

Texas After Violence Project
Interview with Mr. Darren Long

Date: August 25, 2008

Place: Austin, Texas

Equipment: Sony mini-HD DV camcorder; Sennheiser external microphone

Recorded on: Sony mini-DV cassettes

Interviewer: Virginia Raymond

Videographer: Gabriel Solis

Transcription: Eleana Diaz and Susanne Mason

Reviewed & edited: Sabina Hinz-Foley (March 31, 2009)

SOLIS: Okay, so all right, great. So just really quickly we are an organization who are trying to document the effects of violent crimes and capital punishment on

Texans and Texas communities. Today we are interested to talk to you about Deputy Keith Ruíz. Like I said before, this isn't a journalistic interview, we don't have any predetermined questions, we are not expecting you to say anything. Really what we want to do is we just want to capture and document your story, your experiences with your work, in particular with Deputy Ruíz. Our hopes are to donate this interview to the Center for American History at the University of Texas. It's an—there's an archive there. But before we do any of that, you're in complete control of this interview. We'll record the interview today. I'll go back to the office. Within a week I'll send you a D.V.D. copy of it. You could look it over—you can look it over. The transcripts will take a little longer just because they're so time consuming maybe even a month or two. But when we give you a transcript we'll ask you to look it over and if there's anything in the interview that you do not want to go on the public record, you just mark that out. We'll make the appropriate edits and it won't be there. You can decide that you don't want any of the interview to be in the public record and it's gone. I mean you're in complete control of this interview. After we make the appropriate edits we'll send you—we'll send another transcript to you and we'll ask you to donate the interview to us and at that point we'll make it public. After it's public we have no control—how people will use it.

RAYMOND: One side thing, we actually won't make it public immediately. We will ask you to decide at what point it can become public. So it might be the year 2050 or it could be that day. That's also—Sorry.

SOLIS: No, that's fine, thank you, I forgot about that. Of course the only—the only risks involved in doing this interview is that you may get upset or something like that while talking about something like this. So here's our consent form. I've already put my name on the top so if you just wanna look it over and just sign at the bottom please.

[Major Darren Long signs consent form]

SOLIS: Thank you. Do you have any—this is your pen—do you have any questions about anything, the interview, the eventual donation process or anything like that? Our project or anything before we get started?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Nope.

SOLIS: Okay great. So I guess we'll begin.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Okay.

SOLIS: Okay thank you. Today is August 25th, 2008. We're in the office of Major Darren Long at the Keith Ruíz Building at Travis County Sherriff's Department. Present in the room is Gabriel Solis, that's me. To my right is Virginia Raymond and observing is Diana Salgado. Thank you for having us this morning.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: You're welcome. It's a pleasure.

SOLIS: Can we—I wonder if we can begin by maybe—you can just give us a little background as to who you are? maybe your educational—your education path, your eventual—your career path?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: How I came to work at the sheriff's office?

SOLIS: Sure, sure. Yeah.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: It was in 1987. I was a construction worker here in Austin, Texas and the construction business was on a decline in the mid-80s and one of my friends worked here at the sheriff's office and guided me towards this organization. This is a professional organization so I put in my application. A couple months later there I was working in the jails. About 1988 I was working down at the Travis County Jail downtown. I met Deputy Keith Ruíz and we socialized together. Went out to different venues and had the same round of friends so we all kind of hung out together. Went off into the patrol bureau—the law enforcement bureau and Keith and I were district partners. He was in the next district next to me on the same shift, the same patrol shift. We learned how to play golf together, backed each other up on calls, continued working together then I went off to SWAT. About a year later Keith followed and we were both on the SWAT team together. I stood in his wedding. We've known each other for a long time. His wife Bernadette—I went all through school here in South Austin so I knew his wife. So we both start having children with our wives and start doing different things together. We liked going over to each other's house watching the fights whenever there was a De La Hoya fight or something like that. About in the mid-90s I went off into the criminal investigation division and Keith took my position as team leader on the SWAT team but we still officed across the hall from each other so we still got to have a cup of coffee nearly every morning together, and talked about the team, and talked about my—what I was doing—investigations. So we still kept in touch on a daily basis and kept each other updated on what our kids were doing in sports and stuff like that. About when I started off in major crimes, Keith was still a team leader of the SWAT team or one of the team leaders and I never will forget that day I got a page cause I was in major crimes and major crimes works all the homicides, suicides, armed robberies, armed bank robberies, stuff like that—the most serious crimes. And I got a page that evening that said, "All major crime detectives respond to this location for officer down." We didn't know what it was; it was a very short page. We get 'em on our pager with very limited information. So I went over there and I was driving up over there in Del Valle I saw Star Flight taking off and so I—I—I still hadn't quite put everything together yet because it was—I had talked to—I was also the tactical commander for the Central Texas Narcotics Task Force.

(phone rings)

SOLIS: Would you like to take—?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: So anyways, I was—task force and part of my duties was all the—to be response for all the tactical operations where Keith helped me train the area narcotics officers that were assigned on this task force so on entries and basic little things as far as tactics. So Keith and I had developed a relationship because that was before I went to Major Crimes and I was over in the Narcotics Task Force. We shared resources whenever we had to do search warrant stuff and I coordinated with him whenever it was something too risky for the narcotics officers to do. We would have to do a risk analysis and if it had so many points then the SWAT team would do it and Keith and I would always coordinate back and forth on that. So I knew that the operation that night when Keith was killed there was a narcotics search warrant going on that night. I didn't know who was going to execute the search warrant, if SWAT was going to be involved or not. So when I

drove up, I saw the Narcotics Task Force vehicles and personnel around but then I saw one of the sergeants come up and he was Sergeant Richard Hale and he was very upset and he looked at me and then he kind of looked away, so I knew something was bad. And he didn't—it's like he didn't want to face me or something so I was like—I still didn't know it was Keith because there was no names at this point. And I walked up and I saw the looks of everybody because I worked with all these folks and everybody's face was very grim and I'm looking at—and I go—go up to Sergeant Richard and I go, "What happened? What's going on?" And he goes, "Darren, it's Keith." And I still didn't know—it still didn't click and I'm going, "Keith?" I thought it was just a narcotics search warrant so I'm thinking, Well they must have got a new agent. And I'm saying, "Keith? Keith who?" And he looked at me and he put his hand on my shoulder and he goes, "Darren, it's Keith Ruiz." And they had my guys—our guys that worked on Keith when he was shot and knew that—and he died in their arms so they flew him to Brackenridge, but they already knew he was dead. It was for the family and for just appearance-wise but the officers that were working on him, they told me that he died there. Or they felt that he did; they're not doctors or anything but they felt like they saw him take his last breath. So that was very traumatic because I'd just lost one of my good friends. But then I had a responsibility as a Major Crimes detective to continue working so that was kind of—it was torn because I didn't want let—'cause there's only four of us in Major Crimes and this was gonna be a capital murder case, and we knew we needed all hands on deck to help work this and so everybody started gathering up. The media was coming and everything like that and then my sergeant at the time, Sergeant Tommy Wooley—I forgot where in the process, but it was in the first few hours, he came up to me and he goes, "Darren are you going to be able to do this?" And I said, "For Keith I will. For Keith and Berna and his family I'll be able to do it." Because I wanted to make sure that everything was done right and the other—the other—that's not to take away from the other, better detectives because they had a lot more experience than I did but I still—I still wanted to help. And looking back on it, if I probably would have done—if I was a supervisor of the unit, I would have done it differently. I wouldn't have let me work on that deal. I would have probably assigned it to somebody else because I was too close to Keith. Those forty-eight hours that the four major crimes detectives that were up were working on that and going through his clothes, processing the crime scene and looking at the blood and it was hard—it was hard on all of us.

You would take time to cry a little bit then say, "Okay, let's get back to work," because everybody on the major crimes unit, they all knew Keith too. They all—Keith had been around for a long time in our department. So—and Keith's personality was just—everybody that was around Keith liked him. That's just the way Keith was. He was funny, had a great sense of humor. He was a great tactical operator. You want him. I guess the best compliment I can give, as a SWAT team member and a tactical operator, is you would go through any door with him. So you didn't care what was on the other side of the door as long as you had these certain guys or team members—everybody on that team I felt the same way about, but you felt like you could go into any bad situation. You felt like you only had to worry about your area of responsibility and if Keith was on your side or watching your back, you knew you didn't have to turn around and look because Keith was taking care of it. So we went through that process. It was hard. Every day was a little different because I'd remember different things we would do: going water skiing at his parents' house out at Lake Travis, learn to play golf together, and laughing at each other, watching each other's kids kind of play sports, or talk about it. We didn't go to each other's kids' sports events all the time but we'd certainly talk about it the next day at work—what they did.

But what was—what was—it was—I guess it was different for me after that for law enforcement. Up to that point when bad stuff happened it always happened to somebody else, somebody I didn't know. And even in the sheriff's office, we hadn't had an officer killed as long as I was in law

enforcement so it was something that happened other places; you've heard about it but I didn't really worry about it. You know what I mean? But when it's that close to home, it's like reality sets in that this is a dangerous job. Up until then it was—until something bad happens you don't really think of it that seriously so that kind of changed my perspective, gave me some new insight on the planning of or having whenever I was over at critical incidents. Thinking about what's worth it and what's not. Is some dope worth an officer's life? Depending on when you should serve that warrant or not. So it gave me a different perspective. It was certainly hard that first couple of years even talking about it because I guess it's different; like my dad died of colon cancer over nine months so you had a chance to say goodbye and get used to the idea, but when it happens overnight and you don't get a chance to say goodbye or anything it's really hard. I think it's harder when it's unexpected like that. And so it was hard for a lot of us in the sheriff's office that were close to Keith and I know it was certainly hard on Berna and the three boys. I can't imagine that loss, being a father. That's what would kill me is seeing those three boys, especially like at the funeral.

SOLIS: Did you have any—did you have any contact with the family—with his family immediately after the—?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Immediately after?

SOLIS: At this incident or in the weeks that followed, or even today. Do you have any contact—?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Actually—I mean—actually, yes I do. Keith's parents were actually—one of my nieces just got married about three weeks ago and Keith's parents were there and we always hug each other and say hello. They invite us every year to their gathering out there at the lake. They know my wife Laura too and our kids. Berna—I see her every once in a while but I don't stay in close contact with her. But I see her like at the dedication for this and stuff like that. I don't know why we don't stay in contact.

SOLIS: I was just curious. How did—how did this tragedy effect the sheriff's department in general? I know you were particularly close with Keith Ruiz and you spoke a little bit of how it affected you and changed your perspective of your own work. Did you—I mean—what was the general—what was it like at the sheriff's department after this happened with it from your perspective?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Very solemn. Everybody kind of walked around. People that were really close to Keith kind of walked around in a zombie state—disbelief. But in our line of work, you know once you get in that car or once you step foot back in that jail you can get your head on straight. So for the most part you saw everybody just continue their routines, continue what they did. But for the people that was closer to Keith it was—every day was different. We all had our responsibilities. We would see each other in private and they'd have a cry or a hug thinking of Keith but this office is—we deal with a lot of stuff on a daily basis. Not to that extent but we do see a lot that normal people don't usually see or shouldn't see. It's just that line of work that we're in. Law enforcement officers see a lot of stuff that—probably not good for them in the long term. Unnatural things. You have to—it's almost kind of going against your own—your own senses where—where people are running away from stuff and we're running towards it. So it's kind of a—and when something, like when Keith got killed I guess it brings it a little closer to home of

what can happen—what can happen, you know? How would my family be? What's gonna happen after that? I don't know if I answered your question.

SOLIS: Oh, sure. I wonder if maybe—if I could transition over and talk about the suspect or the trial of the suspect. Did you keep up—did you have any interest in keeping up with that?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: I was—I testified a couple of days in there because of the tactics being used and my part in the investigation. Because Delamora—I don't know if we can use names but Delamora—that day—because when his—when his hand was shot he got blood over a lot of—a lot of the officers that handled him. So I had to go get a consent from him so we could test his blood to see if he had any diseases or anything like that so we could—if we had to send our officers to the hospital to get the cocktail to try to kill whatever he had. I had to find out; I had to get consent so I had to be nice to this guy who had just killed my best friend or one of my best friends. And this was in twenty-four hours. A Texas Ranger was with me. I think they kind of put him with me just to make sure I wouldn't do anything but I was doing my job being a professional. I had to go talk to the guy to get him to sign it. That was—I remember that was kind of strange—a strange feeling. Here I am kind of asking nicely for consent when someone had just killed one of my good friends; that was kind of strange and kind of tough. But then during the trial the courtroom was always full. They asked me different questions as far as the tactics being used because I interviewed Craig Smith and Billy Pool who were up at the front of the lineup and Deputy Craig Smith was the one that shot the gun out of Delamora's hand. So—but all of them were heroes in my book that were out there; the actions they took, the professional control they exhibited when they—anybody—nobody was out there but them and they talked him out anyway after he just killed one of their guys. In the dark at night, when he came out and he had something in his hand or it appeared he had something in his hand. They could have been easily justified in shooting him but they showed restraint—showed professionalism. But anyway, during the trial, I testified on the tactics that were used during entry. All the different areas that I helped or assisted in the investigation as far as interviews and statements I took, evidence I collected—just stuff like that. So the—and that was kind of reliving everything—that was—it can be difficult at different times. Sometimes your emotions well up without being able to control it depending on—sitting there and looking at Keith's shirt, looking at the hole, the bullet hole and everything and that's very difficult even to this day. So the trial—we—it was really interesting. The prosecutors, Ammon and Joe for the district attorney's office, were so involved and they—you could tell they felt so much pressure to win this case. You could—we didn't have to say anything to the—you know what I mean? We didn't—I think they were—felt so much stress over trying to win this case and do it right that we didn't have to say a word. We could see the stress and the anxiety in their faces, trying to get everything right. And when we won, it was really—we celebrated all in our own different ways. But hugging the A.D.A.s and they hugged us, so it was very emotional and emotional for the family—for Berna. She was there everyday. It was hard talking about Keith and looking out there—Berna—and knowing what she's—what the rest of her life is gonna be and their sons without a father; so that was hard. So we won the trial. I don't know why the district attorney's office didn't go for the death penalty—that upset us. We believed it should have been left to the jury not up to the district attorney whether they should go for the death penalty or not. The district attorney made that decision, which was against ours and against Berna's. We figured if it was going to be a capital murder case, let the punishment be decided by the jury too but they just tried it as a life sentence so they didn't seek the death penalty. We disagreed with that but at least he got life in prison.

SOLIS: We've spoken with other deputies that we've interviewed here about Keith Ruiz and they've also expressed their frustration that the death penalty wasn't sought. What is that—what is that like to believe that he should have the death penalty and for him to only get life in prison. You said it was—that you're upset that it was not left in the hands of the jury but the D.A. Was there any conflict between the deputies here in the sheriff's office who felt that he deserved the death penalty and the D.A. who wanted to go for life?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Yes, yes. But, we didn't want to do anything during the trial, especially publicly that would take away from the focus or to put more pressure on the D.A.'s office than they already had. So we talked about it amongst ourselves—how it upset us. Because we believe as long as we have that—that access to the death penalty in Texas, especially for people that kill police officers and correction officers, why not? Why was it in this case? We felt like it was justified. I know one of the parts of this interview is the issue of the death penalty itself. There's a lot of controversy on that issue. What do I believe? I believe that sometimes eye for an eye. And sometimes when you kill a police officer, I'm sorry; I believe the ultimate penalty is death. So, now I also believe that—I believe in the due process and making absolutely sure that we got the right person but in a situation like this, we knew we had the person. He was there; we took him in custody at the scene so there was no question of if it was the person. It's not an eyewitness type of deal and then the person got away—No. He did it. He was there. There's no question of who did it. That's the kind of case that I believe—when there's absolutely no question of who committed that horrible offense—that—those are the type of cases that I believe it's justified.

SOLIS: Virginia, do you have any questions for—?

RAYMOND: First of all, thank you so much Darren. This is—I know this must be very painful to even remember or talk about

MAJOR DARREN LONG: It is. It is. I fight back the emotion when I really talk about it. That's Keith up there and Keith over there. This is when we were taking pictures out in Zilker Park and, of course, he liked to goof around too. There's a statue out there we all just kinda—

RAYMOND: Oh, that's Webb and Bedichek and Dobie. It's called Philosopher's Rock. That's a wonderful picture.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: One of our goofing moments together.

RAYMOND: So is Keith the one right here?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Keith is right there.

RAYMOND: Yeah, okay. And who are the other people in this?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Well, from left to right: that's Rick Cospers who just went off to Iraq again last couple of weeks; that's Deputy Kenny Murchison, our detective; he's a detective right now, Detective Robert Spear. Sergeant Doug Teeg is one of my very good friends; well, all of these guys were my very good friends: Keith, myself and this is Deputy John Garza, who was

Keith's partner at the time who also took it very hard, understandably why.

RAYMOND: And who took this photograph?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Our crime lab.

RAYMOND: It's a beautiful photograph.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Yeah our crime lab guys and then there's another picture or two with Keith over there in my—

RAYMOND: Can you show us?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: —with some of the SWAT team—the old SWAT team. There's Keith right there. This was on the same day as that. We were out there taking a team picture.

RAYMOND: And would you identify everybody in this one?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Everybody in this one?

RAYMOND: Yeah.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Okay from left to right, that's detective Robert Spear. That's Larry York; he no longer works here. That's me. That is Lieutenant Tommy Blackwell; he was lieutenant over the SWAT team at that time. There's Rick Cosper; John Garza; Keith; Kenny Merchison, who I identified earlier; Rory McGann, who no longer works here; Sergeant Doug Teeg; George Stahl, who still works here; Derrick Hill, he still works here. That's Mark Saul, who's now the major over at the administration support bureau. He's right next-door. And that's Amber Reyna; she's a detective with us.

RAYMOND: Beautiful. What year more or less?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Gosh, that was in ninety—I want to say '97—1997.

SOLIS: Thank you for showing us.

RAYMOND: Actually, if you don't mind, I do have a couple more—

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Sure.

RAYMOND: This is to get away a little bit from talking about Deputy Ruiz himself a little bit but—you mentioned that when there's a certain number of points or factors, or something—I guess risk factors that determines whether or not a SWAT team is going to be used in an undercover operation. Can you tell us what those factors are or what those points are?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: What we do is—it's called a risk analysis. And it's a sheet that's got different things that has score ratings, okay? So say there—one area would have their criminal history. Say if they've had prior—like a homicide, an aggravated charge with a deadly weapon,

something like that you'd get so many points compared to someone that had no criminal history, which was a zero. Then you'd have different points according to the location. Let's say it's just a plain house with a regular door—it's very low. But if you've got a house with a barbed wire fence around it where you've gotta cut the chain and get in and then you look at the house itself and it's got burglar bars all the way around the doors and windows. It's more fortifications takes more time to get in so it'd be a higher rating. Okay. Then the charge itself and what we're—why we're serving the warrant. Then their potential for having weapons there. So maybe there's been other—they've been involved in other crimes or other search warrants where weapons have been seized. Dogs, like vicious pit bulls that they chain up around their house, which can—a lot of these times when you're serving like a narcotics search warrant—they'll do different fortifications to keep you—it takes you longer to get in so they can have a chance to flush their stuff or get to their weapons to harm you. So, there's a lot of different factors and then once it adds up—and I don't know what the risk analysis looks like today, but back then it was a certain, after you got up over a certain threshold of numbers then it was a mandatory SWAT operation. If it was underneath that then you could use different resources but once it reached up a certain threshold then it becomes mandatory that it was a SWAT operation.

RAYMOND: So assuming that the way that people ranked a barbwire, or a pit bull, or different factors it was pretty much mandatory. It was not—I mean, it was not within anybody's discretion. It's not like a judgment call so much as just—

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Right. Once it's cut clear like that then it takes it out of the discretion of whoever is executing that warrant. Now, in this case, it didn't reach that threshold. Matter of fact it was a very low number—very low number. That just goes to show you just like when you see on TV a routine traffic stop. Well in our book there's nothing—there's not a routine traffic stop because you've had officers killed that you thought was a routine traffic stop. This was a no frills search warrant where it didn't rate very high and who would have known this would have happened after that? Who would have known the decisions that Delamora made that led to Keith's death? Most people, they see a SWAT team trying to get into their house are just going to give up but some people choose to fight and sometimes they—they win. Eventually he lost but he killed Keith.

RAYMOND: So, seeing that the threshold wasn't—and I don't at all mean to second-guess, but it's a tragedy all around unspeakable. But are you saying when you also say that it was a low threshold that it would not have met the mandatory SWAT team?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Yeah it didn't meet it. It was way underneath it. It was way underneath it. Like I believe, at that time, the number system that we had, it had to rate like a twenty-four to be mandatory. I believe his was underneath a ten. Very low, very low—what you would consider at that time low risk. But, of course, you look back on it. It wasn't low risk, obviously. That's just like you don't know what you're going into. There's always unknowns, just like pulling someone over at a traffic stop. It's like someone walking into a church and shooting everybody. Who would have known? You try to think of those things but stuff always happens. You try to learn from it, try not to make the same mistakes if you made any or change your tactics, whatever.

RAYMOND: Forgive my ignorance, but how long have SWAT teams been in existence in Travis County?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Since the Charles Whitman U.T. shooting. Matter of fact, that's what launched SWAT teams. It was that incident.

RAYMOND: Over the country you mean?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Yes, yes. Nationwide.

RAYMOND: Wow. I didn't realize that.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: That's what sparked SWAT teams because they didn't have the type of equipment they needed to with the regular patrol officers responding. They had people out there with deer rifles shooting at this guy. So yes, if you look back at the archives and look at law enforcement history, SWAT teams started getting together after the Charles Whitman shooting.

RAYMOND: So does that also mean that Travis County was perhaps one of the first in the country?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: No.

RAYMOND: Okay.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: The first SWAT team that the Sheriff's office got together I believe was in the—and you would have to verify this—was in the late-80s. When I went on the team in '93, I was part of the first full-time SWAT team. I was on the original full-time SWAT team. Prior to that it was like an extra duty for officers that you volunteered for. In '93 it became full time and I was part of the first full-time team where all we did was also—it was also fugitive apprehension slash SWAT. So we served all the felony warrants for Travis County and then trained and did SWAT operations as well.

RAYMOND: And am I correct in understanding that SWAT team officers have to have training and physical fitness above and beyond other officers?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Yes. Yes. We have—I don't know what all their standards are as of today, but they get a couple hours a day to work out. They train together all daylong, I believe every Tuesday. They have quarterly physical fitness tests. They have to stay at a certain level or eventually they'll be kicked off the team. They have very high shooting standards that they have to adhere to, to stay on the team. Even their appearance is different. And they're expected to keep up their appearance; the way they keep their uniform and everything about them is held at a higher level. Send them to a lot of expensive, valuable training. They train together. They do a lot of things together. It's a very close-knit team. And where you— And it has to be that way, where you're relying on each other in the worst incidents usually and, so yes, it is. They are held at a higher standard. But they're also provided the time to keep their standards up every day.

RAYMOND: So, they're the ones, the elite that everybody would pretty much look up to?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: As far as tactical operations, yes. Yes, that's—a lot of young officers that are staying in shape and stuff, that's what they're striving to be someday is a SWAT officer. It's very hard to get in. You have to go test and everything else to be selected and then to stay on

the team, you gotta keep up your standards and everything you do.

RAYMOND: When you say the courtroom was full—I'm switching again back to the trial of Mr. Delamora. The courtroom was full the whole trial. Who was it full with?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: I think it was—there were a lot of different people there. You had Keith's family, of course. You had, of course, the investigators were always there. Would step in and out just to see how the trial was going 'cause it went on for about a week. You had the public there. You had Delamora's family there. You had media there. I think you had just some public interested in it. 'Cause Keith had a lot of friends. So you had different people coming in different days. And 'cause those courtrooms aren't that big where the public seating can sit, so it was just a whole combination of people. People interested in the case. Family of both sides. You also had—I would see some different assistant District Attorneys in there just to see how a capital murder case is tried. So you had a lot of folks interested in that case. Just like I said, we don't—thank God—we don't have very many officers killed in this area. And when it does happen—it's not—that's when you really see the law enforcement community come together, where it doesn't matter what uniform you're wearing or what agency you're with, when something—when a tragedy like that happens, you'll see that brotherhood really come together like you don't normally see it. And especially when an officer is killed in the line of duty.

RAYMOND: I remember reading a few months ago when the 5th Circuit was re-hearing the case about David Powell who was convicted of killing—

MAJOR DARREN LONG: David Powell—

RAYMOND: Ralph Ablanedo.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Yeah. I—I'll tell you something interesting, and I hate to cut you off but—

RAYMOND: No, no.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: — I fingerprinted David Lee Powell a long time ago on one of his appeals when I was a booking officer. And when that happened — that happened just right — not too far in front of Travis High School. I was attending Travis High School when that happened and he came running towards our school — towards that field when that — when that tragedy occurred. And then when I took over evidence about three years ago — I was over evidence for about a year and a half — I went through — we still have Ablanedo's "Sam Brown" —his duty belt, the hand grenade that was thrown at him. A bunch of the other stuff that was involved in that case we still have in our evidence locker and I looked through some of it—looked at some of it.

RAYMOND: That is really, Wow. It's a small community, I guess, so things affect people — I guess what I was starting to ask about is — I know that a lot of officers went to the 5th Circuit, or I'd read in the paper that a lot of officers went to the 5th Circuit to hear that appeal, the most recent appeal. Did people from the — was that the Police Department only or were there also Sheriff's Department people who went? Do you know?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: I don't know. I don't have any idea.

RAYMOND: Okay. Just when you talked about that brotherhood coming together—

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Yeah, I think that's been tried about more than — I don't know how many times that case has been appealed. I mean it's kinda — how many times is this gonna happen? Keep finding him guilty. Now, like I said, I believe in the appeal process and our due process, but that's another one where he was caught at the scene. And he did it. Sorry, I don't have much feelings for it.

RAYMOND: Well you— but to go back to Delamora's trial, you mentioned that you all celebrated, at least quietly or in some form—

MAJOR DARREN LONG: No, it wasn't quiet.

RAYMOND: It wasn't quiet—

MAJOR DARREN LONG: No, when the jury was— when the verdict was read, oh no, it wasn't quiet.

RAYMOND: Tell me about—what was it like?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: It was a—just waiting—that waiting for the jury to come out. Then when they said he was guilty. Oh no, it wasn't quiet at all.

RAYMOND: Tell me about that.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Everybody stood up and hugged each other, hugged Berna, hugged the A.D.A.s The Assistant District Attorneys were just as emotional as we were, hugging each other. Saw tears in everybody's eyes. It was just — no, it wasn't quiet.

RAYMOND: Was there—tell me about the noise.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: I don't — you tune out certain things. I don't remember the noise. I just remember the looks in everybody's faces and seeing everybody's emotions and the relief. Everybody looking towards Keith's family to see how they're reacting, and—I never looked at Delamora's family. I didn't care. That's bad for them. I'm not saying that, but that's not where my focus was. My focus was on this side of the room.

RAYMOND: Okay, so you had this non-quiet, noisy moment of celebration when the verdict first comes back. How does that change then, or what's the process of then realizing that it's — the D.A.'s not gonna go for death penalty on —

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Well, we knew that before.

RAYMOND: Okay.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Before the trial even started we knew that. So our focus was, Okay,

at least find him guilty, send him to prison for the rest of his life. At least that. So, at that time, the emotion was just glad that he was found guilty and that he's going to be in prison for the rest of his life. That was—the decision not to go for the death penalty—that wasn't the time or place to be talking about it.

RAYMOND: Okay.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: We were just glad that we won. Now, afterwards we're going, Golly. See the jury found him guilty, we should of left it—we felt like the District Attorney should have left it in their hands, whether—'cause it was only—there's only two choices in a death penalty case. It's either life in prison or death. But we felt like it should have been—he was tried by jury of his peers. He was found guilty by a jury of his peers. It should've been left up to them, a jury of his peers, what the punishment was. That's the way we felt. Still to this day we feel that way.

RAYMOND: So, do you think that the sense of relief, given the fact that there's a tragedy and there's no way to bring this young man back, do you think you would feel differently today had Mr. Delamora been sentenced to death? And I know that that's kinda hard 'cause you can't tell how you would feel—

MAJOR DARREN LONG: That's one of those “what if” questions. I don't know. I try not to dwell too much on negative stuff. Do you know what I mean? There's a lot of things that police officers don't have control over. We try to do our job the best we can. We'll put somebody in jail. But we can't worry about—now this is a particular case where we did. It was in our thoughts. But you can't worry about what the District Attorney's office or a County Attorney's office is gonna do 'cause if you did—if you saw all the deals, which this system has to have that. They have to have those plea bargains and everything else where they make their deals between the prosecutor and the defense attorney, where they settle on just a few days or whatever or a lighter sentence 'cause they couldn't afford to have one hundred percent jury trials. The system couldn't handle it. So we know that. Newer detectives or cops will try to follow their case all the way through, especially if you have to go testify. If you have to go testify then you have more—I guess more involvement. But I got to where I did my job as best I could. I passed it off to somebody else. Now you do your job. And you hear about different counties. Williamson County, oh yeah, you're gonna get a lot worse. And it's a fact. And then Travis County maybe some of the judges are a little bit lighter. And that's a fact. But I'm not gonna waste time and energy on worrying about it. It's something I don't have any control over. So it's—I try to—I'm a very optimistic person and happy person. I try not to spend too much time thinking about negative stuff that I don't really have any control over.

RAYMOND: I'm sure that helps make you sane and healthy—and in the short run as well as the long run. Since we are making this interview, hopefully, for the public and for the historical record, are there things that, from your career in law enforcement generally or from this tragedy with Deputy Ruiz specifically that you would want people to know? What have—What would people see if they walked in your shoes that you would want them to understand?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: It's kinda like our military fighting for freedom overseas. That no matter what the policies of the government is at the time, still support them. The officers on the street and the correction officers in the jail, no matter what the politics are, still support them on doing a job that not very many people can do or want to do. So when I see the media attacking

police agencies and never showing all the good things they do on a daily basis, that kinda sours you. It's like, Okay, did you talk about the two hundred good things they did today, except for the one bad thing? And we're—we're normal people that make mistakes, although our mistakes could cost somebody somebody's life, including our own. So it's a lot more magnified. But I wish the media and other people that come into contact with law enforcement professionals and corrections professionals that they just try to treat them better. They're paying them to do a job that most of them don't want to do themselves. But then they expect me to do it perfectly and be able to make a split-second decision that will—could take two to three years for a bunch of attorneys to get into a debate, but yet they're expected to know the law in a quarter of a second—make that decision. Everybody can debate all they want to, but they weren't there. They weren't there. They—they're not—some of 'em are not brave enough to put themselves there either. But that they question a split-second decision—and some of 'em are wrong, but still they were there. They had the courage to put themselves there in the line of fire when most people don't. Most people run away from the situation. Police officers and corrections officers are running towards it. So, give 'em the better part of the doubt before you judge 'em.

RAYMOND: Actually that makes sense. Gabe and I both—well, Gabe right now is in an Austin Police Department's Citizen's Police Academy, and he just rode—

MAJOR DARREN LONG: That's—that—excuse me, but I think that's great. Most people that want to—that judge before they know, if they had come out and ride out and walked through a jail and get a feeling of what that job is, they might have a little bit more better—a little bit better insight and information. Maybe they'll have a different perspective after they did that. And I think it's great. We have a Citizen's Academy as well that shows what we do. And we want to show people. We don't—we're a transparent organization. We're proud of our staff and what they do. Do they make mistakes? Yeah. We hold 'em accountable though. But I think that's great that people that really want to know—that get involved with the Citizen's Academy, whether it's through the Austin Police Department or the Travis County Sheriff's Office. Whatever agency, wherever you're at, to really see—get a good perspective of what those officers and those staff members do. We have a lot of civilian staff members too that see a lot of bad things too.

RAYMOND: But what I was gonna say is—Gabe just went on his this weekend and we haven't even had a chance to—I haven't had a chance to hear about it, but I know that when I went out on the ride-out earlier this year, I saw officers doing things I had no idea that they really did. And that would fall into that category of two—two hundred things that people do everyday that are really good and that most of us don't know about. And I wonder again, since we are talking to the public and to the historical record, if you could name some of those things that you're proud of that you or your fellow officers or fella officer—you know, sister officers—or others do routinely or in exceptional circumstances that you're proud of that you want people to know about.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Well, can I start out with correction officers? I'm proud of them if they're gonna put on that uniform everyday and go into these places. They're locked up with these folks that commit crimes. I'm just proud of the basic of them having the courage to do that job, when most people don't. To be exposed to those elements of all different kinds of things—of sicknesses, illnesses that can be spread to them. Assaults. Everything else. The law enforcement officer that never asks where he's going, just gets something over his mobile dyna-computer—over the radio and responds going that way and not questioning why he needs to go that way. He

just goes. Their interaction with the citizens everyday, whether it be helping them get a snake out of their garage or take a burglary report, or come and break up a fight. Or come in, help them look for their child. That stuff is going on every day. And the people, the common citizen, does not know that. What these officers, these men and women, are out there doing for them, that they've taken an oath and they're willing to put their life on the line at any given moment for the people they serve. That's kinda basic. But I believe just the basic courage of doing this job and those men and women putting on that uniform every day and going into the jails or getting into that patrol car, I think—I think that's something that people don't, or they take for granted—that they expect. They take it for granted that someone's willing to put on that uniform and risk their life for them and they don't even know it.

RAYMOND: Okay. Well, thank you very much. I've learned a lot from this interview and thank you. I really appreciate it.

SOLIS: That's it. Thank you for having us this morning.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: I don't know if that's—if I gave you what you needed or—

RAYMOND: You did. You did. We wanted to hear what you had to say and there we go. Can I—can I just ask you—I am, I guess sort of postscript— There is so much stuff in this office. I want to know all about it. Do you mind just pointing stuff out for us?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: You point it out and I'll tell you what it is.

RAYMOND: Well, start with your area over your desk, I mean—

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Golf. I love golf. I'm a horrible golfer though. (laughs) But I love being outside and golf's a fun game. It's a game that I'm usually not gonna hurt myself doing either. (Laughs) Those over there: I was awarded Deputy of the Year by Veterans of Foreign Wars in the area that I worked one year.

RAYMOND: Congratulations.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Ma'am?

RAYMOND: Congratulations.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Oh thanks. The plaque below, that was—my staff when I was over the Crisis Intervention Team and Crisis Negotiation Team—kinda gave me that. The SWAT team gave me that plaque underneath there when I left the team, for dedicated service. So those mean a lot to me. Those are just certificates. Two commendation bars for actions during some bad situations. Not a big deal.

RAYMOND: Is that flag—that Texas flag particularly special for any reason?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: No. I just got it off the side of a road.

RAYMOND: Oh really?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: No. I just got it off the side of a road.

RAYMOND: Really?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: One of those guys selling from here to Bastrop was selling these. I liked it. Those are different promotions I got. That picture up there is Sheriff Gregg Hamilton and the three majors, along with Chief Bratton when we took a trip to L.A.P.D. to see how they did their ComStat and we brought a lot of it back to here.

RAYMOND: Say what ComStat is.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Like it's comparative statistics where you look at trends—crime trends in your area and how you're gonna respond with various resources to address that—that particular problem in your area. That over there is a—that's a—I guess just a plaque of when I attended the Leadership Command College down at Sam Houston State University.

RAYMOND: (whispers to Solis) Can I ask you to do something? Just [inaudible]

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Over here to the right, last year I went to the F.B.I. National Academy. These plaques over here to the right with the—there I am getting my picture with the director over the F.B.I. in Buler. My bookcases —t hey're just a hodgepodge of different things. At the top, that flag — that folded flag was the flag over my father's coffin. And —

RAYMOND: He was a veteran?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Yes. Then—John Wayne, a true American hero. There's — I coach both my daughters' soccer teams and so that little shelf is some of the soccer stuff. A lot of it is at home though. I guess kinda each one's kinda — different areas. My SWAT days. This is where I was with Crisis Negotiation Team and Crisis Intervention Team. Oh and I went to the F.B.I. Academy. We had kind of a coin pen exchange day, so that's where most of those came from. Then, the one in the middle, is kind of like my little shelf for—I've been on two deployments to Louisiana after the hurricanes to help assist in different things. One was to relieve the officers of Cameron Parish 'cause they lost everything and we were there for three weeks. I was part of that deployment team. Then, earlier this year, in May, we went over there and helped rebuild a playground and I was on that deployment team. So there's different stuff. The alligator head was given to me by the Cameron Parish Sheriff's Office for their appreciation. Then, up there is a "Supervisor of the Year" Award when I was a sergeant, by the — voted on by —

RAYMOND: What's the artist there?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Itzo. It's not just for us. That's been around for a while.

RAYMOND: Oh, okay.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: [inaudible]

RAYMOND: Oh okay. I see.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Here's where the team way up there when he was—

RAYMOND: Uh huh.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: That's where they scratch this—

RAYMOND: Oh.

MAJOR DARREN LONG: That's where they scratch his name on it. Let me see. This is the one—that's the one in Texas. I've got one, and I'm sure the other team members have one where the national — but he's in most of those pictures.

RAYMOND: Is that in Washington? The national one?

MAJOR DARREN LONG: Yes. In Washington D.C. And you can see different people will have—a picture of Keith there. Memorial. Things to be handed out. You'll see throughout here.

RAYMOND: [inaudible]

MAJOR DARREN LONG: And the other side is Keith.

[End of Transcript]