

WERE THE COVER-UP CONSPIRATORS GOING TO MEET IN ASPEN?

Just an update on the Aspen mystery, no doubt inspired by my three days of driving through recently turned Aspen clusters. Here is the mystery passage:

You went into jail in the summer. It is fall now. You will have stories to cover—Iraqi elections and suicide bombers, biological threats and the Iranian nuclear program. Out West, where you vacation, the aspens will already be turning. They turn in clusters, because their roots connect them. Come back to work—and life.

To which Judy responded:

In answer, I told the grand jury about my last encounter with Mr. Libby. It came in August 2003, shortly after I attended a conference on national security issues held in Aspen, Colo. After the conference, I traveled to Jackson Hole, Wyo. At a rodeo one afternoon, a man in jeans, a cowboy hat and sunglasses approached me. He asked me how the Aspen conference had gone. I had no idea who he was.

“Judy,” he said. “It’s Scooter Libby.”

eRiposte notes an odd discrepancy. Libby mentions Judy’s vacation. Yet Judy says the Aspen reference relates to a conference. A big enough discrepancy, I think, to suggest one—or both—are bullshitting.

Then eRiposte goes on to ask whether,

[Judy’s anecdote] *was just a convenient anecdote to take attention away from the*

"aspens turn in clusters" aspect of Libby's letter.

But there's another possibility—that Judy and Libby are both misdirecting.

In my original Aspen post, I suggested the most likely explanation was that Libby was referring to the Forstmann Little Aspen Conference, which started the weekend after he sent his letter. Rove and Novak definitely attended; I have seen no indicated whether Libby attended or not. When I made this speculation, though, I thought primarily of general Neocon scheming—that perhaps everyone involved in the Get Joe Wilson campaign could get together and compare notes. But one more detail has appeared that makes me think there was a more specific goal.

As I noted in my first thoughts on the NYT/Judy document dump this week, Judy's response when Taubman asked if she were one of the six writers involved in the leak was no simple lie:

In the fall of 2003, after The Washington Post reported that "two top White House officials disclosed Plame's identity to at least six Washington journalists," Philip Taubman, Ms. Abramson's successor as Washington bureau chief, asked Ms. Miller and other Times reporters whether they were among the six. Ms. Miller denied it.

"The answer was generally no," Mr. Taubman said. Ms. Miller said the subject of Mr. Wilson and his wife had come up in casual conversation with government officials, Mr. Taubman said, but Ms. Miller said "she had not been at the receiving end of a concerted effort, a deliberate organized effort to put out information.

That is, this lie is not an invention Judy made up all by herself. Compare Judy's Fall 2003 statement with the claim Novak makes in his

2003 column.

First, I did not receive a planned leak.

[snip]

The published report that somebody in the White House failed to plant this story with six reporters and finally found me as a willing pawn is simply untrue.

Judy and Novak—responding to the same article—provide almost the exactly same excuse. The leak was not planned, not deliberate. They weren't pawns.

Now, Murray Waas has reporters investigators are looking closely at this story, as evidence of a cover-up.

Federal investigators have been skeptical of Novak's assertions that he referred to Plame as a CIA "operative" due to his own error, instead of having been explicitly told that was the case by his sources, according to attorneys familiar with the criminal probe.

Also of interest to investigators have been a series of telephone contacts between Novak and Rove, and other White House officials, in the days just *after* press reports first disclosed the existence of a federal criminal investigation as to who leaked Plame's identity. Investigators have been concerned that Novak and his sources might have conceived or co-ordinated a cover story to disguise the nature of their conversations.

The investigators have some evidence that Novak's story was the product of collaboration between Novak, Rove, and (presumably) Libby, part of an effort to tell a consistent story that exonerates everyone. Novak's story, then, is a product of the cover-up. And Judy Miller

is telling a very similar story at precisely the same time.

I'm going to hazard a guess—that Judy Miller was involved in the conspiracy to cover-up the crime of outing Plame.

If I'm right, this is important enough. It means Fitz may have evidence against Judy not just of perjury, but also obstruction of justice. It means Judy's silence **was part of the plan** to cover up the crime. And if Fitz can prove this, it totally shreds whatever remaining claim to respectability and honor Judy had.

Which is where we get back to the Aspen reference. At least two of the cover-up conspirators were at Aspen together the weekend after Libby wrote his letter—at an event traditionally not covered by the press. Had Judy agreed to testify immediately upon receiving Libby's letter, she would have an opportunity to be there as well. To join her cluster of conspirators.

To dream up a new story.

If I'm right, Judy refused to dig herself in deeper. She didn't accept the letter as an adequate waiver. And in fact, she demanded another sign from Libby, which she received on September 19, after the conference ended. And, as I'll show in a future post, right now she's testifying willingly about the Libby obstruction, while she still seems to be lying (at least in public) about the Plame leak.

I think Libby's Aspen reference was an invitation for Judy to further conspire to obstruct the investigation. An invitation she apparently declined. I wonder, given the apparent love-letter to Rove Novak filed from Aspen:

U.S. News & World Report disclosed this week, with apparent disdain, that presidential adviser Karl Rove took time off from the Katrina relief effort to be at Aspen. He was needed as a

counterweight. I settled in for serious fireworks, expecting Bush-bashers to assault his alter ego at the conference's final session. However, direct confrontation with a senior aide must have been more difficult than a remote attack on the president. It would be a shame if Rove returned to Washington without informing George W. Bush how erstwhile friends have turned against him.

Whether this was the first volley in a new attempt to cover-up. Anyway, just another speculation about the Aspen reference.

What Judy's Aspen reference means, though, I've got no clue.

Update: **lawgirl** has a good diary at DKos noting that Bennett either slipped, or admitted that Judy visited Cheney on that trip to Jackson Hole in August 2003. And **Quicksilver** (to whom I owe the Forstmann idea) notes that the development where Cheney lives in Jackson Hole is called the Aspens. Given those two tidbits, I now think it possible that the cover-up conspirators all met in Jackson Hole at Dick's house in August 2003. This is slightly earlier than I've believed the cover-up happened (I thought it was later, between the appearance of the September 30 WaPo article and Novak's October column, but then they'd have to meet face-to-face first to agree to cover-up, right?). But still a distinct possibility.