reasons, that's why it occurred to you that this may have been significant, because this was the night before she goes missing, correct?

CORDOVA: That's correct. I think I became aware of the other situation, it would have been after the 23rd of December.

GERAGOS: Okay. And you were shown some, were you shown some photographs of somebody at some point to see if they fit the description of the person that you had seen that evening on the 23rd?

CORDOVA: I saw a photograph, but I wasn't shown a photograph.

GERAGOS: Okay. And were you told that that, the, one of the people who was arrested in that neighborhood had a van?

CORDOVA: No, I wasn't told that.

FLADAGER: Objection. Hearsay.

JUDGE: Overruled.

GERAGOS: Thank you. I have no further questions.

Recross Examination by Birgit Fladager

FLADAGER: The case that you became aware of as a result of your employment at that time, the individuals, to your knowledge, that were involved in that, this was a ploy that they were using to get people to give them money as opposed to breaking into houses when people weren't there; isn't that true?

CORDOVA: The,

FLADAGER: Or do you recall?

CORDOVA: I don't know the answer to that question. If, there was another incident in the neighborhood, the same night, that I read a police report on.

FLADAGER: Okay. Thank you. Nothing further.