

INTERVIEW WITH DR. RUSSELL MAGNAGHI
FEBRUARY 4th, 2011
SUBJECT: Shooting "Hoax"

START OF INTERVIEW

O'BRIEN, SEAN (SO): Interview with Russ Magnaghi, February 4th, 2011, Friday. So the nature of this interview is continuing to look at the incident that took place on February 2nd, 2011, a Wednesday, at Northern with sort of a threat situation. I guess where to start, is, what is your take, Dr. Magnaghi? What was your role? Where were you when you found out?

MAGNAGHI, RUSSELL (RMM): Well, I usually in the morning, Wednesday mornings, was in the gym, right across campus, the owner's wife came in, oh it was about 8:30, and said that campus had been closed. I guess a threat. They'd picked it up on their computer. Most of the personnel working there are Northern students, so they were all very concerned. So, I went about my business, and, nothing, kind of looked out the window, not a big investigation. Everything was, pretty much, the way it was at 8:00, in terms of the campus. So then when I got done, I went, well, I had a problem because I had left, the only time I had done that, I had left my cell phone in my office. And I was going to stay in our place on Michigan St, and I didn't have a phone. This would be a day I would want the phone. So I came around, up by Presque Isle, then came into the lot, and the one thing that I did notice was, that when you entered the campus, now this would have been probably 9:15, a little after 9:15, when I got here, it was like being here on a weekend during the Holiday break. I mean, the place was empty, totally empty of people. It was a very weird feeling because it was a Wednesday, when there should have been some activity, but by that time, the place was totally devoid of cars, the parking lots were empty, I think the lot here in front of Cohodas had a string of cars at one end, might have been people at the hospital.

SO: About what time was this?

RMM: This was about 9:15 when I came around, and I was going to run into the building. I'll do that, run in, grab the phone, and get out. However, I got this sense, no one particularly told me and I wasn't online or anything, it just got this sense from what I saw that this was not right. There really was something wrong. So, I just kept going out of the parking lot, and around campus. It was completely deserted. Then I went to try and figure out what was going on. I went over to campus security and I drove into the roadway there, and here were about 4 or 5 city police cars. I saw that I said, "I'm not going to go in there and ask what is going on, interfering, wasting their time, they don't need that." So I left and went down the street and called my wife from the gym, Motions, since I wasn't going to be able to call her again, since she was at home and I at Ann River and we just kind of exchanged ideas about what happened and then I spent the day, pretty much, at 215 East Michigan Street, working on my projects and all. It was kind of interesting knowing what was going on, but at least from my end, and I'm not on Facebook and all that, but if I was, probably inviting colleagues and what not, I wouldn't have been like a student getting information. There wasn't much I could do, there wasn't much I could worry about, I just kind of let life go on its own, but I was kind of curious as to what happened. I didn't think there was anything that went on, but later on when you began to read some of the stuff on it, when the evening paper came out, I don't know, I got the sense that, the thing was that all day you didn't know what was actually happening. Was it a bomb? Was it a shooter? Were there a number of people

involved? That was, for me, a blank. Now, I wasn't going on campus, but it was a blank, I guess part of it was, earlier, I usually I go running and that morning I didn't go to the dome to run, and I was going to go afterwards and it was either go running in the dome or go cross country skiing so then someone said, I thought maybe it was just the main campus was closed and that the dome would be open and I was planning to go over there, and they said rather quickly, no, no, no everything's closed. Everything's shut down. One of the trainers said that, I guess he was going to work, he was coming up 7th street, and said that there was a line-up of cars and there was a traffic jam.

SO: About what time do you think that would have been?

RMM: That would have been about 8:30 quarter of nine, he was talking to be about 9:00 or so. So he made it through the gauntlet through all of this traffic, he was coming towards campus and the traffic and he said there were some accidents and all, it was quite a mess, but he went and made it across campus and so on. So that was as far as I got, so for a person who was not on Facebook or Twitter and all that stuff, there really wasn't any information coming out and when you did go online there was just a red band on your screen that gave the general information. You probably have it in the record. The only thing that changed was that later on, the University was not going to have evening classes. I would say, probably from my perspective, I wasn't a student, I wasn't stuck on campus, I just left. I got the sense from the very beginning, without getting a lot of emails that something very serious was underfoot and I wasn't going and start trying to find out, go into the building, get my cell phone. I said, "To Hell with the cell phone, not going to use it today, even though it's kind of a crisis day and I should have it." That was kind of the end of it. I was a person who wasn't tuned in or plugged into whatever information could be coming out but I think the bottom line was there ended up being very little information coming out. I mean, there was discussions you had with friends, but it was all the same information getting tossed about. There wasn't anything new. You really didn't know what was going on. As I started to say, I did begin to get this sense, as I heard things and so on, that this was probably a shooter, that it wasn't a bomb. Just things that were said, they never said who it was or what. It was just that it was probably a shooter. In terms of, you know of being on Michigan Street, being in town, the rest of the town, life went on as normal. There wasn't any indication as you went down the street – you went about your business. I think at one point I drove over to the bank. Now since all the students were either in the dorms or on their way home, the bank was pretty much devoid of cars and whatnot. I went in, took care of some banking business, went home and had some lunch, and in general life for the rest of the city, except for the schools, I wonder if very many people knew what was going on.

SO: To add to the record, reports came out, I never went over to verify, that Marquette General Hospital was locked down. They only had 5 entrances open, with security guards. That was right adjacent to the campus at the time. So, it may not have been, I understand that it may not have been that way in the rest of the town, but it was close there.

RMM: Well, I should point out that I did learn about the hospital when I stopped at Dallas Cleaners, to leave some clothes off, that the woman there, we started talking about what was going on, and she said, "Oh yes, they've closed the hospital, and the security and so on." Basically what you said, "Well, it was a good thing that I didn't have my, you know, some kind of sinus surgery or something, I'd be in a fine mix now being over at Marquette General." She was going the next day to Bell. So, there was kind of that, that was the one discussion I'd had with someone. And then I kind of waited to see were we going to have class the next day? Personally, I was upset sort of because, I'm teaching a course on the history of the National Parks, I have a great group of students, I'm interested in the course and we meet two days a week... Wednesday was our meeting day which was then cancelled. Which I was not excited about,

but then I wasn't like "gee, I got the day off", it could have been Thursday that this happened, I would have been happier.

SO: Numerous students I had talked to were upset for having Wednesday off, because they had no classes or one class.

RMM: So they got the day off, but they had it off anyway.

SO: My problem was just the opposite. So that was about it. When I went home, we talked about it, my wife, when I came in the door, she said, "Well what happened? Did you get some information?" And I said, I had no idea what happened, and that's when I think I said, "I get the sense that maybe it was a shooter." Then we watched TV. You could kind of piece things, but even the television reports that night were very inconclusive, it kind of got done and I was in no better shape than I was at noon, having been around here. So, I would say for the person that wasn't into the Twitter and so on, but even then, it's kind of interesting, and observation from an old-timer, even if you were on twitter, if there's no information being put into the system, you're not going to get anything out of it. So, nothing was really going in.

SO: There was an era of panic online as well, because everyone was talking but no one had answers. So like with that MySpace individual, a little bit of a rumor can spread into conclusive evidence that everyone believes.

RMM: yeah. And there were some rumors, and you see that's the problem with not getting it down immediately, that the one rumor was that there was a bomb that was going to blow out the whole campus. I said, "Oh, you've got an atomic bomb that you're going to blow out the whole campus at one time." There were three altogether, two other rumors of a fantastic nature, you'd hear them and say, this is a rumor, there is no logic to it, it's kind of out of control. You had things like that going on, and I guess it would be just from my observation, it would be something, that, if someone is listening to and wants to get out of the comments, would be that it's probably to be as transparent as possible, within reason. So that people have an idea what's going on, or else you immediately get rumors going and some of that stuff, because people don't think of it logically, and even the most outlandish rumor becomes a reality for a lot of people. I do have one comment to make away from the day, for the next day, and I found it really uncalled for, but the Mining Journal, for the headline for February 3rd, had the thing, something about internet something, about the thing that happened the day before, and then I'm sorry, in typically Mining Journal fashion, thoughtless, has a comment that sort of poo-poo'ed the whole thing, that this was an internet joke almost, and it was almost like it was a joke that the University got hoodwinked into believing and so on. And I thought we sort of knew that, the day before, the few things I heard, or maybe it was earlier in the day, that this was probably – and I talked with you about it – it was probably an internet hoax and something, and I think you had the information that other schools had gotten hit with this. You know, you hear that, and you don't know and then you from the Mining Journal, it's almost like yelling fire in a crowded hall, for the Mining Journal to go and put that, and they could have had it in the article, but to have it as a minor headline, but still a headline, then poo-poo's what the University is doing, what the police were doing, the closing schools, the concern and so on, and that is going to lead people to believe that in the future possibly that this is a joke. Then when something really happens, there is a shooter or something that oh, well, it's Northern going off on some rumor that came out of California.

SO: What you had said earlier regarding this was that they'd used the word 'hoax' in the headline.

RMM: I don't have the headline.

SO: Just for the record.

RMM: Yeah, we'll round up the papers. I don't want to say, they didn't say hoax, but it was very obvious if you read it, it's very obvious that they had been, the way I read it, maybe I'm too much of a historian, I'm too critical about things I read, but the way it came through was that it would have been a hoax perpetrated on Northern and the police, etc. I just feel it was unnecessary to make that kind of a statement. This could, I mean, maybe I anticipate trouble too often but I think it's better to be alert and take care of problems before you're crying because something occurred. Personally, having been here 42 years, we've never had anything like this, the closest was trouble in May of 1970, but you can see where some of this, like the stupidity of the three guys in the silver car. Now what if your friend, and we can do it now in Michigan, was packing a revolver? Concerned about the situation and so on, and when he went to work, he put the revolver in his pocket. No you're not supposed to have them on campus, but he's worried. And these three jamokes come up and playing games with him and what if pop, pop, pop?

SO: Or the police open fire?

RMM: Or the police. You know, so people have to be alert at this point. When the Titanic is sinking and they tell you to get in the life boat, get in the life boat and be saved. Don't be screwing around with jokes. I think that's one thing that people should learn, and hopefully the University, and I think they have, it might be kind of a godsend, in terms of allowing the University and the city police, everybody, the people at the hospital, the schools, to have had to go through an emergency, and as I said, we didn't know what was going on, and you know from what the students were saying, people were panicked, scared, there were kids they were interviewing on TV. They went into one room with the blinds closed and the doors locked. Then I think that maybe people got an idea, a taste, and luckily there was no deaths or damage and nothing came of it, but we got a sense of what could happen and how to respond. I know personally, I wouldn't have even driven on campus and come into the parking lot if something like that were to happen again. Whether or not it's a hoax, that it came off the here or there, I would go out of my way to avoid the campus.

SO: Absolutely. Before we wrap up, I want to ask you some questions, to clarify some of the details of your day. Wednesday morning, you said as you were driving around campus you saw a gathering of police cars at the Public Safety building. Did you see other law enforcement vehicles?

RMM: The only place where there was a Northern security car was at the DeVoss Art Museum. I was kind of looking around to see were they securing buildings and what not, and I was just driving along and I just looked. I remember over at DeVoss there was a police car.

SO: To clarify for the listener or reader, with my experiences on Wednesday, I had not seen any police vehicles on my way home from work and on Thursday I saw two vehicles driving around campus, sort of keeping an eye on things, and that's it. The written record and news reports often state that there was a heavy presence of police securing areas, and I have yet to find an individual to corroborate that source, but hopefully we can with incoming student accounts. Another question I have for you is regarding the Thursday, if you either had classes that day you were teaching, or normally you move

about campus quite a bit having to deal with this and that, what the sense of that feeling was, if people all knew what they were talking about, if they were still curious, if they still experienced fear?

RMM: I think that the following day then, and I did my usual routine, to Motions and then across campus, things were kind of back to normal, in terms of the physical movement of people. And the only thing was we talked about it in the office, you and secretaries in the office yesterday, and we kind of talked about it. Even at that point I was quite surprised, usually when something like that happens, the amount of information that makes its way out, you'll hear different rumors and this and that and so on, not rumors, but grapevine stories, that will come from some secretary across campus and so on, I was kind of surprised that you didn't hear any of that, the secretaries didn't hear from somebody and so on, things that would add more information, not rumor, but more real information about the events, and then the only thing that really came together, and that's when we were discussing it, was the input that you gave us from the student end of it, having access to Twitter and Facebook and so on. Other than that, even to this point, as we're speaking, I don't know, there's not too much you can come up with. There was a threat, it was a shooter – the facts. Some debate on the time as to when all this came out. People were concerned, panicked, frightened. I know there was one fellow who works for us, Aaron Rider, his sister is on campus, he lives off campus, he was a little concerned because his sister went back to the dorm. They didn't know what was happening, so she went back to the dorm. He would have liked to have her with him. I don't know what you do about some of those situations, and I was going to ask you, but you answered it. Was your wife on campus? You're on one end of campus and she's on the other end of campus, and how did everybody get together and so on. There were some things like that I guess what individuals should do, like you and your wife, and I guess there's books out how to survive disaster, to set something up that you know where to meet, because what happens in these events, is people get lost, things get lost, and then where did the person go, what's happening? I hope that this will make people aware of the possibility, and I think that sometimes when you live in a large city, you're aware of this, you hear police sirens going and fire trucks going, and I think a lot of times when you come to Northern, and you come to Marquette, where things are quiet 99% of the time, you tend to have a lower tolerance for some of these problems, they're not going to happen here. I think that might be another problem that might be solved now, that people have gone through this and realized that students have realized that gee, it could happen here. Let's be alert. I'm not saying to get panic-stricken. I'm saying you and your wife and Aaron and his sister and so on, okay, not that something's going to happen, but if something does, what are we going to do, how are we going to communicate?

SO: I was speaking with my father on Wednesday, my wife and my family's had heard about this through the grapevine, the Internet as well as TV. I told my father, as a kid, in grade school, you have fire drills, tornado drills, security drills, I remember the drills how to get off the bus in case of emergency. You don't have those drills as much at this point. There's occasional tornado or fire drills up here, but it's an interesting experience to see how do we handle this, how does the University handle this? A couple points I would like to add, on Facebook there were numerous groups being created for organizations for people to join movements, protests, one of them was "no school, no suspect" so until some is arrested, they didn't want to come to class. Others were saying we need to show NMU solidarity and support wear green and gold and go to class.

RMM: On Thursday?

SO: Wednesday night and Thursday.

RMM: Oh, I see.

SO: So some of that's been recorded in the Archives. I've talked with various professors about attendance records in their classes. One or two classes with freshmen in it were missing a lot of freshmen.

RMM: You mean on Thursday?

SO: On Thursday, yes. Other classes had students emailing in saying they weren't comfortable. The University recommended not giving tests on Thursday, even if they were already scheduled, due to the absentees. Attendance was relatively normal, from what most people said.

RMM: With that in mind, when I get done at the gym, I stop over usually and get a coffee at Starbucks and I did my usual routine, parked in my usual place and so on. I did notice, and I'll have to next Friday, but the parking lot was a lot emptier. I understand that there are not a lot of classes on Friday, but usually there are activities or something going on, and the parking lot has more cars in it. Like I said, I'll have to double check it next Friday, but I just got this sense that I think a lot of students went home.

SO: Yeah.

RMM: Again, it was no one told me, no one said, "Hey, look." When I drove in and I got out of the car, the usual routine, and then walked into the library, I kind of looked around and went, "Hmm."

SO: Should have been more...

RMM: More cars here. Not totally filled with cars, where maybe you'd have 5 slots, you had 2 cars there. I didn't notice that today. So, again, with doing this interview, and this is for anyone who is listening to this, or reading about this in the future, why you want to do this is a lot of these details like the thing about today, and many of the other things we're talking about, never showed up in the North Wind. Which I thought did a very good job getting it into the paper under, they really worked their butts off because Wednesday, the things were shut down, I guess they locked themselves in their office, because on Thursday morning at 11 o'clock they had, and usually that paper is supposed to be out Monday afternoon, and they had the whole story of what happened on Wednesday in the Thursday paper. So they did a Yeoman's job getting the paper out. I was quite surprised when I saw the headlines, "Oh, my god, they really got to work here!" So, uh, I forget now what I was getting at, getting on the tangent about the paper.

SO: Lost details, over time for future readers.

RMM: Yeah, if you want to do some of this, I know from past experience, if you don't put this stuff down immediately, it, you forget about it, you forget the details. You would forget about the silver car and the three guys. Maybe not, but a lot of those details will get lost. And the other part of it is, you think that everybody knows about it, but as time goes on and if the record is not kept, then like this event that occurred in 1970, and I didn't write it down, it was a racial problem after Kent State and Jackson State, and what happened on campus and possible shootings and rumors and so on, and students scared stiff, no Internet to give any information. I personally didn't write any of that up, didn't think about it, didn't record anything, and now I could give you just very basic ideas, but that's why it becomes very important to put all of this stuff on record. If you were to listen to this tape, and we'll give you a transcript, hang on to it, and then read it in a year, two years, and you'll be quite surprised and say, "I

don't remember that! Did I say that?" This becomes very important to keep some of this, though. Some people will think it's a waste of time.

SO: Well, thank you very much for getting me in on this project. I've enjoyed it so far, as far as collecting the information and such. When I've talked with a couple professors I know to see if we can get an account of semester wide attendance records that they keep, to see if we can put some in the Archive at some point. It would kind of be interesting to see what their attendance records did. That's about all I have though.

RMM: I want to thank you for being part of this, this is great because you have access to all the things I don't have access to, namely Facebook and Twitter. Thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW