

Family friend testifies at Jesse James Hollywood's murder trial

Given immunity from prosecution, the attorney recounts a tense conversation with the suspected mastermind of the kidnapping and killing of 15-year-old Nicholas Markowitz.

By Steve Chawkins

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Reporting from Santa Barbara -- Jesse James Hollywood was pacing and chain-smoking.

He had just told a family friend, attorney Stephen Hogg, that his pals had kidnapped the brother of a tough guy who had smashed windows at his home, threatened him and poisoned his dog.

Hogg, a soft-spoken 65-year-old with a ponytail, described his meeting with Hollywood during testimony Tuesday at Hollywood's trial for the 2000 kidnapping and murder of 15-year-old Nicholas Markowitz.

Prosecutors say Hollywood masterminded the Santa Barbara slaying to avenge a drug debt owed him by the boy's half brother, Ben Markowitz.

Nicholas was snatched off the streets near his West Hills home by Hollywood and some friends, who drove to Santa Barbara for the city's annual fiesta. Over the next few days, the group smoked marijuana and drank with their captive.

In the end, Hollywood was back in Los Angeles when his friends took Nicholas to a secluded spot in the hills where they shot and buried him.

Granted immunity in return for his testimony in Santa Barbara County Superior Court, Hogg detailed one of the case's pivotal moments: a tense conversation in the attorney's Simi Valley backyard.

Hollywood, then 20, did not reveal his participation in the abduction, the attorney testified. Still, Hogg pointed out that kidnapping can carry a life sentence.

"He didn't react at all when I said that," Hogg said.

Prosecutors allege that Hollywood ordered his friends to execute Markowitz after he learned of the possible sentence.

Four others have been convicted in the crime. Hollywood was arrested in 2005 after fleeing to Brazil.

An old friend of the Hollywood family, Hogg had seen Jesse play Little League baseball and organized a cruise so the families could witness a solar eclipse.

In court, he said Hollywood told him that he had urged his friends in Santa Barbara to take the boy back home.

But prosecutor Joshua Lynn was skeptical.

"Did he tell you one single, solitary thing he did to get this person home?" Lynn asked. "Anything?"

Hogg said he didn't call the police because he didn't have enough specific information. Agitated, Hollywood said police involvement would be dangerous because Ben Markowitz, a swastika-tattooed white supremacist despite his Jewish heritage, would retaliate.

When Hogg insisted, Hollywood angrily left. "I didn't run after him," Hogg said. "I regret that, but I didn't."