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'Cult' leader Keith Ranieri makes killer claim on newly released video

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Alleged con man Keith Raniere claims he has had people killed.

Photo:

An accused con man who runs an upstate “cult” bankrolled by the Bronfman booze fortune has “had people killed,” he boasts in an explosive new video.

Keith Raniere, who runs Albany-based NXIVM, makes the chilling claim on tape to female followers who confronted him with their concerns about the group, which has been derided by detractors as a harmful “cult.”

“Here’s the thing,” Raniere says on the 2009 video, which was sent to The Post and also posted last night on youtube.com. “I’ve had people killed because of my beliefs — or because of their beliefs.”

Former NXIVM members told The Post that Raniere’s claim is particularly disturbing in light of the mysterious disappearance of a former NXIVM student several years ago.

In 2003, 35-year-old environmentalist Kristin Snyder vanished from an Alaska hotel after taking NXIVM classes. Her body was never found.

Snyder’s Toyota truck was discovered near a local bay, along with a note that read: “I was brainwashed and my emotional center of the brain was killed...Please contact my parents

[if] you find me or this note.”

Raniere’s stunning statement comes about 7 minutes into an 8 minute recording of a creepy sit-down with two women whose faces have been shielded on the tape.

In his trademark ratty t-shirt and stringy, long hair, Raniere — whose followers bow to him and call him “Vanguard” — takes exception to a comment one of the women makes about a failed business that landed him in hot water with authorities.

He appears to be trying to remind her of his power as head of NXIVM.

“I’ve been shot at because of my beliefs,” Raniere claims. “I’ve had to make choices, ‘should I have bodyguards, should I have them armed, or not?’”

“But I’m leading an organization that is very good,” he says. “You might say ‘the brighter the light, the more the bugs...’ I think what we have is a very bright light.”

The women, along with several others, recorded hours of meetings with Raniere as he tried to talk them out of leaving his fold, a source said.

Raniere claims NXIVM offers “personal growth” seminars. But mental health experts have said Raniere is a “brainwasher” who uses mind-bending tactics on his followers to psychologically break them.

The shady svengali’s flock is made up of mostly female followers. It is largely financed by the trust funds of NXIVM devotees Clare and Sara Bronfman, the daughters of Seagrams liquor king Edgar Bronfman, Sr.

The sisters have poured as much as \$150 million into Raniere’s coffers in the past six years, court documents show.

Their dad is among those who have publicly blasted the group as a “cult.”

Court documents in a slew of NXIVM lawsuits, many involving former members, allege Raniere has hired private investigators — including controversial tracker Steven “Rambo” Rombom — to harrass and “threaten” those involved in the litigation. (Rombom was once charged by the feds with witness intimidation and posing as an FBI agent; the charges were later dropped.)

This past summer, Albany-area blogger and outspoken NXIVM critic John Tighe claimed he was followed and run off the road by a black limousine after butting heads with the group. His house was also broken into, but nothing was taken.

NXIVM has been sent reeling in recent months with a series of defections –including that of the Bronfman’s longtime financial advisor. Several former members also have begun coming forward to publicly denounce Raniere and NXIVM’s practices.

Last week, vanityfair.com posted a scathing new article, entitled “The Heiresses and The Cult” that chronicles NXIVM’s alleged dirty tricks.

It also details the Bronfman sisters’ intimate personal and financial ties to Raniere, including the \$11 million they shelled out for a 22-seat private jet Raniere used and \$66 million the heiresses forked over to cover his losses in the commodities market.

Before setting up NXIVM in 1998, Raniere — who boasts that he made the Guinness Book of World Records for having the “highest IQ” — was investigated for fraud in 23 states, including New York, for operating an alleged illegal pyramid scheme.

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