

The Richard Hall Exclusive

How a High School Reporter Got the Only Interview with Dick Hall for Four Decades

During the 1977-78 school year, Amy Shepherd (now Amy Jones) was a junior at Warren Central High School and a section editor for the Wigwam yearbook. The 15 students on staff were assigned articles to write for the yearbook, and Amy was responsible for a piece that would appear on the Current Events page.

One event came to mind. The Kiritsis kidnapping incident had taken place in downtown Indianapolis the previous year when Amy had been a sophomore, and though she remembered seeing the local news coverage, the story had faded from her mind. But as soon as she started researching the original event and the trial, she realized her current events assignment was one of the biggest stories of 1977.

Amy's first bold move was to call WIBC and ask to speak with Mr. Fred Heckman, the longtime and publically beloved anchorman who was personally involved in the Kiritsis incident. She had no idea if he would even speak with her.

Heckman not only took her call, but he recognized that she was doing something extremely difficult—and important: She was a high school student trying to write an article and shed light on one of the most puzzling and frightening crimes that had ever taken place in Indianapolis. Known for his

conservative, no-nonsense approach to reporting the news, Heckman was happy to be interviewed by a budding journalist and welcomed her to take all the time she needed. For Amy, this was one of the most incredible moments in her life, getting to talk with a renowned news idol.

Near the end of the conversation, Heckman suggested Amy should contact a sergeant with the Indiana State Police named Frank Love.

She wasn't sure what to expect. Law enforcement officials from the Indianapolis Police Department, the Indiana State Police, and the Marion County Sheriff's Department had already been interviewed by local TV and newspapers many times. It was common knowledge that in general, law enforcement thought Kiritsis had known very well that what he'd done was illegal and that the way he had modified the shotgun suggested premeditation.

But the journalist in Amy knew that if she could get Love to talk to her, she might find a new angle for the story. If she could just ask the right questions.

After giving it some hard thought and still coming up with nothing, Amy got the courage up to call Sgt. Love and was caught off guard by how emphatically he defended Tony. Even though Love never excused any of the things Tony had done to Hall, he felt that Tony's character had not been fairly portrayed in the media. The Tony Kiritsis the world saw during those three days in February was only one version of the man, not the whole man.

Sgt. Love knew many people who respected Tony, business owners and police throughout Speedway, elderly residents at Crestwood Village that Tony helped with groceries and other tasks. As explosive as he'd been out on Washington that morning in February '77, Tony Kiritsis was also helpful and made friends easily.

"I know the guy," Love said. "And I think I could have managed the standoff differently." He never thought Tony had really wired his apartment to explode, and he thought that the inadvertent bomb squad scare on the second day of the standoff was an unnecessary blunder. Love would have instead played against Tony's claustrophobia by shutting off the water and power to his apartment, hoping to drive him to surrender.

Love even implied that Tony may have been justified to some degree, that Meridian Mortgage had perhaps been overly aggressive with Tony and had backed him into a corner with the ultimate goal of foreclosing on his land. It was another incredibly rare thing for law enforcement to say.

His sympathy for Kiritsis only went so far though. If negotiations had failed and Tony had still refused to release Hall, Love would have shot Kiritsis without a moment's hesitation.

As quoted in Amy's yearbook article, Sgt. Love stated, "I respect both Tony and Mr. Hall. I wanted to avoid injury to either one if possible. If I had to hurt Tony to save Hall, I would have instantly though."

As stunned as she was to find a police officer who spoke so highly of Kiritsis, Amy's biggest surprise was yet to come.

Her third and final interview was a spur-of-the-moment call to Meridian Mortgage, the place where everything had started the previous year and where the hostage Dick Hall still worked.

Sitting on her bed with her bedroom door shut, Amy plotted, "I'm just going to call him and pretend I'm returning his call."

The receptionist answered, and Amy deftly said, "This is Amy Shepherd, returning Dick's phone call."

The receptionist put her through, and after a couple rings, Dick Hall picked up the phone.

Hall had held a single press conference a few days after his release and had testified during the trial, but he had not talked with anyone about the incident since. Nobody had gotten access like this. Not local newspaper reporters. Not local TV news giants like Mike Ahern and Howard Caldwell. Amy was shocked that the ploy had worked, and with barely a pause, she immediately came clean, telling Hall she was a high school student writing a yearbook article.

Dick Hall was taken aback for a moment, but perhaps because Amy wasn't from a newspaper or a TV news crew, he stayed on the line. Hall was polite



On February 8, Tony Kiritsis held Indianapolis businessman Richard Hall captive for a 70 hour ordeal. (Photo reconstruction: Kevin McKamey)

Kiritsis-Hall

"I was frustrated because I couldn't do anything," explains Fred Heckman of W.I.B.C. Mr. Heckman was one of the few contacts with Tony Kiritsis during the 70 hour vigil in which businessman Richard O. Hall was abducted. Kiritsis requested Heckman to be his radio contact after calling W.I.B.C. and telling them that he didn't like what the news media was saying about him. Mr. Heckman was then asked by the F.B.I. to become the official correspondent to Kiritsis.

At 4 a.m., February 9, the morning after Hall was abducted, Heckman was called and asked to calm Tony down. Kiritsis was screaming off the wall, shouting into the telephone, "I'm going to do it!" Kiritsis hung up the phone, and Heckman quickly called him back. "An hour later he was still screaming." "The next morning he called and apologized. He was calm and told me he respected me." Heckman commented that although the situation was handled well, it was still "touch and go" for the last twenty minutes. "I was standing next to him when he fired the shot into the air. I was ready to move when he shot it".

Another very different view was exhibited by Sergeant Frank Love or the Indiana State Police. "I never thought Tony was going to harm Hall. If he had wanted to, he would have done it in the office." As a long time friend of Kiritsis, Love continued, saying "I never felt the room was wired or that

he had dynamite." Working a total of 72 hours, Sergeant Love was part of the negotiating force for the Hall kidnapping.

The news media created a great deal of problems. There were so many different reporters that were scaring Tony, he didn't know who he would trust before it was over." He continued saying, "My heart bled for Tony. When asked about the bomb squad incident in which Tony panicked, thinking the bomb squad was going to rush the building, Sergeant Love commented, "They brought the S.W.A.T. team out and Tony panicked. The press then misquoted a correspondent from the bomb squad and gave Tony the impression that they were going to rush the building." When asked if he felt there were better alternatives for the situation, Love explained, "Tony is claustrophobia. Had I been in charge of the situation, I would have shut off the water and lights, and told Tony that if he harmed that man in any way, we would have surrendered immediately." Love went on to say, "I respect both Tony and Mr. Hall. I wanted to avoid injury to either one if possible. If I had to hurt Tony to save Hall, I would have instantly thought."

In March of 1978, Governor Otis Bowen signed a law into effect which states that "in order to prove insanity, the burden or proof lies on the defendant." This law came about because of the Kiritsis trial. At the trial, Kiritsis' bond was set at \$850,000. However, Kiritsis was found in contempt of court for the refusal of compliance

with the doctors examining him. Kiritsis is now in LaRue Carter Hospital pending a release.

In an exclusive telephone conversation, Richard Hall explained his thoughts of the ordeal saying, "I'm just trying to forget it ever happened". Mr. Heckman best summed up his feelings as he was talking on the phone to Kiritsis that one Wednesday morning. Kiritsis was yelling, "I'm just trying to save my life." Heckman replied, "I'm trying to save both our lives."

Hollandsburg Murders

Terror was brought to the small town of Hollandsburg on the night of Feb. 14, 1977 when four young men entered the home of Keith and Betty Spencer and murdered their four sons. Mrs. Spencer was the only survivor of the hideous crime that took the lives of her son Gregory Brooks, 22, and her stepsons Raymond, 17, Reeve, 16, and Ralph Spencer, 14.

Since only \$30 had been taken from the Spencer home, authorities ruled out robbery as a motive. Over 100 men were checked as suspects and nearly 200 men were interviewed about the murders. All rumors and possible leads had also been checked out by police. After an intensive investigation, police arrested Roger Drollinger, 23, Daniel Stonebraker, 21, Michael Wright, 20, and David Smith, 18, for their parts in the murders of the four young men.

In her testimony, Mrs. Spencer said that on the night of February 14, two men entered her home through the front door and two more entered through the back. Mrs. Spencer and her sons were forced to lie prone on the floor where they were shot in the head with sawed-off shotguns.

The mother of the four youths was able to "play dead" when one of the assailants blew off her wig believing it was part of her head.

After the long trials had ended, Wright, Smith, Drollinger and Stonebraker were each given life sentences for the murders.

Newspaper accounts of the murders started on Feb. 15, 1977 and ran for almost a complete year with the final article being on Feb. 14, 1978.