

John Pinch Interview-Wednesday, September 16, 2015 at 7:53 P.M.

THOMPSON: Today is Wednesday, September 16, 2015 at 7:53 P.M. I'm speaking with John Pinch, and it's P-i-n-c-h?

PINCH: Yes.

THOMPSON: John, what's your date of birth?

PINCH: It's [REDACTED].

THOMPSON: So you [REDACTED]?

PINCH: Uh-huh.

THOMPSON: Do anything exciting?

PINCH: Went down to visit my daughter who just had a second child a couple weeks ago.

THOMPSON: Congratulations.

L. MILLS: He was celebrating his birthday when I called to tell him there was a fire at the house.

THOMPSON: Not a good surprise.

PINCH: No.

THOMPSON: Your residence is the 8015 High Valley. What's a good contact number for you?

PINCH: [REDACTED].

THOMPSON: John, what do you do, do you still work or are you retired?

PINCH: I'm retired.

THOMPSON: What did you do?

PINCH: I used to be a painting contractor in Sebastopol.

THOMPSON: Ok. How long did you do that for?

PINCH: Thirty years.

THOMPSON: Do a lot of traveling now and just enjoying life in general?

PINCH: Yeah.

THOMPSON: Where do you plan to stay until the roads are opened back up?

PINCH: Probably here.

THOMPSON: Here? Ok. And this was [REDACTED]?

L. MILLS: Is there any idea when the roads will be open and we'll be allowed back in?

THOMPSON: I'm hopeful it will be soon. I think part of the biggest problem is the powerlines getting replaced and with the drought that we've had for the last five years, those trees are really top heavy and after a fire burns through there a lot of those trees are coming over so, I think probably more as a safety precaution for the general public they'll remain closed for awhile longer, just because those trees are tipping over left and right.

L. MILLS: So when you say a little while, you mean like days, weeks, a week or so?

THOMPSON: I would hope it's not much longer than by the end of this week.

L. MILLS: Like Friday, Saturday?

THOMPSON: Honestly, I don't make that decision, I wish I could tell you more. But, I think like I said, it's primarily for the safety of everybody; those trees are just out of the blue falling over.

PINCH: So the power won't be back on by then?

THOMPSON: No the power is going to be out for awhile.

PINCH: I can't imagine putting all that back together.

THOMPSON: Yeah, it's quite the mess down there. So you're going to probably be staying here. So if I need to get ahold of you I can call, I think I called your home phone?

L. MILLS: Yeah, [REDACTED].

THOMPSON: So who all lives at 8015 High Valley?

PINCH: Cindy, my wife and I and Parker and Laura, we're all joint owners, but...

L. MILLS: We don't live there very often.

PINCH: Yeah, they travel around a lot and we're usually there by ourselves apart from a few months a year.

THOMPSON: How many vehicles are associated with the property? We got the silver Toyota pickup sitting there.

PINCH: Right, there's that, my wife's Toyota, her Toyota Corolla and the silver truck and I have a Fiesta.

THOMPSON: So is that a total of four vehicles?

PINCH: Yes, and then Parker and Laura's.

L. MILLS: When we're there.

THOMPSON: Do you own a green Jeep Wrangler?

L. MILLS: No.

THOMPSON: Does anybody visit with a green Jeep?

L. MILLS: No.

THOMPSON: How about any of the neighbors, do they have a green Jeep?

PINCH: I don't think so.

L. MILLS: What does Kelly have?

PINCH: Oh it's a red one, brand new one.

L. MILLS: What about Jensens?

PINCH: It's not a green Jeep, no. It's a PT Cruiser or something.

L. MILLS: I know his wife was driving a silver something when she came to look for her cat or dog... A silver pickup, I think.

PINCH: That's the other gal next door, right, on Jensen's property?

L. MILLS: Right.

PINCH: Anyway, we see all the vehicles that go in, never noticed a green Jeep.

THOMPSON: I'm sorry, can I get the spelling of your name as well please?

L. MILLS: Laura, L-a-u-r-a.

THOMPSON: Last name?

L. MILLS: Mills.

THOMPSON: How long have you lived there?

PINCH: Since 2009.

THOMPSON: You and your wife?

PINCH: Yeah.

THOMPSON: Did you guys build the house or was it...

PINCH: No it was a foreclosure, it was only half finished and we finished it off.

THOMPSON: What year did you finish it off?

PINCH: Well, it was an ongoing process for maybe nine months from 2009.

THOMPSON: So you were out of town celebrating your birthday?

PINCH: Yeah and then on Monday when I found out I couldn't get back into the house I volunteered to deliver my daughter's belongings, they're in the process of moving to Reno. So I volunteered to rent a truck and go to their storage in Sacramento and take it up to Reno for them. I just got back from that now.

THOMPSON: I'm sorry, when was what?

PINCH: That was yesterday, yesterday and today. I just got back today.

THOMPSON: So when is the last time you were home?

PINCH: Friday.

THOMPSON: Friday, which would have been...

PINCH: The 11th.

THOMPSON: What were you doing Friday?

PINCH: I was working at the center, at the meditation center. I spent the day volunteering there and then took off in the evening to go down to Santa Clara.

THOMPSON: Did you do any work around the house that day or?

PINCH: No. I just came home, grabbed my stuff and took off.

THOMPSON: How about through the week leading up to Friday?

PINCH: Nothing, no I've been at the meditation center, which is ten minutes away for over a week. I've been coming home in the evening, but not doing any work there.

THOMPSON: Nobody was home at the time the fire started?

PINCH: No.

P. MILLS: I had told the other guy, I was there at 7:00 in the morning to feed cats. I came in at 7:00.

THOMPSON: Oh, ok. Then you actually returned...

P. MILLS: At 2:30.

THOMPSON: Ok, so about an hour after the fire started?

P. MILLS: Yeah, because they called me and said there was a fire. They didn't say it was at 8015, they just said it was in the area so I went to see what was going on. Laura was there too.

L. MILLS: I called you because I heard about it, a friend was leaving where we are, Loch Lomond, and he was leaving and he heard it on the radio so he called and told me.

THOMPSON: So Laura you called John?

L. MILLS: I called John, yeah, yeah.

THOMPSON: Does anybody smoke at the residence?

PINCH: No.

THOMPSON: When is the last time you guys did any yard work as far as mowing and trimming?

PINCH: Not for awhile. You know I actually, I looked at the long grass between the house and the garden, and that's when it was really quite warm and I thought, maybe I should weed whack that, and I thought no I'm not going to do that because it is so tinder dry, so I didn't do it. So I think the last time would have been, gosh, three weeks to a month ago.

THOMPSON: What do you use when you do that?

PINCH: We have a lawn tractor. It was in the woodshed.

THOMPSON: Was it mechanically sound?

PINCH: Oh yeah.

P. MILLS: Brand new.

PINCH: Brand new yeah.

THOMPSON: Do you have a tractor or anything that you use on the property?

PINCH: We have had, Parker has one, but it wasn't there at the time.

THOMPSON: How about the house, anything in or around the house been giving you fits, electrical, nothing like that?

PINCH: Nothing like that.

P. MILLS: Only the smoke alarms. They're all hard wired and there must be thirty of them and when they go off, they all go off.

PINCH: Yeah, you can fry an egg and leave it on there too long.

P. MILLS: They work very well.

THOMPSON: How about the hot tub on the porch, are there any problems with that?

PINCH: It hasn't been on for months. It's been broken.

THOMPSON: When's the last time that was on?

P. MILLS: Well, when did I leave, December?

PINCH: Yeah.

P. MILLS: December.

THOMPSON: The electrical J-Box by the oak tree right out the back door there?

PINCH: Yeah.

THOMPSON: What was it's intent?

PINCH: The J-Box, what's the J-Box?

THOMPSON: It's a junction box.

PINCH: A junction box, you're not talking about the service entrance right?

THOMPSON: No. So...

PINCH: Oh yeah, it's outside of the back door.

THOMPSON: Yes.

PINCH: We were going to move, I mean future plans were to move this hot tub to that area and get it off the deck.

THOMPSON: Ok.

PINCH: But it's never been hooked up. It's not even live. We haven't connected the wires.

THOMPSON: But you said that was intended for the hot tub?

PINCH: Yes.

THOMPSON: Who installed that J-Box?

PINCH: I did.

THOMPSON: Who ran the 200 circuit there?

PINCH: I did.

THOMPSON: How long ago did you do that?

PINCH: When did that tub go in Parker?

P. MILLS: Well the tub's been there a couple of years, when you were working on the garden I think you ran all that stuff.

THOMPSON: I'm sorry, I think I have to back up here. When was the 220 circuit ran to the area of the oak tree?

PINCH: That was probably a year ago.

THOMPSON: Was there ever an issue with the 40 amp breaker?

PINCH: Which one?

THOMPSON: The one that fed that.

PINCH: It's not hooked up.

THOMPSON: Ok. Did somebody by chance hook it up? Has anybody been working on the house recently?

PINCH: No. I don't think it's hooked up. I don't think I got that far. No, I didn't.

THOMPSON: So I just want to clarify, bear with me I'm not a sketch artist here. So this is the house here, this would be the hot tub, I believe there's a back door here, and the oak tree there. So, right here is your breaker panel and then there was a little J-Box here, ok, so did you hook the hot tub into this J-Box?

PINCH: No.

THOMPSON: Ok. Where did the J-Box get ran to, the wires that are out of the J-Box?

PINCH: They're just inside the little closet in there waiting to be hooked up. They might be behind the panel but didn't go all the way to the box.

THOMPSON: When's the last time anybody has worked on the house?

PINCH: Probably, well probably the last thing I did is to put the floor in, in the living room.

THOMPSON: Have you done all the electrical work on the house?

PINCH: Not all of it.

THOMPSON: Ok. Have you hired that out?

PINCH: Yeah, sometimes. If it's very simple I'll do it.

THOMPSON: Ok. So what would you consider to be simple wiring?

PINCH: Um, wiring up a plug or a receptacle.

THOMPSON: What would something be that you would hire out?

PINCH: Well for example we just had a local guy, he fixed the fan upstairs. What else did he do, he connected a light in the hallway, the stairway to light this tapestry.

THOMPSON: How long ago was that?

PINCH: That was recently, about three weeks ago.

THOMPSON: Any other electrical work get done while he was there?

PINCH: I ran a wire, didn't connect it, but I ran a wire because we were thinking about putting a heater underneath the sink, but I never connected it up. I had a quote from the electrician to do that, and it sounded like the biggest part of the job was running the wire through the cabinets. It's not hooked up, it's still waiting to be hooked up. We actually realized that we had another heater that only needs 110 and that's already existing under the sink so I stopped the work.

THOMPSON: So aside from, actually who was it that you hired to do that electrical work?

PINCH: A guy called Dave Johnson.

THOMPSON: Is he a local guy?

PINCH: Yeah.

THOMPSON: Would you happen to have a phone number for Dave?

PINCH: Not with me.

THOMPSON: When we finish I'll leave you my card, if you can find that phone number, I'd appreciate it. So aside from Dave doing that electrical work, the little bit of electrical work you've done, nobody else has been in there?

PINCH: No.

THOMPSON: Who all has access to the property? I understand you and Parker are part owners. Are0

there any other part owners?

PINCH: Sometimes when we, no other part owners, but sometimes when we go away and leave two cats, we'll have a friend stay there. Sometimes it's Annie and _____(?) that are here and sometimes it's another friend of ours.

THOMPSON: Ok. And you said the 40 amp breaker on the 220 circuit there had never been hooked up?

PINCH: From the J-Box?

THOMPSON: Yeah.

PINCH: But it's hooked up to the hot tub. As I said we were going to move the hot tub over to this area and so that was all in preparation. The reason that I did it is because we had the ditches dug because I was going to run water to the garden so we did it at the same time.

THOMPSON: So just so I'm clear, from this J-Box, actually let's go from the sub panel where the 40 amp breaker is, it goes down the wall, comes out and then there's some sweeps that come off here and they run on this side and then it sweeps back up to the J-Box.

PINCH: Yes.

THOMPSON: Did you pull that wire through there from the?

PINCH: Yeah I actually, well I did it, I put it through the conduit as I went.

THOMPSON: Then from the J-Box you've got your wire that runs over here to the hot tub.

PINCH: No. The wire to the J-Box goes into that, where the panel is, there's a little room in there, I don't know if you looked in there but, it's just running to there ready to be connected at the point when we put the hot tub in that area if we ever do. So it's not connected. This is another wire that goes and is connected to the panel. So these are totally separate wires.

THOMPSON: When I'm talking about this one, this large black one, it sits on top of the ground and runs right up to the edge of the hot tub.

PINCH: No, different wire altogether. What happens is on that J-Box, it goes into that room ready to be hooked up to that panel. It's a completely separate wire. This one is, it is run up to the actual panel. So this wire and the wire powering the hot tub when we used it, two different wires. Ok? This one

is not connected. This one is connected, but the breaker is off because it's not working.

THOMPSON: Ok. Who insures the property?

PINCH: Who insures?

THOMPSON: Yeah.

PINCH: Farmers.

THOMPSON: What's your role in the property here, you're the primary resident of the property?

PINCH: Yes.

THOMPSON: Ok, of the shared property.

PINCH: Yeah. Parker and I.

L. MILLS: He and his wife.

THOMPSON: Yes, sorry. I believe I already asked you but, so you guys didn't build the house you bought it on a foreclosure and it was kind of roughed in, essentially, is that what I understand?

PINCH: It was completely finished as far as the wiring was concerned, but we did change the upstairs, the upstairs was just stub walls, downstairs was finished, the whole upper level, apart from the bathroom up there, was complete. We did have another, this is 2009, we did have another electrician that was working in the house.

THOMPSON: I want to go back to this. I'm going to make it a little larger here. So if this is the house, this is your driveway entrance, this is the hot tub, this is your panel, this is your sub panel on the inside. Your main panel is on the outside. There's a door there into that room, back door, oak tree, and a J-Box.

PINCH: Yeah.

THOMPSON: So the wires from the panel to the J-Box, are they are in the conduit?

PINCH: Yeah.

THOMPSON: So that conduit comes out the corner...

PINCH: And it goes into the wall. I think the end of it, if I remember right, is inside the wall, there's a plywood panel that just screws off, and if we ever connect that hot tub, the wires are ready to be hooked up to the box.

THOMPSON: Ok. So this one comes out and then over to the J-Box correct, behind the oak tree in the same trench as the water line?

PINCH: Yeah.

THOMPSON: Ok. When you had the hot tub hooked up where did you have it hooked up at?

PINCH: To the box. That's hooked up.

THOMPSON: I guess I'm not following you then.

PINCH: Let me draw. Ok so we have the house, the hot tub and the service entrance. Ok so this is hooked up to the service entrance, ok. The J-Box is just hooked up to the wall outside the box, so the wire comes around and it goes inside the wall to be hooked up at a later date; separate wiring. These are not connected. They have nothing to do with each other.

THOMPSON: Ok. When the hot tub was hooked up, what was the problems you were having with it?

PINCH: We weren't having any problems. It just stopped working.

THOMPSON: Do you have any idea what happened?

PINCH: I think it might be the heater, it was a pretty old hot tub, the heater I think is broken. What do you think Parker?

P. MILLS: Well yeah, when I looked at it last week, I tried to turn it on and the heating element would come on for a second and then shut off. So the pump and everything was working and so we just turned the breaker off and there it sits until somebody has some time to fix it.

THOMPSON: How many times did you attempt to turn it on?

P. MILLS: Well there's a light that comes on that indicates when the heat cycle is on, and I think twice.

THOMPSON: Are you certain you shut the breaker off?

P. MILLS: Well normally I do, so...

THOMPSON: By chance could you have forgotten to turn the breaker off?

P. MILLS: It's possible.

PINCH: It's possible because it wasn't working, you know, when something isn't, we turn it off.

THOMPSON: Ok. And that was you said a few weeks ago?

P. MILLS: No that was last week some time.

THOMPSON: Ok. Do you recall which day by chance?

P. MILLS: No, but sometime back, it would have had to have been not this last week, but the previous week before that, yeah.

THOMPSON: By chance do you recall a specific day?

P. MILLS: No.

THOMPSON: Were you home that day, do you recall?

P. MILLS: Yes, yeah we were both there. That's why we did it, there was a slow morning or something so I decided to see if I could get it to go.

THOMPSON: Alright, I think that pretty much wraps it up for me. Do you have any questions you'd like to ask of me?

PINCH: Are you part of the investigating team?

THOMPSON: I am.

PINCH: So, I mean, I'd really like to know the results of the investigation.

THOMPSON: Right.

PINCH: You know, I hear through the reporters, you know, there was one gal, I don't know if this is.

P. MILLS: We should get Annie to tell, we told the other investigator this...

PINCH: Let me just finish what I was going to tell you. I had a pretty, well I wouldn't call her nasty, but this reporter Linda Callahan from the Press Democrat, called me yesterday morning? I think it was yesterday morning. You know the way they ask the questions, they try to implicate you as if you may have caused the problem, they would love to write that

up and discover who was the cause of the problem. So it was pretty obvious to me that she wasn't going to stop the questioning, she was kind of trying to just find out, I don't know, reporters are reporters, I don't know how they work, but it was a little frustrating. I felt pretty bad about it and at the end I just said, you know, talk to the investigators, because I want to know too. If you find anything out, call me again, otherwise don't call me. So, later on that evening she called and said, she apologized for calling, she said that photographer, the Press Democrat photographer was at our house taking photographs and he talked to the investigators and he was told that the fire came from another property at the back of the property.

THOMPSON: That's what you were told?

PINCH: That's what she told me. She apologized for the conversation we had in the morning and just reported back to me what they had heard. Whether it's...

THOMPSON: Personally I think that if that's what she believes is that the fire started on a different property, that's fine, let her believe that. If the press is hounding you, one, you don't have to answer your phone, two, if you answer your phone and they're being aggressive like that, just simply disconnect with them. The fire originated somewhere on the property there.

PINCH: It did?

THOMPSON: Yeah, and we're working on getting that resolved and figuring out the cause, hence the reason I'm up here, and my partner was here awhile ago.

L. MILLS: That's what you think is the fire started on the property?

THOMPSON: Yes.

PINCH: Without a doubt, or?

THOMPSON: We're pretty positive right now, it's still under investigation so of course, we will let you know. We're not releasing your information to the press. We don't do that. We don't want to cause you any grief with the press. So, like I said if they continue, because I've seen it too on social media and on the local news, they've been up there and just...

PINCH: Yeah, just out of interest, have you been there today and yesterday?

THOMPSON: I swung by today hoping that I might find you up there because I'd heard, I believe Laura you went up to feed the cats. So I'd heard somebody had

gone to the property so by chance I drove up there sometime around 1:00 or 2:00 this afternoon, but... Any other questions?

PINCH: Do you have any idea where it started?

THOMPSON: Well that's what I'm saying is it's under investigation, we're working on determining that cause. If you don't have any other questions for me I'm going to turn my recorder off here.

PINCH: Anybody have any questions?

P. MILLS: No, you probably have a card?

THOMPSON: Yeah I'm going to leave you a card.

P. MILLS: You said fairly shortly a lead investigator would be named, could be you, could be him, but we could communicate with them?

THOMPSON: Yeah. Ok, end the interview at 8:25 P.M.

END OF INTERVIEW