

Synopsis of the Rex Farrance Murder Investigation Pittsburg Police Department

On Tuesday January 9, 2007 just after 9:00pm, 60-year old Rex Farrance was at his home on Argosy Court in Pittsburg, CA working on his computer while his wife of 16 years, Lenore Vantosh, was asleep in their bedroom. Four masked men, at least one of them armed with a .22 caliber revolver, kicked in their front door, and demanded money. Rex ran to his room in an apparent effort to alert his wife of the robbery and retrieve his personal handgun. He was confronted by the intruders in his bedroom and shot once in the chest. He died an hour later at a local hospital.

Rex and his wife had lived on Argosy Court for several years and were considered polite and friendly, but somewhat private according to their neighbors. They had two adult children; their 19 year-old son Sterling maintained a room at the house, but usually stayed with his girlfriend in a neighboring city. Rex was a well-respected senior editor for PC World Magazine.

In the Farrance home officers found 109 marijuana plants in different stages of cultivation, 3.7 pounds of cultivated marijuana (mainly consisting of dried stems, branches and leaves), two digital scales, and packaging commonly associated with marijuana sales.

Rex and Sterling were heavily involved in marijuana cultivation. In an interview with Sterling, he asserted the marijuana cultivation and consumption were legal under the guidelines of the California Compassionate Use Act (Proposition 215) that was passed by California voters on November 6, 1996.

We believe the intruders in this violent home-invasion robbery and murder knew about the marijuana cultivation operation and assumed marijuana and money would be at the house. We have confirmed that a relatively small amount of money (less than \$500) and several handguns were taken. We suspect marijuana was also taken, although we have not been able to confirm this because Lenore did not know exactly how much marijuana was on hand at the home.

Neither Rex nor Lenore had a prescription to use marijuana. Rex had smoked some marijuana two days prior to his murder on his birthday, but prior to that hadn't smoked in years. Lenore did regularly smoke marijuana to relieve pain, but was afraid that her job as a registered nurse may be in jeopardy if she got a prescription to use marijuana. Sterling did have a prescription to use marijuana for medicinal purposes. He obtained it from a medical doctor at Norcal Healthcare System in Oakland, CA. He had been in a vehicle collision in 2005, which he claimed resulted in residual back pain. He also claimed to have suffered from migraine and tension headaches his entire life so he obtained the prescription, which allowed him to become a card-carrying member of the Oakland Cannabis Buyers' Cooperative; they also issued him a "Growers' Certificate."

Prior to getting a prescription for marijuana, Sterling did smoke marijuana on occasion to help alleviate his back pain and chronic headaches. When Sterling purchases marijuana from the cooperatives, he usually goes to the cooperative in Richmond, CA because they are the cheapest. He can buy an eighth of an ounce for \$40 in Richmond, as opposed to \$60 from the cooperative in Pacheco, CA. He openly suggests that the Pacheco Cooperative is, "There just to take advantage of the law and make money."

Rex knew Sterling used marijuana for medicinal purposes and according to Sterling, Rex came up with the idea to grow marijuana so Sterling would not have to spend so much money buying the marijuana at the Cannabis Cooperatives. Rex purchased the necessary equipment to cultivate the marijuana (grow lights, fertilizer, etc...), while Sterling purchased marijuana clones (a branch from a live plant that can be placed in a rooting solution and soil, eventually rooting into a plant.) Sterling admitted that he and his father knowingly grew more plants than they were allowed (12 immature or 6 mature per qualified individual) because they wanted to pick the "best" plants to harvest. They would discard the rest.

They clearly had a sophisticated cultivation operation that included a High Pressure Sodium light, fluorescent lights, Mylar reflective sheets, premixed chemical solutions to lower the Ph levels in the local water supply, and a ventilation system including remote electrical ballast. Sterling claimed he learned about marijuana cultivation strategies by talking with people at the Cannabis Cooperatives. Sterling also said he and Rex purposely grew most of the marijuana in the attic as a security measure to hide the operation from anyone of "questionable nature."

Sterling claimed some of the plants belonged to another friend who also had a "grower's license," but the friend later denied this and admitted that he and Sterling had conspired to tell this story because Sterling and his father had more plants than they were allowed. The friend, who also has a prescription to use marijuana, occasionally helped manicure the plants, in turn receiving about 12% of the finished product. Sterling would receive about 20% and Rex would keep the rest. The friend also asserted that Sterling got a prescription to smoke marijuana to, "get stoned legally, and to "just get high." The friend openly admitted that Sterling shares his marijuana with other friends who do not have a prescription but just want to "get high."

Sterling adamantly denied he or his father sold marijuana to "people on the streets, only to other people with medical marijuana cards, and occasionally to friends."

Sterling never registered with the State Department of Health Services, as he can voluntarily do pursuant to SB 420 because he had never heard about the registration program.