

## Valley Girl Interrupted: Meth, Race, and the Ku Klux Klan

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### Abstract

The American white supremacist movement is home to an array of many different types of groups inhabited by an equally varied sample of people who are openly racist. Over the past nine years, my field work in four states in the southern region of the country exposed me to people who were affiliated with groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, Blood & Honour, and religious sects such as Christian Identity. This article examines the life history of Stacy, a young woman whose association with several deviant subcultures reveals the complexities of a life marked by poor choices, drug addiction, and virulent racism. A series of in-depth interviews conducted while she was living in Arkansas document personal details that include revelations about discovering her true identity as an adolescent, her troubled teenage years, her participation in the violent skinhead subculture in California, and ongoing personal struggles with methamphetamines and other drugs.

**Key words:** White supremacy; Drug addiction; Skinhead; Ku Klux Klan

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### INTRODUCTION

I met Stacy for the first time in July 2009. For several years I had been conducting field work with various Ku

Klux Klan groups in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas. I had been trying to get an interview with Billy Roper, the founder of a neo-Nazi organization called White Revolution, for about six months. After numerous email exchanges he finally agreed to meet with me in Russellville, Arkansas, where he was living at the time. He suggested that we have lunch at a local diner to discuss my research. He brought along his girlfriend Stacy and her nine year old daughter. I asked if Stacy might be interested in being interviewed by me. She was reluctant and did not commit at the time although I hoped she would change her mind since she appeared to be a big part of Billy's life and work.

My primary objective for connecting with Billy Roper was to cultivate new sources of data for future publications. Following our initial meeting, I began to spend time in Arkansas where I attended various white power festivals and other events. Stacy was always there; in the background. She was very guarded and edgy. After about four months in the field, she invited me to their home for coffee one Sunday morning while Billy was at work. She shared some family photos and she finally agreed to answer some questions about her life. The floodgates opened and I conducted a total of four, lengthy, recorded interviews that revealed many personal details about her life growing up in California, her ongoing battle with meth addiction, and how she came to Arkansas and met Billy. This oral history is a condensed version of a much longer and more detailed account of her life.

### 1. EARLY YEARS

Stacy was born in Indianola, Mississippi in 1978. Her parents divorced when she was three months old and she never knew her birth father. Her mother, age 17 at the time, left Mississippi and moved to Oakland, California to live with her parents. When Stacy was two years old her mother remarried, gave Stacy her husband's last

name, and never mentioned the fact that he was not her real father. At age 12, she discovered an old trunk in the attic of her parents' house. The trunk contained her birth certificate and some letters from a man whose address was a federal prison in Parchman, Mississippi. The man was her father, Robert Rowland, who was serving a life sentence for armed robbery and capital murder committed when he was 19 years old, the year Stacy was born.

After discovering the letters and other documents, Stacy confronted her mother and stepfather. They confessed that when they got married they decided not to discuss her birth father because of his criminal past. She was angry with her mother and stepfather and rebelled by experimenting with drugs. She ran away from home and at age 13 tried meth for the first time and eventually became addicted. Later she found out that her parents were able to afford a nice house because her stepfather was dealing drugs to supplement his income. When her mother found out, she divorced him. The divorce added to Stacy's insecurity and fueled her rebellious behavior.

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## 2. A TROUBLED TEENAGER

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After the divorce when Stacy was 14, her mother began binge drinking adding to the strained relationship between mother and daughter. Her stepfather was still very involved with the family and both of her parents were worried about her safety. By the age of 15 Stacy was hanging out with skinheads, a biker gang, and other teenaged drug users. Her drug addiction was spiking out of control and she experienced several overdoses. Her parents called the police who arrested her and some of her friends who were staying at a local meth house. She went before a judge who reviewed her case and sent her to a prison for juveniles called the California Youth Authority (CYA) in an attempt to save her life. A representative from a rehabilitation center called Day Top Village took an interest in her and offered her a spot in a group home with the intention of helping her kick her drug habit for good. Having been incarcerated for a year by then, Stacy took his offer and went to the group home in Palo Alto, California.

The facility director liked her and at the end of her time at Day Top Village she rose to the rank of Senior Coordinator. She felt that she was rehabilitated and looked forward to getting a release. Eventually a maternal uncle who lived in San Jose, California intervened and applied for a court order to give him full custody of Stacy. This occurred when she was 16 years old. The judge agreed and Stacy moved in with her uncle and aunt and enrolled in high school.

The next year was a good one. She was clean and sober, active in sports and making straight A's in school. She made some friends and she liked living with her uncle and his family.

Six months later, a friend from Day Top named Melissa

contacted her and asked if she could come for a visit. Stacy's aunt and uncle said "okay" and expected them to spend the night at their house. Instead, the girls had other plans and hooked up with two skinheads who were friends of Melissa. They went to Sacramento, California where they drank, took drugs, and had sex. Stacy did not come home for three days so her aunt and uncle sent her back to Day Top Village.

After six more months at Day Top she mended bridges with her uncle and his family and moved back to their home. She seemed to be back on track. She had a part-time job, was clean and sober, and doing well in school. She was still in touch with her friend Melissa who told her she had a guy she wanted Stacy to meet. He was a skinhead and Stacy knew her aunt would never approve and would kick her out again. She started seeing him anyway and when her aunt found out, she gave her an ultimatum. Still rebellious, Stacy continued seeing her new boyfriend and her aunt and uncle packed her belongings and kicked her out.

Refusing to go back to Day Top, Stacy dropped out of school and convinced her boss at a local pizza shop to let her work full time. Her boss had a garage apartment which she rented to Stacy for \$150 a month. For awhile things went well and Stacy's aunt even tried to get her to move back in with them and finish high school. Instead, her skinhead boyfriend convinced her to move in with him. He said they would eventually get married. He had a job as a welder and made good money. She was still going to group counseling and she was trying to kick her drug habit.

As a couple, they had a traditional relationship. He went to work during the day and she stayed home and kept the house. They did not get married because she started doing drugs again. She was bored and hitchhiked to San Francisco one day while he was at work. A Hell's Angel biker picked her up and for the next six months she hung out with the biker gang during the day while her boyfriend worked. One day she decided to leave him and go to Alaska with her biker friends. After a week in Alaska she called her boyfriend and asked him to come and get her. When he found out where she was and who she was with – he told her to go straight to hell. She never spoke to him again.

At age 18, Stacy was living with a Hell's Angel biker gang in Fairbanks, Alaska. She and another young woman became pole dancers at the biker bar and club. Both girls were addicted to meth and other drugs. After about six months, Stacy finally got word to her mother who was mortified and tried to convince her to come back home. She offered to wire her some money and Stacy accepted. She took a bus to Fresno, California where her mother was living at the time. Stacy had just turned 19. Her mother talked her into moving in with her and going back into therapy. After about a month, Stacy was clean, sober, and working. She met a guy who came from a good

Fresno family. Unfortunately, he was addicted to cocaine and had recently been arrested for drug possession. He was to become the father of her first child.

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### 3. TERRIBLE TWENTIES

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When Stacy was 20 years old, she delivered her first child, a boy. The parents of her boyfriend demanded a DNA test to make sure the baby belonged to their son. The test proved the child's paternity and Stacy decided to try to become a responsible mother. She made arrangements to move in with her grandparents who were well off and lived in a nice gated community in Fresno. Her boyfriend's mother was adamant about getting custody of the baby. When the baby was six months old, Stacy let her in-laws take him for a few days and she never got him back. They got a restraining order alleging that she was unfit to take care of him because of her drug addiction. When Stacy went to their house to get him back, she got into a physical confrontation with her boyfriend's mother, the police were called, and Stacy was charged with assault. She went into another tailspin, left her grandparents' house, and went back on the streets.

Two years later she gave birth to her second child, a daughter, who was born healthy even though Stacy experienced liver failure during her pregnancy. She was also found to have contracted Hepatitis C. The baby's father was a drug dealer and skinhead who went to prison on weapons charges. Local authorities arrested Stacy for selling drugs and she went to jail for two years. The baby's father's family got temporary custody of the baby girl. During the time they had the baby, Child Protective Services was documenting neglect and abuse. Finally Stacy's mother was able to intervene and gained custody of the child when she was two years old.

After Stacy was released from prison she went back on the streets. As an act of retribution aimed at the father of her second child, she met and married a rival gang member who was 20 years older than she. He was a career criminal and a member of the Aryan Brotherhood, a prison gang. He was also a drunk and a heroin addict. When he drank he was very abusive and tried to kill her on several occasions. Once he almost broke her neck. Another time he tried to drown her in the toilet. After six months of marriage, he strangled her until she passed out and dumped her in an orange grove where her body was discovered by a jogger. She spent several weeks in the hospital.

In their second year of marriage he stabbed and killed another gang member over a drug deal gone badly wrong. He got 10 years in prison and Stacy was finally able to pull herself together. She moved in with her mother and things went well for awhile. After three years of sobriety, working, and finally getting her GED she met another skinhead at a bar. They began shooting drugs and doing meth. He was also a heavy drinker and in trouble with the

law. She left her mother's house and moved in with him. He was wanted by police in Los Angeles for burglary and assault and was living under an assumed name.

He told her he wanted to move to Arkansas. He had heard about the leader of a group called White Revolution named Billy Roper who helped people like him get a second chance. He also did not think the authorities would ever be able to find him if they moved down South. In 2006, Stacy and her boyfriend hitchhiked from Fresno, California to Russellville, Arkansas. They met Billy who helped them find a place to stay and get jobs. He told them that he did not tolerate drug use or any type of illegal activity. He also told them that no interracial relationships were ever allowed and if he found out any of his members broke any of these rules they would be expelled from the group. After six months, Stacy's boyfriend was finally extradited back to California. Within a month, Stacy and Billy became a couple. He arranged for a trial of Interferon to treat her Hepatitis C. He also told her she had to stay clean and sober. Stacy was 28 years old.

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### 4. THIRTY SOMETHING

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When I first met Stacy she had been clean and sober for one year. She was 31 years old at the time and she had gotten custody of her daughter. Billy and Stacy were engaged to be married in August 2009 in Mountain View, Arkansas where his mother and step-father owned an RV Park. In 2010, Billy ran as a write-in candidate for governor of Arkansas. He had broader political aspirations which made Stacy nervous, especially in view of her past. At some point, Stacy became interested in Christian Identity, a religion that believes whites are the chosen people of God and the only race that achieve salvation. She began attending church services at the Christian Revival Center in Zinc, Arkansas. The church is pastored by Christian Identity minister and Klan leader, Thom Robb. Eventually she was able to convince Billy to embrace Christian Identity and join the Knights Party (Robb's Klan group) – which is what he did. In August 2010 he shut down his White Revolution Web site and closed his group so that he could devote his time and energy to Pastor Robb and the Knights Party.

The family moved several times over the next year and Stacy enrolled in the University of Phoenix to get her Associate Degree in Business Management. She also got a part-time job to help support the family since Billy had lost his job due to his racist beliefs. Stacy insisted that the family moves closer to Zinc and her church. They decided to buy some acreage near Robb's property and Stacy got a job at a resort in Branson, Missouri. I visited them several times and in December 2012 I attended one of Pastor Robb's events. Stacy had lost a lot of weight and she was smoking. She had trouble sitting still and I suspected she was back on meth. Billy seemed clueless. I went outside to talk with her and she confessed to me

that her former husband (the one who tried to kill her) had gotten out of jail and wanted to see her again. In July 2013 Stacy left Arkansas and went back to California. She got in trouble with the law (again) for drugs and illegal possession of firearms. She was able to get one of her friends to take responsibility for the 70 grams of meth found in her car. According to Billy, Stacy is in a 90 day court ordered rehabilitation program and her daughter is living with her mother. The final twist in Stacy's bizarre story is that she is now a lesbian, with a girlfriend, and they are practicing Wiccans. She is 36 years old.

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## CONCLUSION

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Stacy's life is a mosaic of several stigmatized identities. Early in her life she became part of a deviant drug subculture in her native California. Both her associations with drug users and reinforcement from her peers contributed to her deviant behavior (Akers, 1998; Burgess & Akers, 1966; Sutherland, 1939). She also had an unhealthy attraction to skinheads and bikers which resulted in further immersion in deviant, gangland style subcultures. It appears that her family tried to provide a stable environment when she was growing up and there was continual intervention from the time she started getting into trouble in her early teenage years. Recent studies indicate there is a reciprocal relationship between interaction with peers and delinquent behavior evidenced by Stacy's story. Matsueda and Anderson (1998) found that the effect of associations with delinquent peers on delinquency is larger than the effect of delinquency on adolescents' peer relationships. Even during her stay at Day Top Village, she formed relationships that were not totally without consequence such as that with her friend Melissa.

In looking back at Stacy's early life, her initial foray into the drug subculture may have been the result of some type of social strain (Agnew, 1992, 2000). She

was very angry with her parents for not telling her about her real father. This resulted in arguments and tensions which may have also precipitated strain in her parents' marriage. Stresses for adolescents are often magnified and can lead to frustration, rebellion (in Stacy's case), unhappiness, and anger. These situations may also translate into various forms of deviant behavior. Another interesting finding is that in my many conversations with Stacy I determined that her immediate family in California was not particularly racist. When questioned about her racial beliefs, she was convinced that whites are superior to other races. Part of that idea comes from dating overtly racist men. She also told me that growing up in southern California around "gang bangers" and "Mexicans" contributed to her negative views on race. She was adamantly opposed to interracial relationships and homosexual behavior; however, it will be interesting to see if her most recent love interest results in an overall change in her belief system. Only time will tell.

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