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Bandler, Richard  
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# blowback

## “Answer on Demand”: Bandler Testifies

*Testifying for the first time since his arrest, Richard Bandler left some thorny issues unresolved as he recounted the tale of power and persuasion leading to Corine Christensen's death*

Tom Maderos

The nervous boy at the back of the class, the one who knew all the answers yet didn't want to tell, grew up strangely to be a wonder with words. Richard Wayne Bandler parlayed his knowledge of hypnosis and information theory into a lucrative career as an author and lecturer, singing the praises of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, the straw-into-gold efficiency psychology he helped to create. But last week in Department 3 of Santa Cruz Superior Court, words seemed to desert him.

Jurors and spectators alike have been waiting for months to hear Bandler's version of Corine Christensen's close-range murder. In spite of testimony by prosecution witness James Marino and a string of others associated with the case, the brutal nature of the crime demanded an answer from the defendant. When Bandler took the stand on the afternoon of January 13, everyone in the

courtroom was primed for a great performance by a man who has been credited with extraordinary powers of persuasion.

One source had told me that Bandler might try to mesmerize the crowd, adding that the defendant was fully capable of linguistically inducing schizophrenia. Weeks ago I had heard a rumor that people claiming to be followers of Bandler were certain that he had committed the crime in order to prove he could get away with it using NLP. Real or imagined, an almost superhuman aura seemed to surround the man—until he opened his mouth.

The sound that came out was the voice of a seven-year-old child; it was contrite, subdued, almost colorless. Asked by defense attorney M. Gerald Schwartzbach if he had shot and killed Corine Christensen, Bandler answered with a predictable, “No.” Yet his voice was ghostly, and as his



Richard Bandler on the stand

testimony concluded, every sentence sounded as if it were disappearing in smoke. Under direct examination from the defense, Bandler told a mirror-image reversal of James Marino's story, claiming it was Marino who brought the murder weapon to Christensen's home and fired the fatal shot. He went on to say that, after the shooting, he followed Marino out the front door of the victim's condo and drove

his friend around for awhile trying to figure out what to do.

Bandler finally decided to drive to his girlfriend Paula McFarland's house, where McFarland's brother-in-law Floyd Creager was called. The defendant said he wanted to “put some distance” between himself and Marino and thought Creager could take Marino off his hands. But then Bandler proceeded to load up on gin

and cocaine, spending most of the day in bed with McFarland. He denied driving Marino to the Capitola Wharf to dispose of the murder weapon, but did admit to hiding his own blood-stained clothes at McFarland's place and neglecting to contact the police.

When Assistant DA Gary Fry began cross-examination the next day, the courtroom was crammed with cameras and curious onlookers. Fry began slowly, taking Bandler step by step through the details of the story. Then he reminded Bandler that there were some particularly thorny pieces of evidence. For one thing, there was the tape recording of a conversation between Bandler and Christensen made the night before the murder. The defendant claimed that Marino had asked him to “jam” Christensen to find out who was responsible for the severe beating Marino had received at a party several days earlier. However, the tape confirmed that he had done more than merely question Christensen about the incident. Bandler clearly threatened to blow her head off.

Fry then asked about Marino and the murder weapon. Bandler had said that he never saw the gun at Christensen's until Marino fired the shot. He also testified that Marino had taken off his suede jacket immediately upon entering Christensen's home.

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Assistant DA Gary Fry asks Bandler to identify the blade he carried to the scene of the murder

Bandler offered no suggestion about where or how James Marino might have hidden the large .357 Colt Python, the gun that Bandler says he loaned his friend the previous evening.

Then there was the troubling question of Bandler's behavior. The defendant said that Marino stepped up suddenly and fired at Christensen, yet Bandler neither ducked for cover nor sought to protect himself with a second gun he admits having with him at the scene. Instead of trying to escape from the man he claimed was the real murderer, Bandler simply acted as a chauffeur for Marino without considering the consequences. Had Marino threatened Bandler at gunpoint to go with him? asked Fry. No, said Bandler, he had just followed Marino out.

But Bandler did volunteer another piece of information. He said he had lifted Christensen's chin with one or both of his hands after Marino shot her, stating that she had coughed and gushed blood onto his short-sleeved T-shirt.

Much has been made of blood evidence in this case. Prosecution and defense experts have testified to di-

simultaneously, almost involuntarily, with darkened expressions.

On redirect questioning, Schwartzbach tried to make up some of the ground Bandler had lost under cross-examination. He pointed out the sheath knife Bandler had brought with him to Christensen's the day of the murder. This was meant to convince the jury that it was more likely to have been Marino than Bandler who used a serrated steak knife in a failed attempt to fashion a silencer from a plastic bottle of lemon-scented Mr. Clean. Schwartzbach then asked Bandler about the possibility that the long sleeves of his shirt had been pushed up at the time he lifted Christensen's head.

But that still left several problems for the defense. Even if his sleeves had been pushed up, why hadn't Bandler's arms and hands been covered with blood? Why weren't his bloodstained or McFarland's or on the car he drove away from the scene of the crime? It seemed likelier that the blood got on Bandler's short-sleeved T-shirt in some other way, and that he may have merely tried too hard to finesse his story.

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## The tape confirmed that he had done more than merely question Christensen about the incident. Bandler clearly threatened to blow her head off.

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vergent theories on backspatter and blowback, yet a certain lack of blood finally threw Bandler's testimony into doubt. "You lifted up her chin with one or both of your hands," Fry mused. Then the assistant DA walked up to the long table full of tagged evidence and pulled out the spotless long-sleeved T-shirt Bandler had worn underneath the short-sleeved one on the day of the murder. When Fry held up the shirt, it was a straightforward gesture, like a key slipping into a lock.

There was a moment of stunned silence in the room, and then the prosecutor asked the obvious question. If the defendant had lifted up Christensen's chin with one or both hands as she bled profusely, why hadn't he gotten blood on the long-sleeved shirt? When Richard Bandler answered, "I don't know," in that controlled, emotionless voice of his, several jurors turned away from him

**A**s the case nears the stage of final arguments, a number of difficulties remain for the prosecution. It is certainly true that James Marino's testimony is still hard to swallow whole, but on key points his story seems to hold up well enough. Marino claimed he was on the couch at some distance from Bandler and Christensen when the shot was fired, while Bandler said Marino was standing right next to him. The jury will have to decide which version explains why the front of Bandler's clothes were marked with Corine Christensen's blood while no stains were found on Marino.

Oddly enough, the longer Bandler spoke the better James Marino's previous testimony sounded. Marino at least claimed that Bandler had trained a gun on him after killing Christensen. Bandler even made trouble for himself explaining the minor points in the case. He told the jury that AOD, or a jumbled arrangement of the letters he had left on Christina Hall's answering machine, meant "answer on demand." It was a phrase he employed, along with other verbal threats and firearms, to get the results he wanted. But the tactic seemed to be backfiring. As opposed to using such belligerence, Bandler carefully avoided looking at the jury throughout his testimony and masked any arrogance with a guarded monotone. Yet under oath his own "answers on demand" may have dangerously narrowed the margin of reasonable doubt.

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