

Defense presses man who dug grave in Hollywood trial

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The man who dug the shallow grave Nicholas Markowitz, 15, was buried in stood by the testimony he delivered over the last four days in Jesse James Hollywood's capital murder trial as a defense attorney went on the attack Monday with questioning that suggested the witness was lying and had been present for the murder.

Graham Pressley, who was 17 in August 2000 when Nicholas was murdered in the foothills of Santa Barbara, testified he dug a grave at Lizard's Mouth at the command of Ryan Hoyt, an associate of Mr. Hollywood's. Mr. Hoyt was reportedly carrying a gun in a duffle bag.

Prosecutors believe Mr. Hollywood masterminded the kidnapping of Nicholas near his west San Fernando Valley home on Aug. 6, 2000, and eventual murder allegedly over a drug debt owed to Mr. Hollywood by Nicholas' older half-brother, Ben Markowitz.

Once the grave was completed, Mr. Pressley and Mr. Hoyt returned to Santa Barbara and picked up Nicholas and another associate of Mr. Hollywood's, Jesse Ruge, and the party drove back to Lizard's Mouth, according to testimony. However, on the walk back to the grave, Mr. Pressley said he refused to go on and felt frozen, but the others continued on. About 20 minutes later, he heard a stream of gunfire.

The witness said Mr. Ruge later told him Mr. Hollywood "had me do the kid," and co-defense counsel Alex Kessel asked Mr. Pressley why he had previously testified that Mr. Ruge, who was friends with the witness, didn't mean for anything to happen to Nicholas. The witness, however, didn't see these statements as being inconsistent and believed Mr. Ruge had been pressured into doing something he didn't intend to happen.

Mr. Kessel questioned the witness if he was attempting to protect Mr. Hoyt, bringing up a time Mr. Pressley reportedly lied to two friends, telling them Mr. Hoyt and Mr. Hollywood came to a motel room Nicholas was in, with Mr. Hollywood toting a gun. The defense attorney questioned whether Mr. Pressley had been attempting to involve Mr. Hollywood and Mr. Hoyt, but the witness stayed firm with the testimony he has presented during the trial.

Mr. Pressley has admitted to lying to detectives, but testified he came clean in an Aug. 16, 2000, interview. However, Mr. Kessel brought up a portion of the statement where Mr. Pressley said to detectives he had told Mr. Ruge and Mr. Hoyt he would no longer participate as they were in the vehicle, headed for Lizard's Mouth. During Mr. Hollywood's trial, Mr. Pressley said he refused to participate further as the group walked toward the grave. Mr. Kessel asked the witness if he had "conveniently" changed his statement because he learned two hikers who passed him

and the others would be able to place him on the trail.

"No, that's not true," Mr. Pressley responded.

Earlier in the day, the District Attorney's Chief Trial Deputy Joshua Lynn, who is prosecuting, displayed a video of the Aug. 16 interview. At the end of the filming, a detective informed the young Mr. Pressley he would be booked into juvenile hall, saying the teen was more involved than he initially admitted he was.

The witness confirmed for Mr. Lynn he felt he had to come clean during that interview, and that was the day he gave the names of Mr. Hollywood and Mr. Hoyt.

Mr. Pressley was convicted, as an adult, of second-degree murder in 2002. He was sentenced as a juvenile and was released in 2007. As for Mr. Hoyt, he sits on death row for shooting Nicholas dead. However, Superior Court Judge Brian Hill instructed the jury that past convictions will not play a part on whether the crimes alleged against Mr. Hollywood have been proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

Prosecutors also called to the stand Natasha Adams-Young, 26, who spent time with the victim during his final days and was friends with Mr. Pressley. On Aug. 5, 2000, Ms. Adams-Young recalled going over to Mr. Ruge's Santa Barbara home and was introduced to Mr. Hollywood. There, she overheard Mr. Ruge discussing travelling to Los Angeles the next day to help collect money owed to Mr. Hollywood.

When she returned to Mr. Ruge's home on Aug. 7, there was Nicholas in the back patio of the residence with Mr. Pressley, who filled her in on the circumstances of the victim's visit, she said.

At one point Mr. Ruge left Nicholas alone with Ms. Adams-Young, Mr. Pressley and another girl named Kelly Carpenter, and the witness recalled telling the victim "You can leave at any time," according to testimony. However, Nicholas responded if he could do this for his brother, he would.

Ms. Adams-Young said she confronted Mr. Ruge about Nicholas on Aug. 8 -- the day Mr. Pressley told her Mr. Hollywood offered Mr. Ruge \$2,000 to kill the victim. Mr. Ruge eventually said he would send the 17-year-old home on a bus, an announcement that calmed everyone down, the witness said. Ms. Adams-Young last saw Nicholas that night during a party at the Lemon Tree Inn, at which time the boy had been confident he would be returning home. She even recalled Mr. Ruge telling people to leave the inn because Nicholas would soon be picked up for his trip.

However, her confidence that the situation had been resolved ended days later when she saw a newspaper report indicating Nicholas' body had been located. Ms. Adams-Young remembered confronting a quiet Mr. Pressley, who had previously told her the victim was taken home, and a pale Mr. Ruge, who told her he was being set up.

The witness added she could see Mr. Ruge's heart beating into his chest as she spoke with him. Ms. Adams-Young went on to contact an attorney, who then contacted authorities.

During cross examination, Mr. Kessel again focused in on the murder Mr. Hollywood allegedly

proposed to Mr. Ruge, and the witness agreed Mr. Pressley did not say Mr. Ruge had been his source for the information.

Mr. Kessel asked the woman if she went to Nicholas and told him Mr. Hollywood wanted him dead, and she said she did not. Asked why she failed to do this, Ms. Adams-Young responded she did not know.

The trial continues today at 8:30 a.m. but is expected to let out mid-day, and Ben Markowitz is expected to testify this week.

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