
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: [REDACTED], Supervising Attorney

FROM: Shannan Epps-Lever, Paralegal

SUBJECT: Herman Fripp Case
Our File No: W25-055

DATE: February 7, 2025

Pursuant to your request, I interviewed our client, Mr. Herman F. Fripp (also known as Frippe), who is facing murder charges in the Janet Donaldson murder case. Below are my notes from this interview.

Mr. Herman Fripp, who likes to go by the name of Frippe, came across as a very simple, straightforward man who is in his early 50's. He has only a high school education, but he did not seem embarrassed by this fact. He served 4 years in the U.S. Army and was quite proud of this fact.

Mr. Fripp's construction company has been quite successful and he says that this is attributable as much to luck as it is to skill; success has not gone to his head. He was very laid back during our interview—perhaps too much so. During our interview he slumped in his chair, let his eyes wander around the room, and picked at something all the time with his hands. He came across as an overgrown kid (very innocent acting). The only thing he appears to be serious about in life is his construction company, and when that topic came up, he got very intense and was all business.

Mr. Fripp professes complete innocence of the crime charged and does not have a clue who murdered Ms. Donaldson.

Mr. Fripp grew up in Tukwila, Washington and went to high school there as well (Tukwila High School, class of '89). He was just an average student; however, the summer after he graduated, he started working construction and knew that was what he wanted to do. He never had any interest in college.

In high school, Mr. Jack Gates was Mr. Fripp's best friend. After Mr. Fripp's summer construction job ended, it was actually Mr. Gates that convinced Mr. Fripp to join the military. After some convincing by Mr. Gates, Mr. Fripp decided joining the Army would give him the opportunity to travel outside of Washington, something Mr. Fripp had never been able to do as a kid.

Mr. Fripp served four years in the Army, including serving in an infantry battalion during the First Gulf War in 1991. While serving in the Middle East, Mr. Fripp occasionally saw his friend

Mr. Gates, who was serving in a supply unit. Mr. Fripp heard that Gates got hooked on drugs while serving in the Middle East, and may have even sold them, although Mr. Fripp was never quite sure about that. Mr. Fripp does know that Mr. Gates got caught doing something bad, served a little time in the brig, and was dishonorably discharged by the Army.

After the Army, Mr. Fripp moved to California where he worked as a laborer for various construction companies in the San Francisco area; he did some carpentry work too. Finally, about ten years ago, he moved back to WA with his girlfriend Jane Donaldson from California, and from their two-bedroom apartment, she helped him run his company, taking care of all things administrative.

The company struggled for years, and there were some weeks Mr. Fripp couldn't even afford to pay his girlfriend for the work she was doing for him. However, Mr. Fripp was determined to stay with it and Ms. Donaldson stood by his side. Mr. Fripp was also aware that his friend Jack, who was unemployed, wanted to come work for his company and help him out, but Mr. Fripp never offered him a job because of his prior suspected drug use and quite honestly because Jack had never directly asked him for a job.

In 2022, before they had broke-up, Mr. Fripp had asked Ms. Donaldson to marry him. To his surprise she turned him down saying that she did not want to be married to someone who had never been successful in life. They argued and she moved out, but she agreed to continue working for Mr. Fripp as long as he could write her a paycheck "that she could actually cash on payday." Mr. Fripp was sad their relationship had ended, but realized based on her comments to him that she was a different person than he had thought she was and was grateful to learn this before marrying her rather than after.

Shortly thereafter, Mr. Fripp started working out at the gym to kill the time he had previously spent hanging out with Ms. Donaldson. There he ran into one of Jack's ex-girlfriends, Suzie Carmichael and couldn't help but to notice how beautiful and funny she was. Before he even could consider asking Jack's permission to ask her out, he found himself asking her out. After just one date, Mr. Fripp had forgotten all about Ms. Donaldson and was convinced Suzie was the one for him. However, Mr. Fripp today cannot say whether he loved her then or even now; in fact, he says he is not sure what love even is. Nevertheless, Ms. Carmichael made him laugh and they never argued about stupid things like money or his business like he and Ms. Donaldson always did – at least not at first.

Shortly after he married Ms. Carmichael, Mr Gates started selling insurance. Mr. Kaden Choot also started working for Mr. Fripp around this time and this is about the time Mr. Fripp's company landed the big contract.

Since that time, Mr. Fripp's marriage to Ms. Carmichael has been a disaster; but he figures he married her, so he will just stick it out. Part of the problem is that Ms. Carmichael has spent just about everything Mr. Fripp has made over the past two years, including building a lavish home in Tukwila that is far beyond what he ever wanted or needed. But it kept her busy and quiet, so Mr. Fripp explained that he let her spend his money.

Ms. Carmichael and Mr. Fripp barely talk. Their love life is history, but as far as he knows she has remained faithful to him, as he has to her. She is in love with the money, and he is in love with being left alone.

After becoming successful, Mr. Fripp felt sorry for Mr. Gates who had been his best friend for so long. To help him out, he started giving Mr. Gates all of his insurance business.

Later Mr. Fripp made Mr. Gates his retirement account advisor, sort of. Mr. Fripp has never been any good at numbers himself and it suits him that a good friend like Mr. Gates would take care of it. To thank him for the business, last Christmas, Mr. Gates gifted Mr. Fripp a tool bag full of tools. Each tool was specially engraved with Mr. Fripp's nickname "Frippy." Mr. Fripp was very impressed with the thoughtful gift.

Mr. Fripp never has even bothered to check his retirement accounts. Mr. Gates always tells him what he has in the retirement accounts, and that suits Mr. Fripp just fine. All he wants to do is run his construction company and not to have to worry about anything else.

Mr. Fripp does not recall Mr. Gates calling him the day before Ms. Donaldson's murder or making an appointment to meet him at Farley's Fish Shack, located on Church Street in Tukwila at 8:00 p.m. Mr. Fripp was with Mr. Choot (Kato) all that afternoon and night and does not recall hearing from Mr. Gates at all. Mr. Fripp thinks Mr. Gates must just be confused or just forgot.

Mr. Fripp and Ms. Donaldson did not really talk too much after she broke up with him, but they had been over the drama for a long time. They had a good working relationship so far as Mr. Fripp knew, and he insisted that he had no reason to want to hurt her, much less kill her. He knows of no motive for anyone to kill Ms. Donaldson. He had heard a rumor a while back that she was dating someone pretty seriously, but he never found out who that was.

Mr. Fripp stated that he truly has no recollection of the night of the murder other than meeting Mr. Choot at about 4:00 p.m. at a jobsite and finishing some last-minute work on a job that needed to be done by January 30th. They worked there until about 10:00 p.m., then stopped by Mr. Fripp's house so he could change, and then went out drinking. His wife, Ms. Carmichael, was not home when he and Mr. Choot were there, so far as he knows; however, it is a big house, so it is possible that she could have been home. They do not keep up with each other anymore and Mr. Fripp admits he was actually hoping not to run into her.

That night, Mr. Fripp and Mr. Choot visited Betty's Good Time Bar and Grill, located on Main Street in Tukwila, for about an hour or so, and then went to the Blue Moon Cafe for several hours. Frankly, they got very drunk, and he does not recall when they left the bar or where they went next. Mr. Fripp stated that he woke up late in the morning in his car on a downtown street and Mr. Choot was gone. A couple of hours later Mr. Fripp heard about the murder of Ms. Donaldson and that the police were looking for him. He figured that there must have been some mistake, so he went down to the police station and turned himself in.

Mr. Fripp did waive his right to counsel, and he did tell the police at first that he had been working and then went home. He said that after remembering being there with Mr. Choot. When the police mentioned his wife saying he had not been there, he figured she must have come in after he and Mr. Choot left so then he told them about going out with Mr. Choot. He knows that this looks bad, but he insists that he never intended to lie to the police or hide anything from them. Mr. Fripp does not recall making any confession, and is adamant that he did not do it.

With a great deal of prodding, our client disclosed the following additional information. For about two months recently, Mr. Fripp had been seeing Linda Good, Ms. Donaldson's sister. They were never intimate, but there was definitely a romantic interest. Ms. Donaldson asked him about it the day before her death and she seemed angry that he had been hanging out with her sister. She asked if his wife, Ms. Carmichael, knew about it and Mr. Fripp shrugged her off saying, "There's nothing to know."

While they were seeing each other, Ms. Good had asked Mr. Fripp to fire Ms. Donaldson and hire her as his human resources manager instead. He refused, told her she was out of her mind, and that is when he stopped seeing Ms. Good. She called him and left e-mail messages several times after that, but he never responded. Mr. Fripp does remember that Ms. Good's last messages seemed angry and threatening though he cannot recall her actual words. His work email address is Herman.Fripp@FrippConstruction.com. She however was emailing his personal email, FrippyFripp@gmail.com, but Mr. Fripp has not checked that email in days. He is somewhat confident that he deleted Ms. Good's messages anyway, and the police have confiscated his tablet which is what he used to send personal emails back and forth with Ms. Good.

Mr. Fripp did have one prior arrest. He had been at a bar when a drunk guy started hitting on Ms. Donaldson. Mr. Fripp told the man to leave her alone, but he refused and instead sat down on a bar stool next to her. This angered Mr. Fripp so he hit the guy with his fist. Mr. Fripp pled guilty to simple assault and received a 30-day suspended sentence.

Mr. Fripp frequently has nightmares and flashbacks from Iraq, with gruesome scenes of body parts flying through the air. These flashbacks get much worse when he drinks, and he sometimes wakes up swinging violently and screaming. The last time he had such an episode was the morning following the murder, when he awoke in his car. He has never sought treatment for this problem.

One other thing, Mr. Fripp and Mr. Choot were also smoking marijuana as well as drinking heavily on the night of the murder.

My interaction with Mr. Fripp was very professional and I believe his version of the events. However, I was concerned that he was so laid back about the events surrounding the murder. It seems to me that someone that had been with Ms. Donaldson for so long would be more visually upset by her murder. My sense is that Mr. Fripp is laid back about everything;

██████████, Supervising Attorney

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however, the jury may see this as showing a lack of compassion and evidence of his contempt for Ms. Donaldson.