



Select your city

Seattle

Search articles from thousand

Designed for Your Family
 Verizon High Speed Internet + DIRECTV® service + Phone
 Get **\$5 off every mo.** for 12 months | Plus get SHOWTIME® **FREE** for 3 months

**Online Exclusive
SAVE \$60**

TWILIGHT NOW PLAYING ON SHOWTIME®

[Home](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Business](#) | [Family & Home](#) | [Life](#) | [News & Politics](#) | [Sports & Rec](#)
Photos
[Seattle](#) | [Arts and Entertainment](#) | [Philadelphia Speculative Fiction Examiner](#)


James Ray uses teen wilderness program techniques on adults: Interview with Brett Merle


 October 20, 6:40 PM | [Philadelphia Speculative Fiction Examiner](#) | Cassandra Yorgey

17 comments



Print



Email



RSS



Subscribe

[Previous](#)[Next](#)

The participants in the James Ray sweat lodge tragedy are intelligent, rational, strong and powerful people. Every time I see someone call them “weak-minded” or some such nonsense I start flipping the bird and swearing like a sailor. Today I interviewed [Brett Merle](#), also known as Sagewalker. He is the former owner of Sagewalk School for Troubled Teens (no longer affiliated), licensed PCS instructor (Positive Control Systems), instructor in verbal de-escalation and non-violent physical intervention and is certified in NLP ([Nuero-linguistic programming](#)). He has been espousing both the benefits and dangers of unregulated programs similar to James Ray’s sweat lodge for over a decade.

I contacted Brett because I thought it might be nice if we had some professionals on record talking about this stuff since wilderness programs have a lot in common with James Ray’s teachings.

One major similarity is in the use of NLP. Now, scientists are still not in agreement about NLP, but it is a concept that makes sense when you think about it. Brett describes, “It’s the relation between how we speak, how we hear, and how we process that information. The way that I say something might not be the way you hear it and the way you hear it might not be the way you process it.” Now, that is clearly a highly subjective experience based on each individual which would explain why it’s hard to pin down scientifically.

**Popu**
**Funny
Seduc
video**

NLP, at its heart, is a highly effective communication technique based on the different styles of learning. People learn visually, through auditory listening, and kinesthetically but everyone is more receptive to one particular type. James Ray and other experts trained in this can maximize results by using all three methods and continually judging what is working best for which individuals and then reinforcing that learning. This is why it is so important to pay attention to the *individual person* using these techniques; **it places masters of NLP in a conversational position of power that can be used to great benefit or great harm.** Brett explains it as “People tend to speak the way they think, and you change the way you’re speaking to gain rapport with them.”

NLP is a valued technique in wilderness programs for its effectiveness in behavior modification of Troubled Teens. As early as 2000 Brett is on record speaking out about the dangerous lack of accountability in these fields, ["We don't have to answer to anybody, and that scares the hell out of me. Oregon needs some \(regulation\) before children die."](#) In wilderness programs there are two main dangers that need to be constantly guarded against – physical and mental.

The very process of behavior modification can leave participants vulnerable psychologically at the point of transformational shift, even when they themselves are leading the change within. It is very important to ensure the person leading these modifications is not abusing that temporary vulnerability, whether it’s physical abuse or psychologically adding their own agenda.

Wilderness programs can use these techniques to great effect on some of the most difficult teen cases because the unpredictability in nature resembles the natural flow of life in any community. This very unpredictability can lead to emergencies – even if well prepared. **James Ray tried to duplicate some of these techniques to gain greater sway over the most financially capable, intelligent, powerful, and transformative people he could find.** It’s not just that he failed to safeguard them in any capacity (although he did, I will address that as well), but that **James Ray twisted and warped valid techniques and amazing experiences** with his own subtle messages. Well, they *were* subtle, until he used his technique to cook people to death. It’s kind of hard not to notice now, huh?

I asked Brett what kind of safety nets he used while running his own wilderness program, because (as far as I know) he has never had any accusations brought against him. When I asked him about that he informed me that the current owners of Sagewalk are [working to reduce coverage](#) of a recent [suspicious death of one of their students](#). This highlights Oprah’s problem right now perfectly – I can say Brett ran Sagewalk with every safety measure in mind, but that does not mean it will continue. These programs are effective or dangerous depending on who’s in charge.

Brett set up several levels of accountability for the well-being of his charges. First, all the field staff were trained in CPR/ basic first aid, as well as the head instructor being either a [Wilderness EMT](#) or [Wilderness First Responder](#). They were also given warning signs to look for – physical and psychological signs that something is amiss. Every student was also under the overall care of licensed doctors. For the most part this included people with PhD’s in Psychology, but there were also several Master’s level people working at the direction of the doctors to contribute to the accountability and hands on understanding that is needed in this work because of the highly individualized nature of it.

Sounds expensive right? The numbers are surprising. James Ray Spiritual Warriors paid \$10,000.00 to attend the five day retreat and \$5,000.00 or so in additional expenses (flight, room and board, preparatory materials, etc). For \$13,000 they could have participated in Brett’s program which was 45+ days and also included things like vision quests. Of course, Brett doesn’t live in a Beverly Hills mansion either.

'The E
love.'

'We A
video

Shaq'

Death
shad

Rece

Vale

Sunc

Vale

watc

laug

you

Jam

Ope

Thur

Meg

Jam

in ex

opp

All A

Rela

LATI

SLIDES

Thin

Toda

Want to be notified of new articles? Subscribe to email notifications [here](#).

Follow me on Twitter [here](#).

[In case the FTC is wondering](#), I do not endorse James Ray and he has never compensated me in any way. Nor Have I been compensated by Sagewalk, although they did send me some information about their company once.

More About: [James Ray scandal](#)

[ShareThis](#)

 [Report article](#)



[James Bond Blu-Ray](#)

Order Now And Save. Low Prices. Free, Fast Shipping On All Orders.
www.HotMovieSale.com



[James Ray](#)

Find and Compare prices on **james ray** at Smarter.com.
www.smarter.com

Chitika | Premium Sponsored Results

Related Articles:

[Literary events around Seattle February 13th -19th](#)

[Some real 'Love' for Valentine's Day on Chris Carter's 'Breakfast With the Beatles'](#)

[Taylor Swift, Miley Cyrus and 'New Moon' are Kids' Choice Award nominees](#)

[Images from "Deathly Hallows" filming site in Berkshire](#)

[George Clooney watch is on at Winter Olympic Games in Canada](#)



[Unemployed Mom Makes \\$6,397/Month Working Online! Read How She Did It.](#)



[Shocking discovery by Boston Researchers for amazing joint relief.](#)

Comments

Conned Mom says:

Cassandra,
Yes,I realize Sagewalk is a wilderness program in Oregon. However,this doesn't just take place in wilderness settings,it happens in behavior modification programs everywhere.It is an integral part of these programs structure. I mentioned Utah because of my child. Why haven't I removed her? NOT from lack of trying,that's for sure!
These facilities run on the same motivation as James Ray,GREED. They WANT your \$7,500/mth rolling in for as long as they can! Anyone that questions their policy's, procedures,credentials are seen as a threat.In my case,I have an ex husband that has been trying to ship my daughter off for years.So, my ex with the guidance & help of ERA, convinced a judge to terminate my parental rights based on the facility's statement that I was "interfering" with my child's therapy. In truth,I was nothing more than a concerned Mother who had valid

Smok



[See a](#)

Link

[My wh](#)
[Fol rar](#)
[We eng](#)

Cass on th

[Tra](#)
[Ins](#)
[Pro](#)
[Te Jar](#)
[Su](#)
[Jar](#)
[Sp lett](#)
[Int cer](#)
[Ho on](#)
[Let](#)
[Sp](#)
[Fu](#)
[Jar dis](#)
[Wh pa](#)

concerns & questions that they refused to answer. I am still fighting for her. She will be locked up till she is 18.

February 2, 9:44 PM

Cassandra Yorgey says:

Conned Mom: It sounds like you had a pretty bad experience, and I'm sorry to hear that. As for Brett, his program ran out of Oregon and was not a lock-down facility. There are certainly still many dangerous programs out there that abuse and neglect teens, and I agree, that's totally wrong and should be stopped. If you're concerned about the safety of your child I am confused as to why you haven't withdrawn them.

February 2, 7:12 PM

Conned Mom says:

I would like to comment on the information that Bret Merle spoke of regarding the methods used inside of the teens wilderness programs. These methods are not just used within the wilderness programs but inside of behavior modification programs everywhere, including the one my own child is incarcerated in. Eagle Ranch Academy in St. George, Utah. In fact, ERAs program and assistant program director currently owns Journeys adolescent transport company that Brett currently works for. There is absolutely NO oversight inside of these places and the state of Utah allow these facility's to SELF GOVERN, which essentially means they are unregulated limited liability organizations. They are generally staffed by unexperienced, non licensed individuals who are not trained to handle children in these lock down facilities and therefore, there is a constant danger of being neglected and abused by the individuals that work there. This outrageous injustice must be stopped. Children have basic human rights

February 2, 11:06 AM

Steve says:

The media has now caused a pig pile of people upon the entire self-development arena by people, many of whom couldn't tell you one sentence about the law of attraction. Joel Osteen delivers the same message every Sunday to a totally filled compaq center, is this all a giant fraud?
Charles Haanel taught it as a course called the master key system in the early 1900's to businessmen. They liked it so much they tried to buy it and keep it a secret. Were these already successful businessmen fraud victims?
Check any list of the traits/habits/beliefs of very successful people and they will boil down to what is being taught by mentors about the law of attraction.
Are all these successful people like Donald Trump and/or Mother Theresa victims of fraud? If so, this is the best and most beneficial fraud in the history of man.
Sadly, critical thinking is becoming more and more of a lost art in our world as people get dumbed down to 15 second sound bites and tweets.

November 8, 6:17 AM

Steve says:

This tragic event should never have happened. James Ray should have stuck to his fine mentoring lectures like fellow teachers Randy Gage and Dov Baron.

Es
lod

Jar
inte

If c

De
futi

Th

Bre
ha:

Bre
Ra

Bre
an

Bre
Ra

Bre

Bre
Ma

Bre
Thi

Jar
up:

De
lod

Pa
Ra

Pa
Jar

Bre
de:

Toj

Bre
Loc

Bre
cal

Jar
Op

**Disc
swe
uses**

Ma
var

Pre
Ra

Sadly, the tragic unstudied version of the fine Native American traditions is what was wrong, not the law of attraction.
The media has now caused a pig pile of people upon the entire self-development arena by people, many of whom couldn't tell you one sentence about the law of attraction.
Joel Osteen delivers the same message every Sunday to a totally filled compaq center, is this all a giant fraud?
Charles Haanel taught it as a course called the master key system in the early 1900's to businessmen. They liked it so much they tried to buy it and keep it a secret. Were these already successful businessmen fraud victims?
Check any list of the traits/habits/beliefs of very successful people and they will boil down to what is being taught by mentors about the law of attraction.
Are all these successful people like Donald Trump and/or

November 8, 6:16 AM

njgirl says:

THANK YOU!! Someone is finally saying NLP! I thought "NLP" upon first hearing of the incident in Arizona.

I learned NLP Level 1, and refuse to have anything to do with it, and can spot it instantly. NLP is used under the premise, "well, you have free will, its your choice", and to that I say, "Then why use it". It plays with your subconscious. I have an NLP tape, and after listening to a harmless story? I am zoned out"stoned", can't move a muscle. ITs very carefully chosen words.

Now, it can be used for positive effects. I have yet to see that. Interestingly enough, every practitioner of NLP that has used it for self serviing purposes?? They are out of business, no longer practicing, have had lawsuits against them. Yes, I truly believe that JR used NLP.

AND THANK YOU FOR BRINGING THAT INTO THE MIX OF "HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN?" With NLP? Very easily.

My prayers to all that attended the Arizona tragedy.

November 3, 12:16 AM

Ex JRI Warrior says:

well thank you Anna for the compliment. i have spoke to authorities but haven't talked to Media. Others that have went on even further than I, have talked to media and i think others will keep coming forward to tell their stories and possibly also filing lawsuits. I know a couple of them were on Good Morning America, one of which was Mickey Reynolds. I actually went to several events with him(as well as with Liz Neuman) but I got out and they continued on..... Another thing I was thinking of was in response to some peoples comments about JRI participants being rich people....but that's not the case, at least not with me. I am not rich in the least...I am actually in debt thanks to James Ray and his irresistible sales pitch...."if money is the reason you are hesitating, then that is exactly why you need to sign up." Sure wish I never took out those credit cards... ;0

November 1, 11:07 PM

been there says:

St. Francis Adirondack Experience, Lake Placid NY needs to be investigated. There have been allegations of sexual abuse that have been repeatedly reported and dismissed.

Ma
Jar
St
Ru
SH
SH
Co
Atf
Or
Art
Da
Wh
Th
Wil
Tu
Th
An
Sp
Sp
Ho
Ca
Int
sw
Ru
ab
Sa
it's
Pa
Re
Du
Th
Dr.
Liz
Loi
ab
Ky

November 1, 2:49 PM

Anna says:

Ex JRI Warrior - you seem level-headed and intelligent. Have you considered coming out and speaking to the media about your experiences? It might help others to realize that almost anyone - given the right circumstances, could fall prey to the kind of false charisma that James Ray has used.

October 30, 5:34 PM

Peace and Love says:

Prayers of peace to the families and friends of those who died. This was a horrific tragedy that should not have happened. JR and others use powerful techniques such NLP and Large Group Awareness Training. These are very powerful and used by untrained and unlicensed people with their own agenda it can be very dangerous. This is not uncommon among many of these "Peak Potential" type speakers. Usually offered for free to attract unknowing and unwilling participants. Many times the "free" seminar involves a three day commitment of intensive indoctrination of the speaker's ideas without the person having the ability to leave. Of course you are told you can leave, but it's "highly suggested" you don't. Many times there are people standing guard at the hotel room entrance. Snacks and water are usually under the control of the seminar. The control is subtle at first. High energy music is played to keep energy up. Once exhausted and receptive then the pressure to sign up for more!

October 23, 10:50 PM

Lynn says:

I'm sorry--I meant EX-JRI Warrior, of course.

October 22, 4:14 PM

Ex JRI Warrior says:

I actually spoke to one of the investigators yesterday and they have all my information on file. I would encourage everyone else to do the same:

This is just one of the people working on the case
Liz Martz, Investigative Assistant
Criminal Investigations Bureau
Investigations, SCS, SOCU
Yavapai County Sheriff's Office
3505 W Highway 260
Camp Verde, AZ 86322
928-771-3278 Office
928-554-8801 Voice Mail
928-554-8708 Fax

October 22, 1:45 PM

[Wilderness](#)
[Immersion](#)
[Scholarship](#)
[www.i](#)

[Scholarship](#)
[Sea](#)
[Tree](#)
[www.i](#)

[Wilderness](#)
[The](#)
[Boy](#)
[www.i](#)

Examine by Category

[Arts & Entertainment](#)
[Bars & Clubs](#)
[Business & Finance](#)
[Careers & Work](#)
[Education & Training](#)
[Family & Parenting](#)
[Fitness & Wellness](#)
[Food & Drink](#)
[Gadgets & Technology](#)
[Games & Hobbies](#)
[Health](#)
[Home & Living](#)
[Neighborhoods](#)

More Exam

[Associations](#)
[Classifications](#)
[Events](#)
[Examine](#)
[News By](#)
[News By](#)
[Press Release](#)
[Slideshows](#)
[Stock Quotes](#)
[Today In](#)
[Vancouver](#)

[Sitemap](#)
[Exam](#)
[Link](#)

Adve

[Join our](#)
[Blog](#)
[Examiner](#)
[Career](#)
[RSS Feeds](#)
[Terms](#)
[Policy](#)
[Contact](#)
[Walder](#)
[AEG V](#)
[Found](#)

Brea Now

World
Techn
Busine
Entert
Enviro
Health
Sports
Style
Strang

Lynn says:

I'm sorry--I meant EX-JRI Warrior, of course.

October 22, 11:53 AM

Lynn says:

JRI Warrior--I appreciate you speaking out about your experiences. I think people so easily condemn those who have been manipulated using very sophisticated techniques. I think we are all susceptible at one time or another to some kind of scam--if we're honest. I'd really encourage you to get in touch with the Arizona authorities. They need people who have experienced JR's methods and are willing to speak out.

October 22, 11:52 AM

Ex JRI Warrior says:

yeah John....i was in the same boat. not sure what it was...but it was pretty powerful. definitely kind of scary to know that something like that can happen to you. i am just relieved to know that I was able to get clear headed enough to get out and see James for who he really is. it's just so over the top...every new aspect to this story just boggles me. well not really...but that's just because i know what james is capable of...just sad that his EGO has gotten sooo out of control.

October 21, 4:48 PM

John says:

He always says "When would NOW be a good time to act". NOW is the NLP he uses trying to get people to do things now.

If one was to go to his seminar like I have, they would quickly realize he uses these NLP methods in order to make more sales. From past seminars I went to, I was in a hypnotic daze when I did some of the events. Because of all the hypnosis that was laid upon me.

I couldn't think, and it makes me wonder if the people who went into this sweat lodge were under the same kind of spell.

Peace

October 21, 1:24 PM

Ex JRI Warrior says:

Cassandra....I whole-heartedly agree with your first couple sentences of this article. So many people are bad mouthing the victims and the other participants.....and they are the VICTIMS. It just amazes me at how insensitive and disrespectful and hurtful people can be! And in regards to James and his subtle messages....another aspect is brought up in one of the other articles i have read. It brings up the fact that James teaches that your words are powerful and that where you put attention, attention grows... Well if that's the truth....why does he

always say "what first must die?"..... He is a big manifester....so you would think he would be more careful with his words. Interesting concept i think.

October 21, 2:06 AM

Name:

Comments:

1000 characters left

SEND

