

INTERVIEW OF JASON BRYAN

DATE: July 7, 2015

TIME: 10:20 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.

LOCATION: Office of the State Attorney
524 East Nelson Avenue, #A
DeFuniak Springs, Florida, 32433

PRESENT: Greg Anchors, Esquire
Chief Assistant State Attorney

Clifton Drake, Esquire
Assistant State Attorney

Investigator Chris Webster
Walton County Sheriff's Office

Investigator Candace Bearden
State Attorney's Office

Janice Cosson
State Attorney's Office

TRANSCRIBED BY:

NANCY L. BOYCE
BOYCE REPORTING SERVICE
Post Office Box 182
Shalimar, Florida 32579
Phone: (850) 651-3660
Cell: (850) 974-6940
e-mail: Boycereporting@aol.com

1 MR. DRAKE: Today is July 7th, 2015.
2 It's 10:20 a.m. My name is Clifton Drake. I'm an
3 Assistant State Attorney. And I'm going to ask if
4 everyone would go around the room and say who they
5 are.

6 INV. BEARDEN: Candace Bearden, State
7 Attorney's Office.

8 MS. COSSON: Janice Cosson, State Attorney's
9 Office.

10 MR. ANCHORS: Greg Anchors, State Attorney's
11 Office.

12 INV. WEBSTER: Chris Webster, Walton County
13 Sheriff's Office.

14 MR. BRYAN: And I'm Jason Bryan.

15 MR. DRAKE: Mr. Bryan, would you raise your
16 right hand, please? Do you swear to tell the
17 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,
18 so help you God?

19 MR. BRYAN: I do.

20 MR. DRAKE: Mr. Bryan, as I mentioned before
21 we went on the record, you are here to tell the
22 truth. You've been placed under oath. If you
23 were to fail to tell the truth, that would be
24 perjury. You could be prosecuted for that, and
25 what you say could be used against you in that

1 situation. Do you understand that?

2 MR. BRYAN: I do.

3 MR. DRAKE: Okay. If you would start out by
4 telling us, when did you start working for Walton
5 County?

6 MR. BRYAN: I believe it was early 2006, about
7 April of 2006.

8 MR. DRAKE: What was your job at that time?

9 MR. BRYAN: I was a planner.

10 MR. ANCHORS: Could we get his -- an address,
11 mailing address, street address, and phone number?

12 MR. BRYAN: 602 Fairview Avenue, Opp, Alabama
13 36467.

14 MR. DRAKE: And what's a good phone number for
15 you?

16 MR. BRYAN: Would be 205-503-0089.

17 MR. DRAKE: Thank you. So you started
18 in 2006 --

19 MR. BRYAN: I believe that's the case.

20 MR. DRAKE: -- as, did you say a planner?

21 MR. BRYAN: Yeah.

22 MR. DRAKE: Okay. And what was your
23 responsibility associated with being a planner?

24 MR. BRYAN: Mainly plans review, comprehensive
25 plan, which would detail some policy work. But

1 mostly it -- it was primarily plans review.

2 MR. DRAKE: Would you be assigned specific
3 projects, or did you work with a particular
4 developer? How was that divvied up?

5 MR. BRYAN: It wasn't divvied up in any
6 particular fashion. It was just first in, first
7 out, basically.

8 MR. DRAKE: Did you stay working as a planner
9 the entire time, or did you ever switch positions?

10 MR. BRYAN: I got I guess you would call it a
11 promotion when I become a senior planner.
12 Basically, same job, more responsibility, no pay.

13 MR. DRAKE: Did you have people working for
14 you at that time?

15 MR. BRYAN: No, I didn't have any direct
16 reportables.

17 MR. DRAKE: Who were your supervisors during
18 your time in Walton County?

19 MR. BRYAN: Lois La Seur was a planning
20 director, or planning manager. Pat Blackshear was
21 the director. Then there was Gerry Demers. And
22 there was a strange situation where Jennifer
23 Christensen was involved. Didn't quite understand
24 what her role was. Then there was Wayne --

25 MR. DRAKE: Dyess?

1 MR. BRYAN: -- Dyess.

2 MR. DRAKE: What do you mean by strange
3 situation between Jennifer Christensen?

4 MR. BRYAN: She was brought in to advise
5 during the rewrite of the comprehensive plan.

6 MR. DRAKE: Do you know what she did on a
7 day-to-day basis?

8 MR. BRYAN: Primarily that. She managed that
9 process.

10 MR. DRAKE: Did anyone report to her, that you
11 know of?

12 MR. BRYAN: We had -- Ken Goldberg was hired
13 as a consultant, and Melissa Ward worked primarily
14 with her. I did some work and report -- and gave
15 it to them to compile and come up with a new
16 comprehensive plan.

17 MR. DRAKE: What was it like working with Pat
18 Blackshear?

19 MR. BRYAN: Unique. She was very political in
20 her determinations. Oftentimes, when a review
21 come up and she didn't want to address any issues
22 at that time, she would send you to go find
23 something, some other obscure piece of
24 information, saying you weren't ready.

25 MR. DRAKE: What types of decisions would she

1 avoid?

2 MR. BRYAN: Anything that she didn't have time
3 to -- to really address or didn't want to address
4 at the time. There was no rhyme or reason. Now,
5 in my view, now. This is all my opinion.

6 MR. DRAKE: Did you ever sense that it was
7 having to do with a particular developer or a
8 particular project?

9 MR. BRYAN: Not that definitive, no, I
10 wouldn't say that. If it was controversial or had
11 the potential to be controversial, she tried to
12 not get involved with it right away. She would
13 often test the -- the winds to see which direction
14 it was going.

15 MR. DRAKE: How would she do that?

16 MR. BRYAN: I think she prim- -- primarily did
17 it through what she heard on the street, or her --
18 who -- the relationship she had, and who would
19 call her, and things like that, contact that we
20 would have with developers in front of the public.
21 Sometimes it would be from commissioners who were
22 interested in, you know, whatever project might be
23 coming out.

24 MR. DRAKE: Do you recall any specific
25 commissioners that would meet with her or call her

1 about particular projects?

2 MR. BRYAN: Not really. They all did on some
3 sort of a regular basis about something.

4 MR. DRAKE: Would it be common to see
5 commissioners in the office?

6 MR. BRYAN: Not necessarily common, but, yes,
7 they would come by and visit. Of course, you
8 know, during meeting days they were always talking
9 to each other a little, you know. She made a
10 point of trying to stay in touch with them.

11 MR. DRAKE: What about county administration,
12 so Ronnie Bell, Shirl Williams, Lyle Seigler,
13 people like that, how often were they in the
14 office?

15 MR. BRYAN: Not that often.

16 MR. DRAKE: Did they have much interaction
17 with day-to-day decisions in your office?

18 MR. BRYAN: Not that I'm aware of. I mean, if
19 they did, it come through her. It wouldn't be --
20 you know, they would direct her or whatever.

21 MR. DRAKE: They wouldn't come to you?

22 MR. BRYAN: No.

23 MR. DRAKE: Can you think of any problem
24 projects? Any stick out in your mind while you
25 were there, that this was -- is a nightmare, or --

1 MR. BRYAN: Well -- well, it -- you talking
2 about hard to handle, or are you talking about in
3 public perception, or --

4 MR. DRAKE: Both. Any of it.

5 MR. BRYAN: Most projects in South Walton
6 are -- the neighborhoods generally are very
7 involved in South Walton, so you often have some
8 activists or locals that would want to know what
9 was going on with this particular project, and, of
10 course, they kept us in check and made sure we did
11 what we were supposed to do, made sure that our
12 planning reports were tight, and it -- that we
13 didn't have any loose ends or we didn't miss
14 anything.

15 So, yeah, there were several projects that
16 always got attention of certain people.

17 MR. DRAKE: Did you ever notice some projects
18 getting more attention than others, or moving
19 faster than others?

20 MR. BRYAN: Not particularly.

21 MR. DRAKE: Are there any developers that you
22 would say seemed to get special treatment from
23 some people?

24 MR. BRYAN: No, I wouldn't say that. I mean,
25 we tried to -- and from my point of view, I tried

1 to get everybody in at the same time, get them out
2 as soon as possible. Nobody -- I mean, I
3 inherited 60 cases when I stepped in the door.
4 And the day that I walked in the door, a man
5 turned in his notice and I ended up picking up his
6 cases. So I ended up, you know, having to work
7 through a lot of paper.

8 MR. DRAKE: Have you ever heard of any errors
9 being made in recreation fee calculations?

10 MR. BRYAN: Yes.

11 MR. DRAKE: What do you know about those?

12 MR. BRYAN: There was one in particular that
13 was pretty, I would say, tense. It was one that
14 Melissa had done, or she was semi in charge of.
15 My understanding of the situation was that a
16 decimal point was dropped or some -- some number
17 got transposed, and then it didn't come to light
18 right away. It was after the fact.

19 When Pat found out about it, she made Melissa
20 do a week's worth of research and -- and explain
21 what she had done and how it happened and, you
22 know, basically give an accounting of what the
23 situation was.

24 MR. DRAKE: When did you first learn about
25 that mistake?

1 MR. BRYAN: Well, I sat next to Melissa for my
2 whole tenure that I was there that she was there,
3 so I would guess that was probably 2008, 2009,
4 maybe. I don't -- I can't get a date on that one.
5 But I -- I remember that being a big deal, because
6 Pat was on the warpath.

7 MR. DRAKE: Did Melissa ever talk to you about
8 what happened?

9 MR. BRYAN: She did.

10 MR. DRAKE: What did she say?

11 MR. BRYAN: She told me that she had -- the --
12 the procedure at the time was so mixed up that
13 they would bring in the project, and we were
14 encouraged to bring in the planning clerks, get
15 them involved, so, basically, had some succession
16 planning going on, maybe give them some more
17 experience, and allow them to take charge of some
18 of the paperwork and handle it.

19 I believe she told Kendal Marse to, you know,
20 take this down to the -- to the property
21 appraiser's, get the letter, and then type up the
22 memo. That's the understanding that I got out of
23 the discussions that we had and finding out what
24 went -- what really went on.

25 MR. DRAKE: Is that all from what Melissa told

1 you?

2 MR. BRYAN: And Kendal.

3 MR. DRAKE: What, specifically, did Kendal
4 say?

5 MR. BRYAN: That she made a mistake on the --
6 on the memo.

7 MR. DRAKE: Did -- which project was that in
8 relation to?

9 MR. BRYAN: Somewhere on -- in Blue Mountain.
10 I don't know exactly which one.

11 MR. DRAKE: So you had specific conversations
12 with Kendal about a Blue Mountain Project?

13 MR. BRYAN: Yes. Or -- or the memo.

14 MR. DRAKE: All right. What memo are you
15 referring to?

16 MR. BRYAN: You have to issue a letter -- you
17 had to get a letter from the property appraiser
18 that gives you the value of the property, which
19 then establishes, you know, the percentage that is
20 owed.

21 MR. DRAKE: And Kendal talked to you about
22 that particular document?

23 MR. BRYAN: She talked to me about a lot of
24 different things, but, yes, that's part of it.

25 MR. DRAKE: So is what Melissa told you and

1 what Kendal told you, did those match up?

2 MR. BRYAN: Yes.

3 MR. DRAKE: And what was their explanation for
4 how it all happened?

5 MR. BRYAN: That it was a simple mistake.

6 MR. DRAKE: Is it your understanding that
7 Kendal is the one who made the mistake, but then
8 Melissa was ultimately responsible because she was
9 the planner?

10 MR. BRYAN: That's right.

11 MR. DRAKE: How much of the interaction
12 between Pat Blackshear and Melissa did you hear?

13 MR. BRYAN: On this particular --

14 MR. DRAKE: On this -- yes.

15 MR. BRYAN: Nothing specific, other than she
16 was told to type -- to do all of this research,
17 report back to Pat. And my understanding was --
18 and, of course, this was a long time ago --
19 Melissa had a stack of papers showing all of the
20 stuff that she had done, and gave it to Pat. Pat
21 made her basically sign a memo taking
22 responsibility for it.

23 MR. DRAKE: Did you ever see that memo?

24 MR. BRYAN: I believe I did. I believe I -- I
25 edited it for Melissa.

1 MR. DRAKE: I want to show you the memo I
2 think you may be referring to. So I just want to
3 see if this is, in fact, the one that you helped
4 edit.

5 MR. BRYAN: I believe it is.

6 MR. DRAKE: And, for the record, this is the
7 memo that says it's from Melissa Ward to Pat
8 Blackshear, dated May 21st, 2008. It's a
9 recreation fee admission for Lakeside.

10 Who actually wrote this memo?

11 MR. BRYAN: Melissa.

12 MR. DRAKE: All right. And then you edited it
13 for her?

14 MR. BRYAN: And, of course, that just means
15 read it and be sure, you know, there's nothing
16 dramatic.

17 MR. DRAKE: Do you know if Melissa gave this
18 letter, or this memo, to Pat Blackshear?

19 MR. BRYAN: Like I said, she gave her a stack
20 of documentation and everything to Pat. That was
21 part of the process, is that she was supposed to
22 take a -- you know, whatever time it did -- that
23 it -- she needed to produce whatever
24 documentation, and admit to Pat that this was a
25 mistake, or explain the situation.

1 MR. DRAKE: Now, there's no mention in here
2 about Kendal Marse. Any reason why?

3 MR. BRYAN: Probably because Melissa felt like
4 it was her responsibility, or she felt like it was
5 an honest mistake on Kendal's part.

6 MR. DRAKE: Did you ever hear Pat or Lois
7 refer to this memo?

8 MR. BRYAN: Well, of course, Lois was involved
9 with it from the beginning, helping Melissa
10 through the process and figuring out how or what
11 was supposed to be in the documentation.

12 MR. DRAKE: Okay. Could you just briefly talk
13 about the different areas Lois would have been
14 involved, how she would have found out about this,
15 and then what her role was once it was made known
16 to her?

17 MR. BRYAN: Pat would have called her in and
18 said, what do we do about it. She -- she leaned
19 on Lois on trying to figure out what was -- what
20 would be permissible and what would be the right
21 way. And, likewise, Melissa would go to Lois for
22 advice on how to word it, too. Melissa and I both
23 reported to Lois, who basically reported to Pat.

24 MR. DRAKE: Do you know if Lois helped Melissa
25 write this?

1 MR. BRYAN: I would say that, yes, more than
2 likely Lois helped advise her on what it should
3 say.

4 MR. DRAKE: Did you ever see Melissa hand the
5 final memo to Lois?

6 MR. BRYAN: No.

7 MR. DRAKE: Have you ever seen any other memos
8 like this?

9 MR. BRYAN: Not particularly like that. Not
10 on plat fees or anything.

11 MR. DRAKE: Are you --

12 MR. BRYAN: But it was routine that Pat would
13 make somebody sign some paperwork.

14 MR. DRAKE: With regard to recreation fees,
15 are you aware of any other miscalculations?

16 MR. BRYAN: I'm not. Nothing to that scale,
17 if there was -- if -- my procedure was, is to take
18 it to the property appraiser's office. They would
19 issue a memo. I would turn around and verify,
20 give it back to the -- to the clerk's office and
21 let them collect it.

22 MR. DRAKE: Did you ever ask Kendal or any
23 other processing person to prepare the documents
24 for you?

25 MR. BRYAN: I might have, because at one point

1 we were trying to use a bunch of boilerplates that
2 everybody could access and create that. However,
3 I would always go to the property appraiser myself
4 and get the letter from Lori.

5 MR. DRAKE: Once you got that letter, would
6 you then do the five percent calculation, or would
7 you have somebody else do it?

8 MR. BRYAN: I did.

9 MR. DRAKE: Did you ever -- did you ever ask
10 someone else to do the five percent?

11 MR. BRYAN: No.

12 MR. DRAKE: Do you know if Melissa did?

13 MR. BRYAN: She may have.

14 MR. DRAKE: Or at least on this one, I guess,
15 she was telling you that she did.

16 MR. BRYAN: Right.

17 MR. DRAKE: Do you know how common that was
18 for her to do that?

19 MR. BRYAN: It wasn't -- it wasn't uncommon,
20 but it -- because Melissa was, basically -- she
21 managed the -- the planning clerks, and advised
22 them. But I wouldn't say it was very common
23 either. I mean, you only got one of these once
24 the project was completed and approved and got
25 through all the -- the planning stages and the

1 platting stages. So sometimes you would take the
2 project, and it lasted two or three years before
3 you actually got to this point.

4 MR. DRAKE: I want to show you another memo.
5 This one is dated July 17th, 2008. I want to see
6 if you recognize that.

7 MR. BRYAN: I don't recognize that.

8 MR. DRAKE: Before me showing you that, have
9 you ever heard about that mistake being made for
10 Endless Summer?

11 MR. BRYAN: I don't believe so.

12 MR. DRAKE: Did you ever hear Pat Blackshear
13 or Lois La Seur talking about a second recreation
14 fee error?

15 MR. BRYAN: I won't be able to verify that.
16 But comparing the memos, it looks like it's the
17 same language.

18 MR. DRAKE: You're confident that you've seen
19 this one from Melissa to Pat?

20 MR. BRYAN: Uh-huh.

21 MR. DRAKE: Is it possible you saw the one
22 from Kendal to Pat, or have you just flat never
23 seen it?

24 MR. BRYAN: It's possible. Can I testify to
25 it? No, I won't be able to do that. I won't --

1 that one would not -- I'm trying to think of the
2 project name, and I don't know where that's
3 located.

4 MR. DRAKE: It was one by Doodle Harris. And
5 there's only three or four lots, but I think it
6 was beach front.

7 MR. BRYAN: Oh, yeah. That's probably going
8 to be across from where the V restaurant is now, I
9 guess.

10 MR. DRAKE: When you mentioned earlier that
11 Pat was on the warpath with Melissa, did she ever
12 get on the warpath with anybody else during that
13 time period?

14 MR. BRYAN: Oh, yeah.

15 MR. DRAKE: Like who?

16 MR. BRYAN: Me.

17 MR. DRAKE: And for what?

18 MR. BRYAN: At the time, I don't remember.
19 And oftentimes she would -- I would guess, to be
20 nice, she was paranoid. She was really worried
21 about her image. She was worried about, you know,
22 being in the good graces of the commissioners and
23 above it. And sometimes those things brought out
24 the worst of her.

25 MR. DRAKE: I want to ask you a few questions

1 about letters of credit --

2 MR. BRYAN: Okay.

3 MR. DRAKE: -- and see what you know about
4 those. Do you know if any ever expired without
5 ever being collected or released, or without
6 construction being completed?

7 MR. BRYAN: I would believe, yes, there were
8 some.

9 MR. DRAKE: Do you know if it was accidental
10 or intentional? Do you have any feel for that?

11 MR. BRYAN: I would not think that that --
12 that they would be intentional. I'm going to be a
13 little protective of the planning department here,
14 because having been through that myself, I
15 personally did not accept letters of credit or did
16 have them. Melissa was the conduit for most of
17 those. But at any given time, you know, there's
18 no telling how many there were. And then you also
19 had to follow up and figure out where they were in
20 construction and if they were still viable.

21 She was adamant about making sure they were
22 collectible in Florida on a Florida bank, because
23 I think they had had some bad experiences in the
24 past of them expiring and not being able to
25 collect.

1 MR. DRAKE: Do you know how often they would
2 expire?

3 MR. BRYAN: Most letters of credit were good
4 for either one or two years, so you would keep
5 them in a pipeline, basically. And that would
6 probably be where a mistake was made, because you
7 had them all stacked up, and, you know, they would
8 either be in a sequence, and if you didn't keep up
9 with it, then one would fall out or run over.

10 MR. DRAKE: Was Melissa the one responsible
11 for determining when they were about to expire?

12 MR. BRYAN: For the most part, yes.

13 MR. DRAKE: Would there have been anybody else
14 who would have had that responsibility?

15 MR. BRYAN: Well, Pat, of course. I mean,
16 she's the ultimate responsibility of it all. Lois
17 may have been aware of it. But I believe, again,
18 that they had a system that flagged things when
19 dates were supposed to come up.

20 MR. DRAKE: Is that the NaviLine system?

21 MR. BRYAN: Uh-huh.

22 MR. DRAKE: How often was that used?

23 MR. BRYAN: Depending on the planner, but most
24 of us used it on a daily basis.

25 MR. DRAKE: Which planners would you say used

1 it all the time?

2 MR. BRYAN: Melissa was the guru. She used it
3 all the time. I personally didn't use it that --
4 as often as she did, because I did most of mine in
5 Word and then drop it in later. But almost
6 everybody -- well, everybody had an account.

7 MR. DRAKE: Do you know of anybody who did not
8 use it or barely used it?

9 MR. BRYAN: Not really, because they --
10 everybody had a different set of tasks within it
11 that you had to do, and one would trigger the
12 other, and then it would flag the next one. So
13 everybody who was involved with -- during the
14 process would be involved in it some way.

15 MR. DRAKE: Did you ever hear of or come
16 across checks being left in files without being
17 deposited?

18 MR. BRYAN: No.

19 MR. DRAKE: What about development orders,
20 what would happen with development orders once
21 they were approved?

22 MR. BRYAN: Development orders, when I first
23 got there, were in a hard format, put in binders
24 behind -- that was kept in a bookshelf. And then
25 after a while we started using NaviLine, and then

1 each one of the individual planners would also
2 have their own copy of the development orders. I,
3 myself, kept them in the legal file with the --
4 with the project reviews.

5 MR. DRAKE: Did you keep those DOs in your
6 desk?

7 MR. BRYAN: I kept it at a -- at the -- in a
8 book -- bookcase behind mine.

9 MR. DRAKE: Would that have been the only copy
10 of the DO, or just a copy for you to refer to if
11 you needed it?

12 MR. BRYAN: It would be one that I referred
13 to. Oftentimes they would be in the NaviLine
14 system, which was the electronic version. I kept
15 one on my desktop, also. Plus, I had a hard copy.

16 MR. DRAKE: Does anyone else have any
17 questions related to any of that?

18 MR. ANCHORS: Who was the name of the person
19 that quit when you started?

20 MR. BRYAN: You know, I can't think of his
21 name. I can see his face. He was from Virginia.

22 MR. ANCHORS: Got some names up on the board.
23 I don't know whether it's any of those or not,
24 over on the left.

25 MR. BRYAN: No, I don't see him. I can --

1 MR. ANCHORS: Are you aware of any other
2 projects that had problems that were resolved more
3 politically than according to the code?

4 MR. BRYAN: When you -- when you say it that
5 way, it sounds like there's some tradeoffs.
6 Oftentimes there were not tradeoffs. It was just
7 a neighbor would like to have a fence put up
8 instead of vegetation or things like that. That
9 would -- we would work through some of those
10 issues. And that was within the code. There was
11 options allowed that way. For the most part, that
12 was the way it was handled.

13 MR. ANCHORS: So you don't remember a road
14 being built to benefit a developer?

15 MR. BRYAN: No.

16 MR. ANCHORS: About hauling dirt to a
17 property?

18 MR. BRYAN: I wouldn't be aware of that
19 either. At the planning -- at the planning stage,
20 you wouldn't get into those type of operations.

21 MR. ANCHORS: You wouldn't even hear about
22 them throughout the office since most of the time
23 the engineering section was under you all back in
24 those days?

25 MR. BRYAN: Or administration in DeFuniak, or

1 someone else, or public works doing some work,
2 maybe. But I wouldn't see how that would be
3 connected to -- to the project. There wouldn't be
4 a -- I would not see a direct line between, you
5 know, this was a tradeoff or anything.

6 MR. ANCHORS: I have nothing further.

7 INV. WEBSTER: I was going to ask, did you
8 have any projects where letters of credit had
9 expired, that you were aware of?

10 MR. BRYAN: Not that I'm aware of, but I
11 wouldn't say that wouldn't be the case, because in
12 2008 everything went harem scarem, and we had FDIC
13 coming in, picking up projects, and developers
14 swapping and trading. And sometimes those letters
15 of credit would have to be renegotiated or some
16 replaced with another one. So, I mean, I wouldn't
17 say it wouldn't be impossible.

18 INV. WEBSTER: Uh-huh.

19 INV. BEARDEN: I don't have anything.

20 MR. DRAKE: All right. Thank you very much
21 for coming.

22 MR. BRYAN: All right. Thank you all.

23 INV. WEBSTER: Let me turn this off here.
24 It's about a quarter to 11:00.

25 (WHEREUPON, the interview was concluded.)

1 CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIPTION

2
3 I, Nancy L. Boyce, do hereby certify that the
4 foregoing pages are a transcription of the digital
5 recording of the interview of **JASON BRYAN**, conducted on
6 the 7th day of July, 2015.
7
8
9

10 _____
11 Nancy L. Boyce, Transcriptionist

Date

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