

"It's a very dangerous thing to believe in nonsense."

-- James Randi

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Update: Bennett Braun Case

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by David Bloomberg

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As discussed in previous issues (Vol. 6, No. 8-10; Vol. 7, No. 2 & 6), the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation filed a complaint against psychiatrist Bennett Braun, a leader in the repressed memory movement. They also filed complaints against child psychiatrist colleague, Elva Poznanski, and psychologist Roberta Sachs. The Braun proceedings were originally scheduled to be in May, but they were postponed until November so the Burgus children would not have to miss final exams. Also, as of May 26, Braun's attorney had not provided any defense material to the prosecution, as is required. The administrative judge gave him until June 1 to provide this material, or else it would be disallowed in the proceedings. In response, Braun's attorney provided a little information, but asked for a 60-day continuance to provide the rest. This despite the fact that the attorney has had Braun's case since the civil trial (at least a couple years ago). The Sachs case has not been assigned a hearing date yet. More

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The surprise, however, was that the Poznanski case had been settled without any action being taken against her license to practice medicine. Thomas Glasgow, chief prosecutor in this case, explained in a telephone interview why they settled with her.

A number of factors came into play in this decision. The most important was that Poznanski, unlike Braun and Sachs, has only apparently been involved in this one case that brought the complaint. The other two have had several complaints filed against them, and played major roles in the treatment of those involved. Poznanski is a child psychiatrist who was brought in because of the treatment of the children. She played a minor role in the grand scheme of

things and treated the children as though they had been abused – not as if they were part of a satanic cult.

In addition, Poznanski "took remedial action" by withdrawing cooperation from Braun and Sachs less than halfway through the treatment, when Braun allegedly brought guns in with the children. Up until then, she had agreed to work with Braun due to his standing in the psychiatric community, but she finally decided things had gone too far. After that, she did keep the children under her care because she did not feel Patricia Burgus was a fit mother at the time. (Burgus was still under Braun's care.)

Glasgow noted that Poznanski, in her seventies, has already lost much of her good reputation because of this case, and as part of the settlement, she must step down as the head of child psychiatry at Rush hospital. In addition, she will fully cooperate with the prosecution in this case – testifying against Braun and Sachs – and also with any federal, state, or local prosecutors that may undertake further cases. (When asked if this meant there were going to be further such cases, Glasgow said he is not at liberty to discuss any cases or investigations that might or might not be ongoing.)

In addition, the settlement mandates that she write to the Board of the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation, explaining what she did wrong and why. And she can no longer work with any form of recovered memory therapy or patients alleging satanic ritual abuse.

Glasgow said they agreed to take no action against her license due to her age, her cooperation, and the fact that she is the least culpable of the three. He noted that having somebody from the "inside" of this therapy will be a powerful piece of testimony that overrides any need to prosecute her separately. He said it furthers the Department's aims and goals in this case to have Poznanski testify against Braun and Sachs. Also, the Burgus family – the victims in this case – were consulted and agreed before the settlement was reached.

Glasgow took pains to point out that he would never make a deal like this with Braun, and the only thing he would settle for, should Braun seek a deal, would be the indefinite suspension of Braun's license to practice medicine – which is what he hopes to gain from prosecuting Braun anyway.