



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on March 13, 2012

Calif. Raw Milk Distributor Says He Was Tortured in County Jails

"I thought I was gonna die in there." Those are the words not of a former prisoner of a communist gulag but of 65-year-old American James Stewart, describing his seven days in southern California jails. Stewart says he was subjected to "torture" and "brutality" including sleep deprivation, starvation, hypothermia, involuntary medical testing, highly unsanitary conditions, and solitary confinement — all because he had the temerity to sell raw milk to willing customers.



Stewart was [arrested](#) last summer when armed local cops and federal agents raided his Venice, California, natural foods club, Rawesome Foods (photo, left). Also arrested at that time were Sharon Palmer, operator of Healthy Family Farms in Santa Paula, and her employee, Eugenie Victoria Bloch. Healthy Family Farms supplies dairy products to Rawesome for distribution to club members.

On March 2 all three were appearing in Los Angeles County court for a hearing concerning the charges against them, which stem from their alleged trafficking in raw dairy products without a license. As the hearing was ending, Stewart and Palmer were handcuffed and arrested by L.A. County Sheriff's deputies under a warrant from nearby Ventura County. Ventura County [alleges](#) that Palmer defrauded several individuals by accepting short-term loans from them to purchase Healthy Family Farms in 2008 and then failing to repay those loans. Because some of those who loaned her money were Rawesome members, and because Stewart had put her in contact with those individuals, he, too, is being charged.

Oddly, though the arrest warrant had been issued by Ventura County, Stewart was taken to the Twin Towers Correctional Facility in downtown L.A., where he says he was subjected to the worst of the torture for the next two days before being transferred to a Ventura County jail.

In an [interview](#) with Mike Adams of NaturalNews.com, Stewart claimed that while in police custody he was extensively questioned about whether or not he considered himself a "sovereign," i.e., a member of the "sovereign citizens" movement. Self-described sovereign citizens, wrote *The New American's* [Bob Adelmann](#), "take the position that they are 'answerable only to common law' and therefore are not subject to any statutes at the federal, state, or municipal levels. They do not officially recognize U.S. currency and declare themselves to be 'free of any legal constraints.'" Stewart was also characterized as a sovereign citizen by the Ventura County District Attorney's office during a bail hearing.



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Stewart said he had never considered himself a sovereign, nor had he ever used that word to describe himself. However, as blogger [David Gumpert](#) observes, Stewart “did, in running Rawesome, actively operate it as a private organization, outside normal licensing channels” and maintained that posture even after the club was raided in June 2010. This undoubtedly rankled the authorities, as did some of Stewart’s subsequent actions such as deciding to act as his own attorney and, most especially, researching and discovering that many of the officials involved in searching Rawesome and arresting him had not filed sworn oaths of office, which “could eventually be interpreted during a trial or other judicial proceeding, as a significant procedural error,” Gumpert notes.

Stewart said he was put in a holding cell immediately after his arrest and kept there for seven hours with no food or water. Then he was taken to the L.A. jail, where he was questioned about being a “sovereign.” After he refused to answer any more questions, Stewart was handcuffed, with the handcuffs attached to a long chain tied around his waist. “The handcuffs were so tight I thought my wrists were going to break,” he told Adams. He was also fitted with a red arm band, he said, to signify that he was “a danger to the general population of the jail itself,” though he did not understand what it meant at the time.

He alleges that he was handcuffed to a cold bench for four to five hours, during which time he could not move more than six inches. After that he was — still handcuffed — subjected to forcible medical tests, including chest X-rays and an EKG, all of which he characterized as “a combination of mental and physical torture to break you down” and make “you come unglued.”

About midnight, Stewart said, he was placed into a cell where “the temperature was probably in the mid-fifties,” wearing nothing but a t-shirt and jeans. Left there for approximately three hours, he began to suffer from hypothermia.

He was then moved to another cell among a group of prisoners so noisy that he was unable to get any sleep, he recounted. Toward morning things finally quieted down and he was able to get some shuteye, but when he awoke he found that toilets in the vicinity had been permitted to overflow and flood the cells, leaving two to three inches of raw sewage covering the floor of his cell, where his shirt and shoes were lying.

No one, he recalled, came to clean up the sewage for a long time. Finally Stewart was given a small squeegee and told to clean it up himself. He did the best he could, but it didn’t help very much. He was left in that cell for approximately 30 hours, surrounded by the remnants of the toilet overflow.

After being released from the putrid cell, Stewart said he was placed in another cold cell for about six hours, after which he was transferred to a Ventura County jail, where he was put in solitary confinement for a few days.

On March 8 Stewart’s bail, initially set at \$1 million, was reduced to \$100,000. The judge, Adams recalled, expressed astonishment at the whole matter, saying, “James just sounds like a milkman to me.” Stewart was able to raise the money and be released from jail, at which time he finally learned the charges on which he had been held for the previous week. (Palmer is still being held by Ventura County.)

Of course, Stewart’s allegations of torture are just that: allegations. He admits that he has “no evidence” that any of his charges are true, though the details he recalls (times, places, and even names of law enforcement personnel) and the consistency of his testimony across interviews suggest that he is telling the truth. [Photos of Stewart](#) before and after his incarceration further indicate that he endured



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some harsh treatment in jail.

“Is the Stewart torture affair a first step in an effort to begin discrediting private food clubs, and their operators, as involved in domestic terrorism?” Gumpert asks. It’s certainly a strong possibility. The government has been cracking down on natural foods suppliers in recent years, even going so far as to infiltrate a private food club in Maryland in order to [force an Amish farmer](#) to stop supplying club members with raw dairy products.

“I don’t sleep well at night right now,” Stewart told Adams, “and I don’t think anyone would if they had been through what I’ve been through.”

Stewart’s testimony may be all that many natural foods suppliers and consumers need to hear to convince them to submit to the government’s dictates. And that, more than simply shutting down Stewart’s club, may be the real agenda behind the brutal treatment he supposedly endured.



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