

Los Angeles Times - June 25, 2009

Jesse James Hollywood says he fled U.S. because he feared for his life

The former drug dealer testifies that, inspired by the movie 'Blame It on Rio,' he went to Brazil after hiding out in Canada, where the cold climate didn't agree with him.

By Steve Chawkins

June 25, 2009

Reporting from Santa Barbara — Convinced that he would be "shot on sight" by police in the United States, Jesse James Hollywood testified Wednesday, he was inspired by the film "Blame It on Rio" to head for a new life as Michael Costa Giroux in Brazil.

Hollywood, 29, was a fugitive for nearly five years after the 2000 kidnapping and murder of a 15-year-old West Hills boy. Four of Hollywood's associates have been convicted in the crime. After fleeing to Canada, Hollywood said, he wound up freezing in Quebec. South American climes beckoned.

But prosecutor Joshua Lynn, who spent all day trying to poke holes in Hollywood's testimony, suggested another reason for switching hemispheres.

"You knew you couldn't be extradited if you had a child there, right?" Lynn asked.

Hollywood, a former marijuana dealer in the San Fernando Valley, said he learned about the extradition rule only after he was in Brazil.

Now the father of a Brazilian boy who is nearly 4, Hollywood was arrested in a beach town outside Rio de Janeiro when the boy's mother was six months pregnant.

"I had made a new life for myself -- or started to," said Hollywood, who sold vacation properties in Brazil.

Throughout Hollywood's third day on the witness stand, he responded to the prosecutor's sometimes barbed questioning by confessing to memory lapses or disputing testimony from previous witnesses in the five-week trial.

Hollywood is the alleged ringleader in a plan to kidnap and kill Nicholas Markowitz to avenge a \$1,200 drug debt owed by his older half-brother Ben.

He has acknowledged a role in the abduction but says his friend Ryan Hoyt, the convicted

triggerman, took it upon himself to shoot and bury Nicholas in the Santa Barbara foothills.

In court, Lynn suggested that the murder wiped clean a debt Hoyt owed to Hollywood, but Hollywood denied it.

"By the time I left California, he owed me \$100 or \$200," he said. "It's not a significant amount to kill somebody, that's for sure."

Hollywood said he was "shocked and distraught" when he learned of Nicholas' death.

On Aug. 6, 2000, he helped hustle the boy into a van because, he said, he was eager to confront Ben Markowitz, who had been harassing him.

Hollywood, two friends and the boy were headed to Fiesta in Santa Barbara, where Nicholas spent the next couple of days smoking pot and drinking with his captors and their friends.

"There were girls, weed and beer, and they were hanging out," Hollywood said. "I asked Nick if he wanted to come back to the Valley, and he said, 'No, I'm cool.' "

Lynn responded to his assertions with undisguised sarcasm.

"Was this just an unplanned vacation that Nick Markowitz should have been thanking you for?" he asked.

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