

My interview with murderer Hans Reiser

By *srlinuxx*

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I showed up at the Santa Rita Jail during visiting hours to meet Hans Reiser, the Linux programmer found guilty of killing his estranged wife. He was being held in Santa Rita awaiting sentencing and I knew if I was ever going to talk with him, I had to do it before he was transferred to state prison, where the rules regarding media visits are much more strict and it can take months for even relatives to get approval.

Hans was being held in cellblock 9. The visiting area is a row of partitioned cubicles. The visitor and inmate speak over a phone line, face to face, separated by thick, soundproof glass. A couple of reporters had tried to visit and he had hung up the phone on them when they posed their first question, so I knew I wasn't going to ask him any questions.

He was waiting for me in cubicle 7 wearing bright jailhouse reds. Since the trial, Hans has grown his hair out in a crazy gray bush around his head. He sat across from me with several folders full of paper and a thin silver pen. He lifted the receiver and said he recognized me from court and wasn't talking to journalists.

He said he still wouldn't answer my questions unless I put them in the mail to him. I told him I didn't have any questions and I probably wouldn't get to see him again. If there was anything he wanted me to know, I said, now is the time.

He spoke for the next 40 minutes. He was endlessly dishonest, self-justifying, and pedantic. Hans told me the investigator had failed him. He maintained his innocence and said there was a list of people who should be looked into.

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