

The Internet Lynching of Art Bell.

Commentary by Investigative Journalist Ted Oliphant III.

I am a freelance investigative journalist. In 1990 I wrote and produced the documentary "UFOs: A Need To Know" which is still distributed nationally by Blockbuster Video. I have been a paid consultant to Television & Radio programs here in the United States, Sweden, Finland & Japan. My investigative work has been featured on "Sightings", "Encounters", the "CBS Sunday Night Movie", "Larry King Live" and in the independent documentaries of George Knapp and Linda Moulton Howe. I have been investigating the cases and claims of UFO witnesses for ten years now. As a former police officer, I investigated a spate of over three dozen cases of livestock crime during a six month period (1992-1993) in Fyffe, Alabama.

I have a good reputation for conducting competent investigations and checking facts, and I'm known for reporting truthfully without regard for where the cards fall. I am the friend of honest witnesses, and I am the enemy of those who try to deceive the public. I have a sometimes brash personality, but I've never been accused of lying in my reports, whether they be associated with Law Enforcement or Broadcast Journalism. In my opinion, reality is much more interesting than fiction so lying is never a necessity. The truth is entertaining enough for me. The silliness, craziness and outrageous circumstances people create, or find themselves (and others) in is more than enough material for me to pull from and share with everyone. I don't have much time for fantasy, trying to keep up with reality is exhausting by itself.

Today I would like to report a situation I found myself involved in last October, 1998. The facts stated here are true as of my personal knowledge, and, if called as a witness, I could and would testify competently hereto:

In approximately November, I had a film crew in Pahrump, Nevada for the second time, the first was in April of 1999. I was not present this time, but my associate Ted Bonnitt was. Art Bell had gone off the air unexpectedly, and Mr. Bonnitt and I were hoping (again) to get an interview with Art, though he (Bell) had not agreed to do so.

In mid October, 1998, I had been "online" with "Sightings On The Radio" host Jeff Rense, who had interviewed me twice previously on his show. We discussed the fact that Art Bell was "off the air". We didn't know "why" Art was off the air, But Jeff told me that a private investigator was looking into Art Bell's past. I asked Rense if he could get me the private investigator's phone number, he said he'd try. In the next email from Jeff, he stated I "have to be careful with this one" which I took as a friendly warning that I might be venturing into dangerous territory. Later in the day Jeff called me at home and gave me the phone number of one Clay Fondren, who he said was the private investigator. Minutes later I called the number which was answered by a young man, who just said hello. My first clue that I wasn't necessarily calling a licensed private investigator. I told Mr. Fondren that Jeff Rense had given me his phone number.

Mr. Fondren told me he had information regarding alleged activities by Art Bell in the production of pornographic videotapes allegedly produced by Bell and a number of other TV station employees in the Monterey/Salinas area of California. Mr. Fondren stated these events purportedly occurred over two decades ago and that Asian prostitutes, some possibly minors had been involved in these alleged filmings. Clay Fondren further stated that Bell had been arrested, arraigned, convicted and sentenced for these "crimes" and Fondren supplied me with the names of about five people he claimed were directly involved, either as witnesses or "co-defendants". Fondren went on to give me their present whereabouts should I want to interview them. I told Fondren that I'd be willing to personally look into these allegations because I was trying to figure out why Art Bell had left the airwaves unexpectedly. I didn't want to be scooped. I was immediately able to contact two of the individuals whose names Mr. Fondren had earlier provided me.

After brief interviews via telephone, I determined that only one of the individuals I spoke to had a "vague memory" of "something" involving Mr. Bell, but he couldn't remember anything specific. So I contacted two other sources I've known over the years to see if they knew anything. One is a journalist, the other is a cop. Both of them told me the same thing, they said that John Oates of "reverse-speech" fame was the man behind the investigation into Art Bell's alleged criminal record. They both gave me the same story, that Mr. Oates was angry at Art for being "thrown off the air" during an on-air interview, and that Oates was exacting "revenge" for what he believed was mistreatment by Mr. Bell. Both of my sources told me they were sure of this and they both requested anonymity, which I did promise.

In my brief, cursory examination of these alleged claims, I never inspected any public records regarding this alleged matter, not did I employ or request anyone else to do so. I felt at the time, as I do today, that there was no merit to these allegations. About a week later, Clay Fondren called me. I told him that I had no further interest in the matter and I declined to participate any further into any investigation of Mr. Bell.

On May 21, 1999 I spoke to Art Bell and I asked him the pointed questions. Here's what Art had to say:

Oliphant: "Art, is there any truth at all to the allegations made against you by Robert Stephens and David John Oates?"

Bell: "Absolutely not"

Oliphant: "Have you ever been arrested?"

Bell: "Yes, I used to run a dating service in San Diego. The District Attorney came in and grabbed everything. Ten days later the D.A.'s (District Attorney's) Office said "whoops", realized they'd made a mistake and dropped the charges".

Oliphant: "So that's it?, that's all there was to it?"

Bell: "Well I sued them and won \$50,000.00"

Oliphant: "Now what"

Bell: "Well we're filing a major lawsuit against Oates & Stephens next week"

Oliphant: "Is anyone else going to be sued?"

Bell: "No, no at this point".

Oliphant: "Am I going to be sued?"

Bell: "No! You didn't do anything wrong".

So there you have it sports fans, the rest of the story. You have to take responsibility for what you say. You don't make public accusations against people unless you can back those claims with evidence that will hold up in a court of law, because that's where you're going to end up.

You only have to be accused in America for the public to declare you guilty, if you falsely accuse another, you too shall reap what you so.

Confucius say: "He who sets out on a path of revenge, should dig two graves".

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