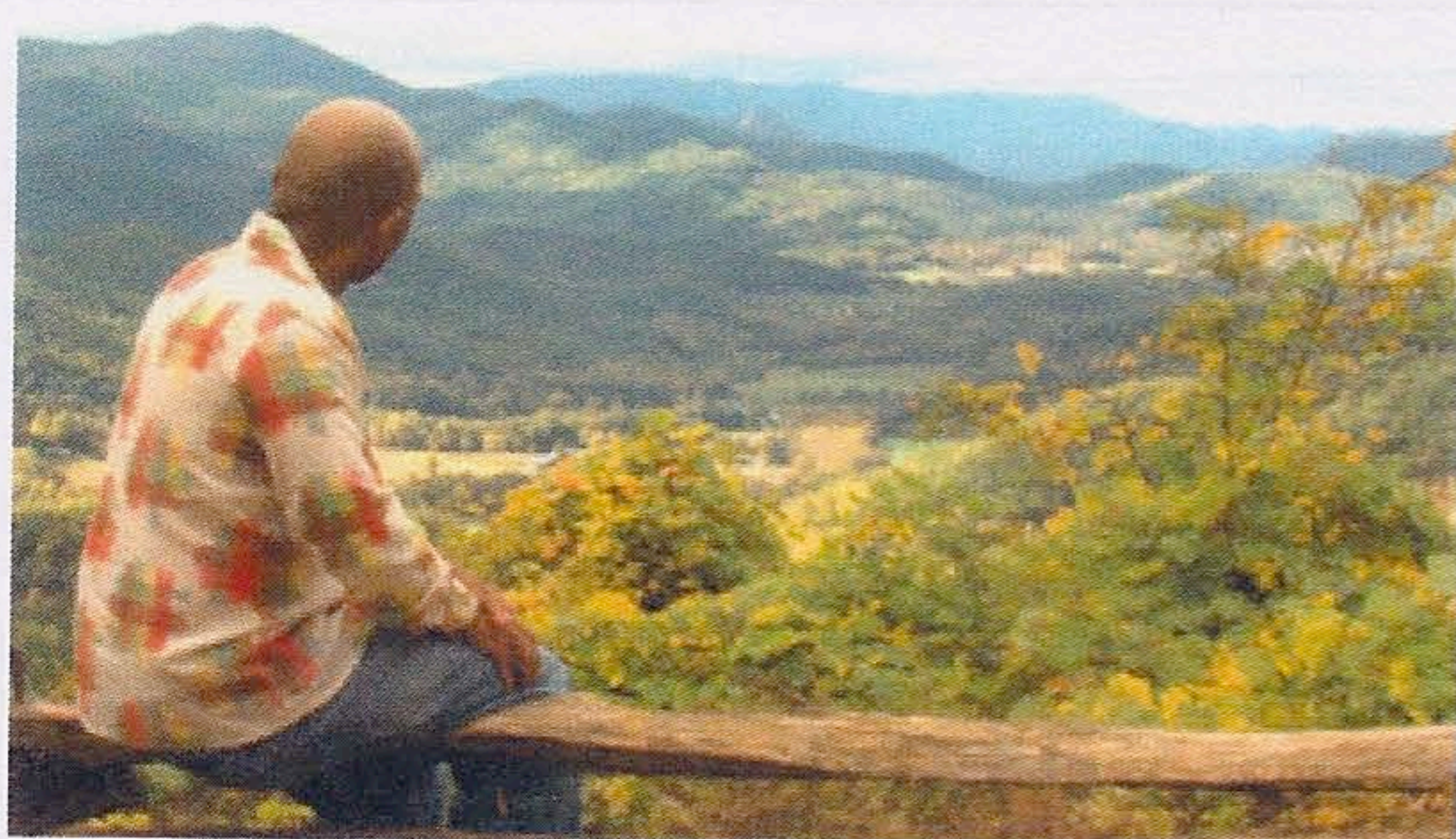


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The M Report

FRIDAY, APRIL 1, 2011

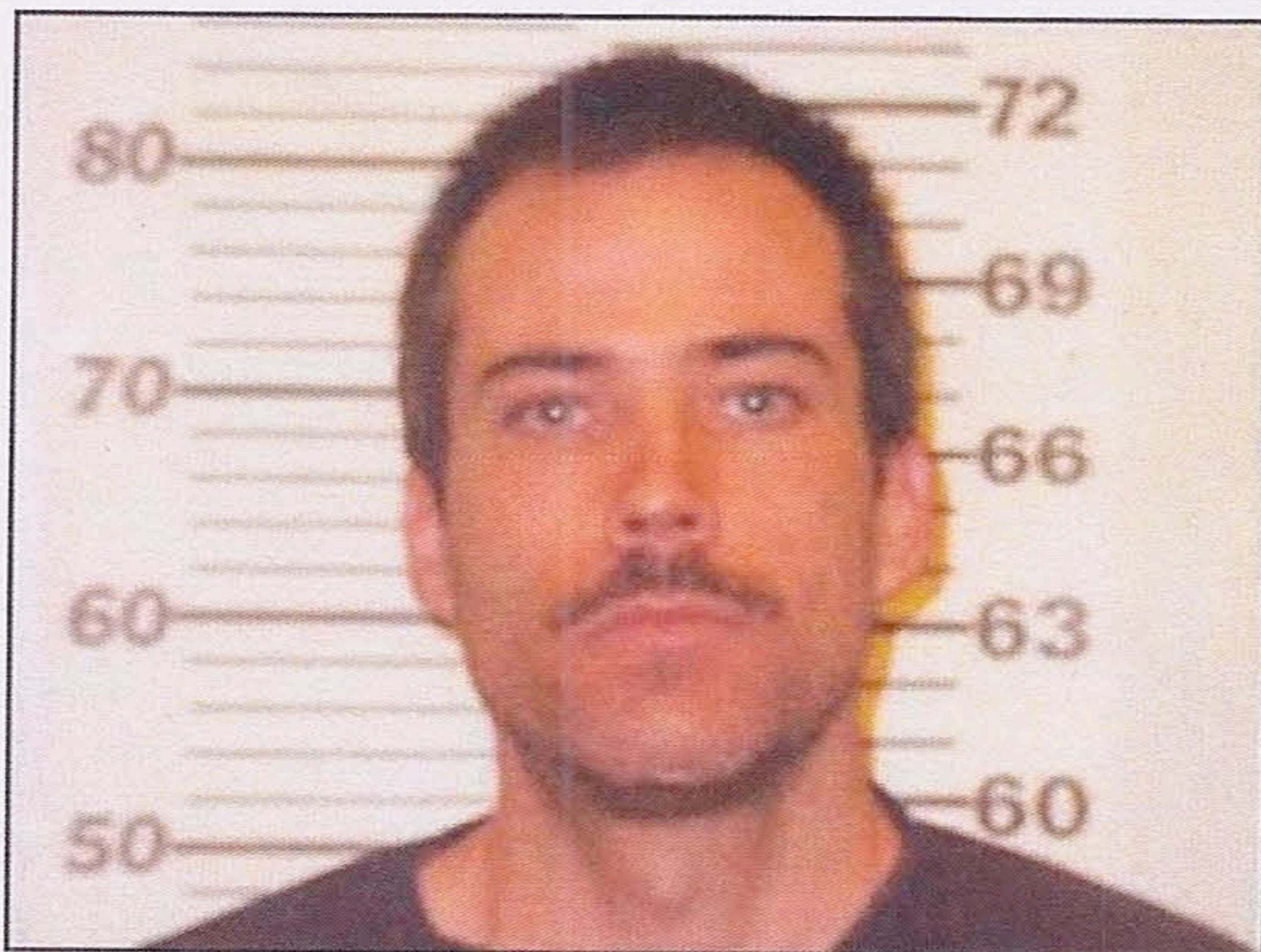
Ken Wyatt and the Ballad of a Bomber



Professor Ken Wyatt's documentary *Pray for Eric* is a half-hour exploration of the rural and mountainous area of North Carolina where bomber Eric Rudolph was caught after being a fugitive for five years.

Professor Wyatt was curious because people from that area allegedly sympathized for that particular terrorist, and Wyatt wanted to know why.

What you should understand if you don't already is that Eric Rudolph was responsible for a series of bombings from 1996 to 1998, which resulted in the deaths of two people and the near-fatal injuries of hundreds. He became



Eric Rudolph

infamously known as the Olympic bomber when it was eventually revealed that Rudolph set off the bomb on July 27th in Atlanta's Centennial Park during the 1996 Summer Olympics. Rudolph was caught in 2003 and is currently serving four consecutive life sentences.

Ken Wyatt graduated from Norfolk State University with a degree in Electronics Engineering. It wasn't a field that Wyatt especially liked, but both his parents were engineers, mostly working in aerospace, so Wyatt figured he'd appease them by also entering the field. Yet, it got to a point where Wyatt had to get out of it. He said he started helping to make nuclear weapons, and unlike Rudolph, Wyatt had no

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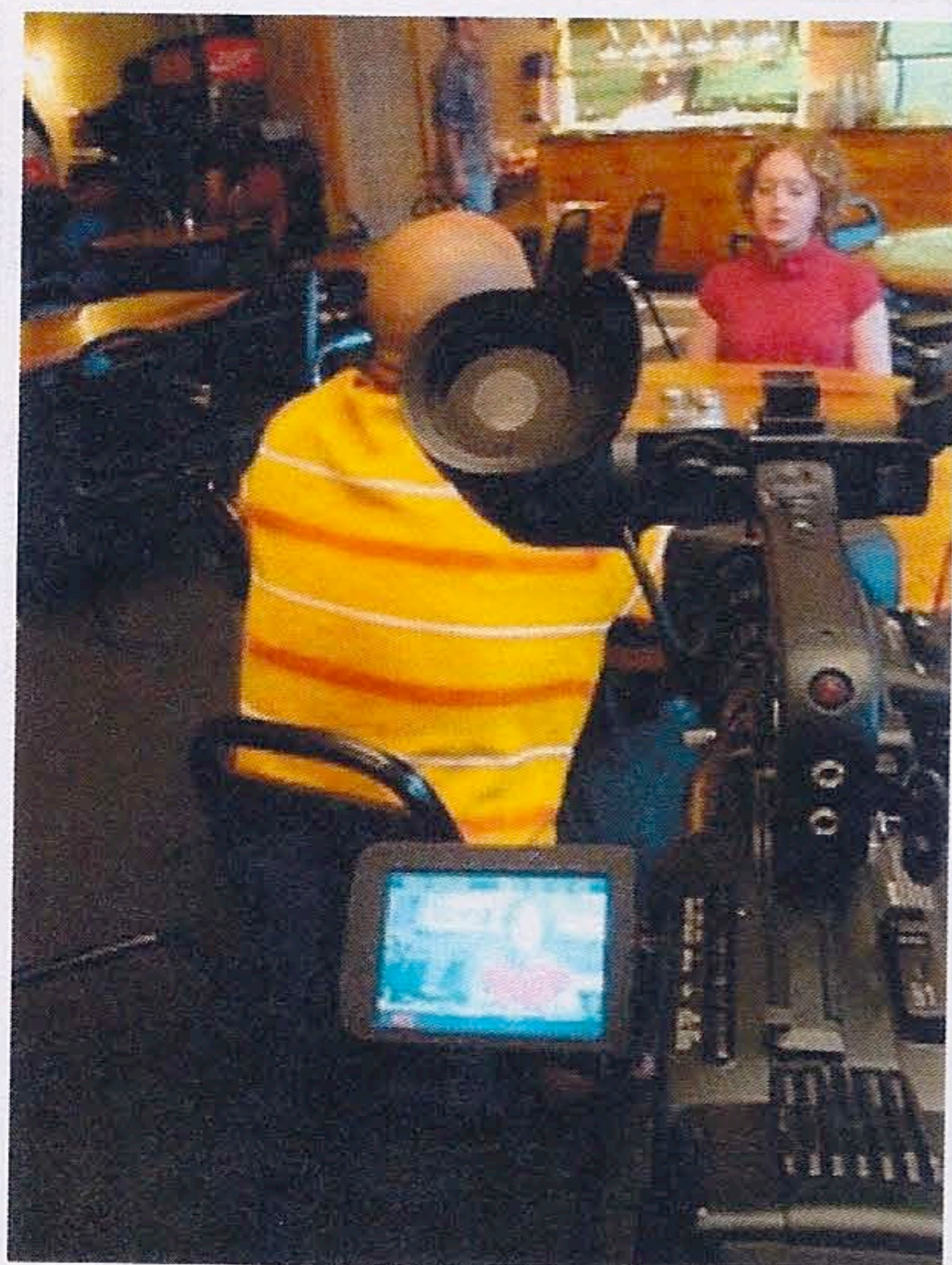
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passion for making things that explode.

Wyatt started work in TV news in Rochester, New York, in the 1990s. He got experience in shooting and editing, particularly under time constraints and deadlines. Before working in television, Wyatt was a jazz radio host and a freelance music journalist who had an appreciation for not only music but for art. He said he tried to apply an artistic aesthetic and mind set to his work in TV news but learned the two didn't gel most days.



He left TV news, got his Master of Fine Arts degree from Temple University in Film and Media Arts and started teaching as a professor. He said it paid more and gave him more freedom. He could maintain three classes a semester with about 15 students in each while also having the time to do artistic projects.

Wyatt's projects have consisted of short form documentaries, and he might describe them as not merely artistic projects but "edutainment." They've mainly been fun and informative pieces that

tackle controversial issues. One of his best works was his movie *Nigger or Not?*, which looked at the history and the application or use of the "N" word in America by both black people and white people. When Wyatt became a professor at East Carolina University (ECU) and found out Eric Rudolph's role in that school's state, he saw a prime opportunity for a new project. He got started in the spring of 2008, sometimes by himself, other times with a small crew.

He ventured from ECU in Greenville, which is known as the hub of education and health in this Tidewater area in Carolina's Inner Banks, about 400 miles toward the western part of the state, near the Georgia-Tennessee border and into the Blue Ridge Mountains. Before going to Murphy, the town where Rudolph was officially arrested, Wyatt stopped in Asheville, the largest city in western North Carolina, which Wyatt found to be an anomaly. It's a city unlike any other in Tar Heel and tobacco country. Wyatt described it as like San Francisco, a mecca for tourists, retirees and gay people, having the youngest and first black woman as mayor.

Wyatt asked people there what kind of things to expect, what kind of folks. A good number of them, including Wyatt's brother, basically said that the folks about an hour or two outside of Asheville were not that far removed from who Rudolph was. The only difference is they would never go to the extreme of setting bombs. Rudolph was anti-abortion, staunchly and unwavering so, seeing abortion as a holocaust. He was an anarchist, a racist, and a homophobe. Wyatt's

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trip out west was to find out if the residents of that area were all those things as well.



Allegedly, Rudolph received assistance from sympathizers in that area of the state. However, no one was charged with aiding and abetting. That only means that no one did anything physically to help him. That doesn't mean that no one did anything emotionally or spiritually to help

him. While conducting research for his film, Wyatt discovered signs, T-shirts and even songs made in Rudolph's honor from the people in that place. One composition included Michael Holland's "Ballad of Eric Rudolph," a folk song that depicted Rudolph as a Paul Bunyan-type figure. People there practically rooted him on.

What Wyatt also found is that those who didn't root him on basically looked the other way or never asked questions. Wyatt said that some had the mentality that you can have roaches or rats in your house, but as long as you never see them, then you can live together. Of course, not all North Carolinians are like this, and some people feel like they're stereotyped as hillbillies or terrorist sympathizers, which Wyatt agrees is unfair. Yet, through his research and interviews with experts like Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) whose article "Hills of Rebellion" points to western North Carolina as a haven for hate groups and terrorist cells like the pilot training for the September 11 jihadists.

Still, all of these are generalizations. Wyatt didn't want to rely on research or hearsay. He wanted to see, meet and talk to the people himself, to walk to their front doors and knock on it. There is a question of how honest or forthright



Professor Ken Wyatt interviewing woman on the street

these people who are presumed Rudolph sympathizers were to a black professor with a video camera, but, if nothing else, one can appreciate the dialogue that Wyatt creates.

For more information about Professor Ken Wyatt and his projects, including *Pray for Eric*, go to:

<http://vimeo.com/user2728534>