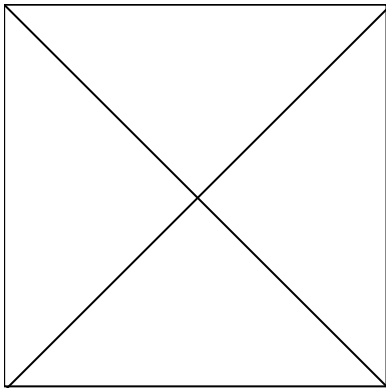


'We were almost murdered' by mobsters

West Vancouver venture capitalist Charlie Flynn is used to high- flying deals, but this one nearly sank him to the bottom of the sea.

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West Vancouver venture capitalist Charlie Flynn is used to high- flying deals, but this one nearly sank him to the bottom of the sea.

The globe-trotting Flynn, 55, says he had to fight for his life when Russian mobsters attacked him earlier this year on a luxury sailboat docked in Thailand. And that was after he and his wife narrowly missed being tortured in a Thai resort town.

Now, at his house on the West Vancouver waterfront, Flynn's wife, Lisa Cain, still jumps at every sudden sound, and Flynn is watching closely as the FBI, CIA and U.S. State Department unravel a series of alleged crimes involving fake passports, extortion and homicide.

"We were almost murdered," Flynn said yesterday. "These guys play for keeps. I call them international men of mystery. They have three names, four different credit cards. They have homes in Thailand and Moscow and Salt Lake City and Vegas." The dramatic events that swept up Flynn are detailed in an FBI affidavit and a U.S. federal court indictment concerning Egor Michailovich Chernov, a Russian immigrant living in Utah. In the affidavit, Flynn is described as Co-operating Witness No. 2, or CW-2.

Flynn first met Chernov in 1999 in Las Vegas. The bear-like Russian, 32, was introduced as the son of Russia's chief supreme court justice.

A vodka-soaked night in Vegas led to sporadic contact over the next few years, until Flynn flew to Thailand in 2004 to meet again with Chernov to discuss buying a villa.

He was told that former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and a cousin of Princess Diana were buying villas in the same Thai complex.

At the time, Chernov was with New York motivational speaker Rex Judd. Flynn says the pair wanted him to invest in an artificial skin product developed in Russia.

"I agreed that I would do something," Flynn said. "It looked interesting." Then Chernov began to pressure him to wire \$250,000 to an account in Cyprus, while Judd confided that he'd invested \$3.5 million with Chernov and was trying to get some of it back, Flynn said.

Flynn remembers the people who move around Chernov as being right out of a James Bond movie.

There was a man Chernov called a hired killer whose appearance, Flynn said, was "scary, very cold, cold as ice. He's got one eye that's straight, one that goes to the side." There was a second purported hitman, a Russian, plus a massive thug with a shaved head.

As for Judd, he went missing and is presumed dead, killed -- Flynn believes -- because he wanted his money back.

Flynn said Chernov and his associates began upping the stakes, asking him to transfer \$30 million in stock holdings to a Florida man.

"They [were] going to give me a chance to get an oil lease in Russia," he said.

Last March, in Thailand, Flynn found himself in the back seat of a car between the shaven-headed goon and another Russian. Chernov was at the wheel.

Flynn said the group ended up on the sailboat, Flynn protesting that he had to leave to meet his wife for dinner. When he reached for his cellphone, he was shot in the back with a Taser, he said. In the melee that followed, Flynn received a blow to the head but was able to leap on to the dock to make his escape.

Chernov is now in a Utah jail awaiting trial on two counts of conspiracy to produce false passports and identification. An FBI affidavit says the passport case is "inextricably intertwined" with the alleged murder of Judd.

A man described as "co-conspirator 7" (CC-7) in the FBI affidavit told an FBI agent that he was in Thailand in 2005 and heard Chernov tell two men to kill "CC-1," whom Flynn identified as Judd.

CC-7, who referred to Chernov as "the Russian maggot," said he helped get rid of evidence of the murder, and he provided the FBI with a ring and cufflinks he said belonged to the victim. When an FBI agent showed a photo of the ring to Judd's wife, she began to cry and said it was her husband's wedding band, the affidavit says.

Chernov had a falling-out with his associate, Paul Combs, Flynn said. Combs, who also went by the names Aleksandar Stanislavov Karanikolov and Michael Woods, is now facing a charge for allegedly attempting to extort "cash or substitute real property" from a person identified on Combs' federal-court indictment as "E.C." Since the falling-out, Flynn has heard from a Chernov associate that Flynn and his wife, on an earlier trip to Thailand, narrowly missed ending up in a "torture home" prepared for them. The plan was to hurt Lisa until Flynn signed over assets, then kill the couple, Flynn said.

"They had electric batteries there, and all sorts of torture devices, and they had black plastic across all the windows," he said. "They had the chains all ready, and the buckets, to put us into the bottom of the ocean."