

James Vincent Randazzo

Background

These newspaper articles describe the arrest and imprisonment of James Vincent Randazzo, the leader of the "Spiral of Friends" (SOF). Randazzo and the SOF are significant because the leaders of the NAW and many of its longtime members were originally his students. It was there that they learned how to run a "school".

Curious cult leader back in Mesa County lockup

Source: The Grand Junction Free Press

Date: 2004 or 2005

Dateline: Grand Junction, Colorado

Byline: Ellen Miller

Headline: Curious cult leader back in Mesa County lockup

The perpetrator of one of Mesa County's most bizarre crimes and ensuing trial is back, ensconced in the Mesa County jail to serve the final year of his lengthy sentence for sexually abusing teen-agers.

His trial in 1989 was like a circus at times, with the self-styled leader of the Spiral of Friends cult and his young wife on trial for having sex with children of their followers and videotaping the sessions.

A videotape was shown to the jury. While it ran, complete with audio, James Randazzo's followers in his Spiral of Friends cult sat impassively in the audience.

The case launched an investigation into jury tampering after a juror reported that her daughter had received a phone call during deliberations. A juror was dismissed early in the trial because she knew that a witness had reported getting a call from someone identifying himself as a member of the cult.

And an alternate juror dismissed prior to deliberations said a man identifying himself as James Randazzo called his house asking for him.

Time served

Randazzo, now 65, served 12 years of a 16-year sentence in the state prison system, but District Judge Dave Bottger had tacked on an additional year for a misdemeanor sex assault conviction to be served consecutively.

Randazzo was convicted of 10 felonies in the case. He jumped bond when he didn't show up for sentencing and was captured four years later in Budapest, Hungary, and brought back to Grand Junction.

Assistant District Attorney Rich Tuttle had to search for records but confirmed the one year in county jail sentence to be served consecutively.

"It's an unusual sentence, but it was an unusual case," Tuttle said.

Randazzo's wife, Colleen, served seven months in prison for her part in the crimes but won a new, reduced sentence for time served by Bottger in 1993.

"There was and is no doubt these crimes were motivated by Mr. Randazzo and that you were an extraordinarily passive person," Bottger told her in 1993. "I don't think that's true anymore. You finally, after years, have decided to run your own life for a change."

Colleen divorced Randazzo after the 1989 conviction, resumed her maiden name and moved to Utah with her children. She was represented at her trial by a Denver-area attorney, handpicked by James Randazzo, who was close to the cult.



"She's in Kansas City now, working there, and her kids are grown," Bert Nieslanik, the attorney who was a public defender when she won Colleen the reduced sentence, said Thursday. "This is funny. I just talked to her yesterday."

The curious case

The case against Randazzo, who had moved his followers from Crested Butte to Molina during the 1980s, began when a member of the cult split with the others and moved to California, taking a teen-age son.

The son had grabbed a couple of videotapes from the house on his way out. Weeks later, still thinking they were normal movies, he played one of the tapes, which showed Randazzo, his wife and a 17-year-old boy having sex.

The tape was turned in to California authorities, who forwarded it to Mesa County.

After the Randazzos were convicted, the large house they had owned was sold. Potential buyers who toured it spoke of special passages between bedrooms and multi-shower head showers.

The Randazzos had claimed before their trial that the youth in the videotape was being counseled by them and that the sexual contact boosted his self-esteem.

Cult sex offender seeks to be paroled

Source: The Daily Sentinel (Grand Junction, CO)

Date: February 5, 2003

Dateline: Canon City, Colorado

Byline: Gary Harmon

Headline: Cult sex offender seeks to be paroled

CANON CITY - The former head of a cult based in Molina asked Tuesday for his freedom after serving 10 years for 10 sex-related felonies involving children.

James Randazzo, 64, once the jaunty, self-assured leader of the Spiral of Friends Church who fought fire with a barrage of legal threats against government investigators, quietly told state parole board members he was remorseful for his actions and guilty of even more than he was charged.

Questioned as to why none of the charges against him were for violations against children while he was in a position of trust, the heavysset Randazzo, sporting a ponytail of white hair reaching down to the middle of his back, said children who were exploited by him indeed had been entrusted to his care. He was known for his insouciance, hopping out of limousines in tailored, three-piece suits to attend hearings and his trial.

"I was the top dog" of the Spiral of Friends Church, he said in a barely audible voice. "I know I was in a position of trust."

In one instance of abuse, Randazzo acted as director of a 104-minute video of his wife, Colleen, having sex with a 16-year-old boy.

The Randazzos said they had hoped the experience would prevent the youth from committing suicide. The youth and his mother later testified the youth had suffered no harm from the experience.

Randazzo had sought to defend himself against charges related to that incident using a "choice-of-evils" defense, saying that to do otherwise might have contributed to a suicide attempt, but that legal maneuver was rebuffed by the judge.

At the time he was sexually assaulting children, Randazzo said, he believed he was doing good.

"I thought it was educational for them," he said. "I was dysfunctional."

After he was found guilty in 1989, Randazzo jumped a \$50,000 bond and fled the country. He was returned to the United States in September 1992 after he assaulted a police officer in Budapest, Hungary. He began serving his 16-year Department of Corrections sentence in 1993 and is scheduled to be discharged in September 2005.

While in prison, he was punished on one occasion for his continued connections with the Spiral of Friends, he said, but

had come to realize he was using the organization to contact children.

The Spiral of Friends Church has survived Randazzo's incarceration and its current head, the Rev. Cathryn Ivie, told the parole board she and her husband were prepared to be responsible for him at the church, which now is based in Phoenix.

Children no longer are part of the church, Randazzo told the board members.

Ivie, who told the board she had known Randazzo for 20 years, said she believed him to be remorseful and to have no intent to resume his previous activities. She and her husband have consulted with an expert on how best to help Randazzo if he is released, she said.

Ivie declined comment about any plans she had for Randazzo, saying contact with a reporter would be "inappropriate."

Randazzo, who said he had academic training in mathematics, psychology and nuclear physics, told the board he was a broken man, suffering from problems with his "mental apparatus" as a result of a prison accident in 1998, and that he suffers from arthritis.

Were his victims present, he said, he would apologize and hope they would realize he had "seen the error of my ways."

While Randazzo has been imprisoned, his former wife received a sentence reduction from eight years of incarceration to eight years of supervised probation.

He made no mention of her during the parole hearing.

Once he completes his Department of Corrections sentence, Randazzo is to serve a year in the Mesa County Jail for a separate sex-related offense involving children.

The two parole board members were to discuss Randazzo's case with the rest of the board before deciding on his parole application.

Meanwhile, Randazzo has filed suit against the state Department of Corrections, saying he has been deprived of the free practice of his religion because he was denied contact with church members.

The suit is pending in federal court in Denver.

Church founder faces weapons, wild-life charges

Source: United Press International

Date: June 17, 1985, Monday

Dateline: Molina, Colorado

Headline: Church founder faces weapons, wild-life charges

The founder and leader of the Spiral of Friends Church has an opulent style of life, including a chauffer-driven Rolls-Royce, but law enforcement officials say James Randazzo also has an illegal cache of weapons and poaches deer.

Randazzo has been charged with possession of a dangerous weapon, and is free on \$1,000 bond. A preliminary hearing is set for June 25, officials said Monday.

Randazzo, 46, was fined \$3,014 by the Division of Wildlife for poaching.

Mesa County Sheriff's Sgt. John Hakes said the department last month spent six hours in Randazzo's Molina home and removed several weapons, including a modified Uzzi submachine gun.

Randazzo said the officers "saw something that to them appeared illegal. Now it is up to a judge and jury."

Randazzo, who grew up in Quincy, Mass., has many followers who would be considered well educated members of the upper-middle class, including doctors, lawyers and geologists. Followers of the former bartender and karate instructor are required to pay him 10 percent of their incomes to be members of his church.

That helps Randazzo afford to live in church-owned homes in Molina and Mount Crested Butte, and pay a chauffeur to drive his Silver Spirit Rolls-Royce.

Randazzo admits to using the tax-free money to support his lifestyle, but said his teaching are worth the price.

"I'm here to help them. They pay me for it. I sell them the tools for daily living. I have final say on who joins the church," he said.

The church was incorporated in Utah and moved to a 100-acre farm in Molina in 1977.

Randazzo said the church also owns another home at Mount Crested Butte. Both are open to members at any time. He said 30 to 60 people belong to the church at any one time, although more than 1,000 people have belonged over the years.

Despite his lush surroundings, Randazzo said he believes material things are not the main purpose of life.

"You can only own one thing, your soul. Beyond that is zip, an illusion."

Randazzo sentencing scheduled

Source: United Press International

Date: July 28, 1989, Friday

Dateline: Grand Junction, Colorado

Sentencing is scheduled Oct. 20 for a couple convicted of sexually abusing and exploiting children.

A Mesa County District Court jury Thursday found James and Colleen Randazzo guilty of 18 of the 19 counts against them. The couple was accused of sexually assaulting two teenage boys and two teenage girls at a ranch operated by the Spiral of Friends Church. James Randazzo is head of the religious cult.

After the verdicts, Judge David Bottger continued James Randazzo's \$50,000 bond. The judge doubled Colleen Randazzo's bond to \$30,000.

Sect leader sentenced to eight years in sexual exploitation case

Source: Associated Press

Date: October 21, 1989, Saturday

Dateline: Grand Junction, Colorado

Byline: By Ellen Miller, Associated Press writer

Headline: Sect leader sentenced to eight years in sexual exploitation case

A woman convicted with her religious sect-leader husband of sexually exploiting teen-age boys was sentenced Friday to eight years in prison.

Colleen Randazzo "has repeatedly exploited children for her own sexual gratification and that of those around her," Mesa County District Judge David Bottger said in sentencing her on eight felony convictions.

Supplying teen-agers with cocaine, having sex with them and videotaping the sessions "is not casual or inadvertent acts," Bottger said. "I watched that videotape and I didn't see any love or affection at all. All I saw was sex.

"The only reason she doesn't have any other felony convictions is because her conduct was not detected and prosecuted sooner," the judge said.

Bottger allowed Mrs. Randazzo, 38, to go free on \$80,000 bond pending her appeal.

On the 1 1/2 hour videotape, Mrs. Randazzo's husband, James, is seen lying naked next to his wife and the teen-age boy as they have sex. He called out direction, made requests of them and fondled himself.

The Randazzos were leaders of a group called the Spiral of Friends, a Christianity-based cult whose five or six dozen members believed that James Randazzo had reached the "highest level of spirituality since Jesus Christ," according to testimony.

The Mesa County probation office had recommended a sentence of 90 days in jail, followed by probation, for Mrs. Randazzo, who had faced up to 66 years in prison.

Bottger said he couldn't agree because Mrs. Randazzo's conduct had not constituted an isolated incident and because she had not expressed remorse or acknowledged that what she did was wrong.

He sentenced her to two consecutive terms of four years each. Under state law, she will probably serve four years.

Her 50-year old husband, James, was convicted of 10 charges and also was to be sentenced Friday. However, his attorney was unable to be present, and his sentencing was rescheduled for Jan. 26. He faces up to 130 years in prison.

Mrs. Randazzo's attorney, **Robert Flynn**, said he would base his appeal on the admissibility of the videotape and the court's refusal to allow her to use a "choice of evil" defense.

Mrs. Randazzo had contended that she engaged in sex with the boy in the videotape because he was depressed and needed to have his self-esteem boosted.

Bottger, however, said her case "is not a case of religion ... or of therapy, or kindness or affection or love."

Fugitive religious leader nabbed

Source: Pueblo Chieftain

Date: October 29, 1992

Headline: Fugitive religious leader nabbed

Fugitive religious leader James Randazzo, convicted in 1989 of sex crimes, had skipped the country in 1990 & was nabbed in Hungary after a manhunt. He will now be sentenced on 10 counts of sexual exploitation of children & drug use. Randazzo founded Spiral of Friends Church in Molina.

Cult leader gets 16 years

Source: Rocky Mountain News

Date: January 30, 1993

Headline: Cult leader gets 16 years

Fugitive religious leader James Randazzo, convicted in 1989 of sexual exploitation of children, was sentenced to 16 years in prison. Founder of Spiral of Friends cult, he videotaped sex sessions with teenaged children during "therapy". His wife Colleen is serving an 8-year prison term. Randazzo had skipped the country, but was nabbed last fall in Hungary.

Ex-cult leader loses appeal in sex crimes

Source: Rocky Mountain News

Date: June 24, 1994, Friday

Byline: Associated Press

Headline: Ex-cult leader loses appeal in sex crimes

A former cult leader convicted of having sex with children of cult followers lost his bid Thursday to have the Colorado Court of Appeals overturn the jury findings.

James Vincent Randazzo is serving a 16-year sentence for the crimes and had a 1 1/2 year prison term added to that sentence after pleading guilty to skipping bond.

Randazzo, 54, had claimed that the trial court erred in denying his motion to sever the counts and grant separate trials on each.

He was convicted on 10 counts involving five instances of sexual misconduct with four children. Videotapes of some acts were introduced as evidence at his trial in Denver.

Randazzo and his then-wife Colleen were leaders of the Spiral of Friends cult with headquarters near Grand Junction.

The case was moved to Denver because of news coverage in Mesa County.

Randazzo also unsuccessfully claimed in his appeal that the trial court erred in admitting the videotape and certain testimony as similar transaction evidence.

He also failed in his allegation that certain acts of sexual conduct were necessary to avoid imminent injury to one of the children.

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