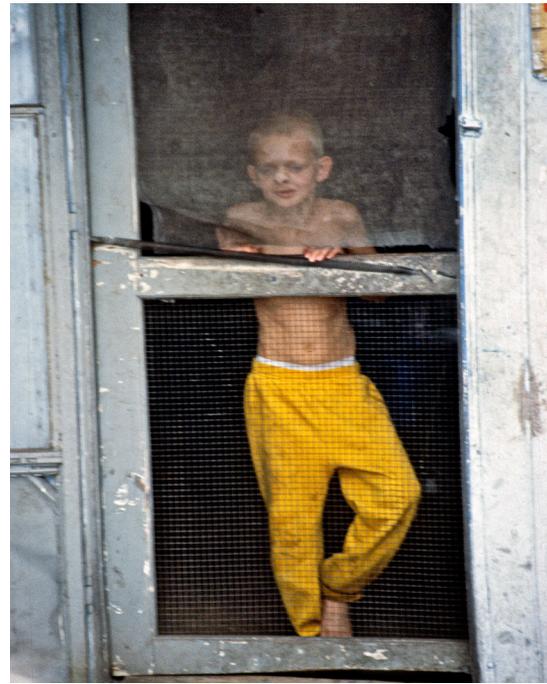




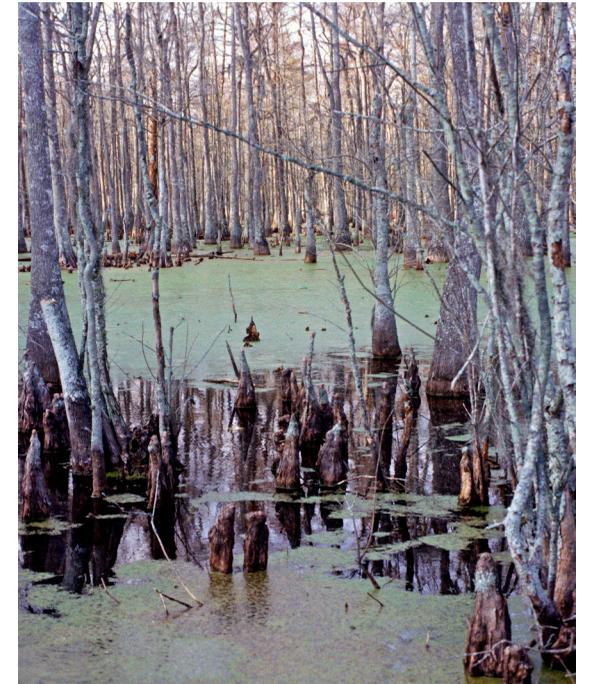
1991 - Woody the night I picked him up



1973 - Immokalee, MS



1975 - Waynesboro, GA



1996 - swamps, LA

In my vagabond years in the 70's most Americans seemed to feel good about themselves and I found hardly any Klan activity. But the increasing mistreatment of children I have seen since then, seems to go hand in hand with the growth of the Klan and white supremacy groups under president Obama and Trump. Here is about how I came into a family of later Trump supporters. One night in 1991 I picked up Woody, this dirtpoor hitchhiker in Mississippi, who told me that he and his two brothers had personally killed so many blacks, that they had lost count of them.

- I don't know if he killed the first two I got blood on me from, I know he busted his head open real bad.

- Hmm

- John busted open his head real, real bad... Took a big whole piece out of his head - and blood got on me then. That's cause I was holding the dude. Every time his heart would beat, blood would squirt out about 5-6 feet, man. The guy ran about ten steps, then just fell - face first. I'll even take you by the old postoffice tonight and show you it to you, right where it happened. Then they got a big sign says 'No Niggers Allowed' when you go in there on the highway.

- Still? What year is this?

- This is 91 now, fixing to be 92 and they got a sign saying 'No Niggers Allowed'.

- When you went out to kill them, would he talk about it all day before or did you just happen to...?

- No, it just happened. It just was one of those things. He was going down the street and he just felt like doing it. He'd seen them, so he did it....

- Right here is where this guy fell after my brother stabbed him. That may be the cops. Right here is where he fell. I'll show you where he got stabbed at. He got stabbed right on the other side of this telephone pole, right here. And then he ran ten feet and fell. Let's go before the cops are coming 'cause they are bad here at night time.

- What did he actually say?

- He actually said 'I'm gonna kill me a nigger tonight'. He said it all day long and when we'd come back from over the tracks Sammy told him, 'I bet you wont kill that one right there.' And this was a big nigger, you know. And John says 'Bet me!'. And Sammy says, 'I'll bet you.' And he goes, 'Never mind about the betting.' He walked over there and he says, 'Hey, did you meet your maker?' and he stabbed him. The guy's eyes rolled to the back of his head and John twisted the knife and then he pulled it out. The blood, when it came out, it hit me and Sammy.

- How did it happen when....?

- He goes out and he kills niggers for fun. He tells me he likes to see the fear in their face when they die. It was like when we was riding down River Road I was telling you about how Sammy called one over to the car and John jumped out and shot him. Well, two of them split, and one of them stayed there, you know, he was freaking out. I guess he was young or something, you know. Sammy started beating him in the head with some bottle that he had. And then John started kicking him and stuff - and when they had him on the ground bleeding and where he couldn't move, John just stomped him until he died. The only thing I've never seen John do, was go out and run over the

niggers that he used to go out and run over. But I've seen blood on the car and....like I said, I took T shirts and shirts and stuff like that out from under the car after he ran them over. I've seen him beat up many, many niggers many times and leave them for dead.

- How many would you say?

- How many? More than I can count on my fingers and toes.

As always with violent people, I asked about his childhood. His eyes filled with tears when he told me how the three brothers had constantly been beaten and abused by their deeply alcoholic parents.

- From as early as I remember I've got whippings from my mom. She used to come in drunk.... She would hit you anywhere she could hit you. When she whips you with a board, if you move and it hits you somewhere else, you shouldn't have moved.....

It is important always to give such children of pain all the love and affection we can muster.

In my travels I have often been amazed how little caring it takes to make these encapsulated and discouraged people raise their heads again and feel better about themselves. People, who feel good about themselves will not intentionally hurt other people or even think badly of them. Only people in deep pain wish to harm others. All the violent racists I meet these days have without exception been mistreated or humiliated in childhood. The cross burnings and swastikas are just their inept cry for our help and attention, and it takes so incredibly little

nurturing from us to help them out of their oppressive patterns.

Five years later I found some of Woody's victims, such as Sarah's family, who had been stabbed by Woody in their sleep. (Read on page 213 what later happened) Their shattered lives needed similar nurturing not to be destroyed by the paralyzing fear and unforgiving hate they had developed toward fellow citizens.

Knowing how easily such hatred perpetuates itself led the new black government in South Africa to pardon all racial crimes committed under apartheid.

My friend Woody is beginning to understand that since he has never had anybody to help him heal his pain, he had turned it outward against blacks in such a horrifying way that he could describe how they tortured and murdered every one of their victims and dumped them in Mississippi's rivers and swamps.

- Did you usually get rid of them by throwing them in rivers and swamps?

- Oh, yeah, many times we dumped them in the swamps....

Here is to the state of Mississippi for underneath her borders the devil draws no line. If you drag her muddy rivers nameless bodies you will find. Oh, the factories of the forests have hidden a thousand crimes. The calendar is lying when it reads the present time. Oh, here's to the land you have torn out the heart of: Mississippi, find yourself another country to be part of!

Regarding the pain of serial murderers

While driving one night in 1991, I saw an older white woman in the darkness under the freeway pillars and picked her up. She'd been attacked by black hoodlums and was bleeding so profusely I had to take her to a hospital. An hour later I spotted a man on the side of the road. Angry and tense, he'd been fired without pay from a shrimp boat in the Gulf and had been waiting three days for a ride. Considering the desperation in Woody's eyes, I easily could've triggered the violence in him by sending out vibrations of fear and distrust. When I told him about the white woman who'd just been left for dead by her black attackers, Woody began to open up. (I had no idea at the time how deeply involved in his family I'd become.) He said he'd never been attacked by blacks because he "always attacked them first." Little by little he told me how he and his two brothers had killed so many "niggers that I can't count them on my fingers and toes." Now I was wide awake. At first I'd thought he was just bragging, but there were too many descriptive details and locations in his stories. So when he also talked about his own mistreatment as a child, I made a deal with him: I'd bring him home, four hours out of my way, if he'd tell his stories and let me tape record them. "But I won't tell you where I live. Just let me off somewhere in my town." He knew I could go straight to the police with my tape.

In my show, updated to include Woody and his family, his voice shocked university students. Some years after I'd met him, having listened to his nightmarish voice night after night, I was curious to find out how he was doing. When I finally had the chance on a tour in spring of 1996, I invited a Norwegian publisher of Toni Morrison's books, Eli Saeter, to be my witness. What especially scared her was that everyone we met had been in prison for murder and rape. "They remind me of those men in the movie *Deliverance*," she said. When we arrived, a dense fog hung over the place. It gave our hunt for a serial murderer in this swampy area, where we couldn't see even six feet ahead of us, an eerie unreal aura. After three days we found his cousin. "It's true, as you say, Woody came here five years ago," he said. "He and his friend Bobby broke into a house, and Woody stabbed a 16-year-old girl while she was sleeping. He got 25 years in prison. He was an idiot during the trial. Made noise, laughed at the judge, and made fun of everyone. I tried to calm him down, but to no avail. He destroyed everything for himself."

We found Woody's victim, Sarah, who told us about that horrible night. She'd been forced out of bed by Woody, who ripped open her stomach and lungs with a long knife. She survived thanks to several expensive hospital stays, but no one had given this poor family help processing their pain. It had happened only a couple of days after I'd dropped Woody off. This was depressing—I'd really believed during our night together I'd helped him get in touch with the deep pain and anger he felt. I tried to tell Sarah that Woody was my friend, but my voice broke against guilt and regret when I saw the terror in her eyes. She was unable to see him as anything but a bloodthirsty monster and talked about how he'd behaved like an "animal" during the trial, shouting "I'm gonna get you one day!" before he was dragged out of the courtroom in chains. She'd had nightmares about his returning ever since. It was important to see and understand Sarah, the victim of the would-be executioner, since for so many years I'd dealt mostly with the victim inside the executioner.

When we went to Woody's home, a woman opened the screen door and said, "I know who you are. Woody came home five years ago feeling uplifted. He said he'd been picked up by a strange man who'd gotten him to tell him everything about himself. I wondered who that could be since Woody is the most secretive person I know." Adeline was the mother of Bobby, Woody's accomplice, and lived with Rose, the mother of Woody's two older brothers, Sammy and John.

"Oh yes, it's horrible. It's not like Woody to do such a thing, but he was desperate when you brought him home fired with no pay after working for months in the Gulf. He and Bobby had both been drinking and had taken a lot of drugs, and I believe it was Bobby who did it. They came running home, knocking on the door at 2 a.m., shouting, 'Mom! Mom! We did something terrible!' Then they fainted and collapsed right there on the lawn, where they were asleep when the police picked them up."

I was relieved hearing there'd been nothing deliberate about his bloodlust in Sarah's house, just the deep pain and anger I'd sensed in him. High on dope, they'd stolen a bike in front of Sarah's house then started fighting over it. Woody suddenly broke into the house to grab a kitchen knife to use against his half-brother, who fled. In a frenzy of bloodlust, Woody then kicked in all the doors and tried to stab the



Woody the night I picked him up in 1991 after my lecture in U. of Houston

sleeping family. As for Woody's "animal" behavior during the trial, Adeline now recounted that "he'd been frightened out of his wits and his legs shook under him at the feeling that his life was suddenly over." The poor are incessantly harming themselves, I thought, since Woody's behavior had convinced everyone in the courtroom that he should never come out again, and he'd been given an additional 10 years in prison. What immediately forged strong bonds between Adeline and me was the love we both felt for Woody. I was amazed at her understanding of how the injuries he'd suffered in childhood had led to his violence.

Woody's brothers, then? He said they took him out on their killing sprees, when they killed blacks for no reason. Trusting the intimacy I'd established with Adeline, I asked whether it could be true.

"Oh, yeah," said Adeline, who'd often overheard them mention such killings, but added that the father, Vincent, had been even worse. Not to mention the grandfather! "We just did things like that down here in the past!" It was as if she was apologizing for them.

"Sammy is like his father. A horrible man. It was an organization that stopped him in the end. Life in prison. He's not coming out, ever." Slightly annoyed, she said the reason Woody's eldest brother had been jailed for his latest murder was that the NAACP had called the killing "a hate crime" (in the past nothing happened to them after their murders). She added that Sammy continued to murder blacks in prison. A black prisoner told him that he'd soon be released. "No, you ain't!" Sammy replied, and the night before his release, Sammy poured gasoline over him and set him on fire, reducing him to a charred corpse. Woody had previously told me that Sammy was the leader of the prison's "Aryan gang."

In the absence of a real mother, Woody called Adeline "Mom" and at least once a week called her from prison. It was all further complicated by the fact that Woody had been dating Adeline's junkie daughter, Dawn, for whom she, like her son Bobby, apparently didn't have any great feelings.

And what about the middle brother, John? Did he also participate in the killings? "I don't know how many, but I know for sure that John killed a man at least once. He only got three years in prison for it."

We later drove out to visit John in the swamps despite Adeline's having warned us sternly against it. "Don't you realize he's the worst of them all! He's tough, cold, and he will in no way talk to you." She drew such a frightening portrait that Eli, who'd heard more than enough about violence by now, insisted we move on, especially since, if we wanted to get there before dark, we were running out of time. But now that I'd finally found the man who could corroborate what Woody had said to me in his interview, I wasn't going to give up. As we drove through the endless swamp, where bare trees stood like skeletal fingers overhung with cobwebs of ghostly Spanish moss, Eli looked more and more pale. "Didn't you come along to experience America?" I was trying to cheer her up, amused that reality had borrowed the worst Hollywood visual effects (on top of the heavy fog still lying over the black crocodile-infested waters). "Why do people sit through such movies when reality is far more exciting," I asked Eli.



Angel waving good bye to us from the trailer

Deep in the swamp too close to dark, I managed to find a rotten trailer with plastic over the windows. The usual rubbish of old car wrecks and rusty boats lay scattered around. And when I saw two dirty little white girls, shaggy and barefoot, their noses snotty, I knew instantly these were John's children. Eli was so scared she locked all the car doors and refused to get out. The scene she saw in front of her was right out of Deliverance (in Norway the film was called "Excursion with Death"). She feared that if John came out and shot us no one would ever find our corpses in those swamps. I recalled Woody's detailed description of how their faces had stiffened when they caught one of their own dissolving corpses in the crawfish net.

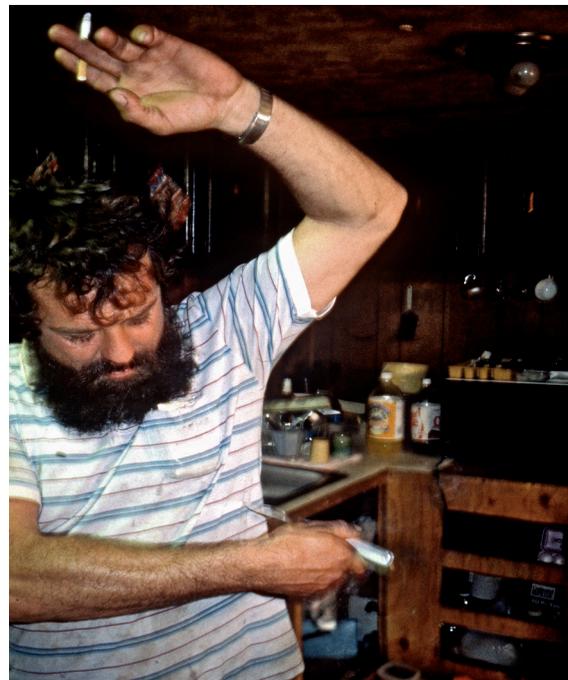
Yet I displayed neither courage nor naïveté in seeking out John, for in the middle of this dark wetland I felt I was on completely solid ground. I was in an almost euphoric state of being, basking in the light of the transformation one perceives when one of the great questions of life is at last being clarified. It's important to note the ecstatic state of mind I arrived in because when John ended up, as I'd predicted, behaving in a way diametrically opposed to what one would expect of a terrifying psychopath, as his family had insisted he was, it was precisely because I'd mentally built up this desperate man to be the one holding the answer to the riddle of life. Thus, I could give him the unimaginable powers people gain when you show them trust and deep human interest: he felt accepted and loved.

Certainly, he was isolated, hostile, and, yes, awe-inspiring. His came to the door armed with a gun, his beard wild and symbols of violence tattooed on body. Yet rarely have I met a man who was so quick to open up when I told him I was a friend of Woody's. Immediately the gun was put away and replaced by cups of fresh-brewed coffee. I soon felt such an exuberant warmth from John and his wife, Connie, that I went out and persuaded Eli to join us. He was indeed the same blood-dripping "monster" that Woody had talked about in his interview and hammered into my

consciousness for five years. But at the same time—and Eli agreed—he was a small cowed child whom one could hardly help but embrace. When you bear in mind that I could easily have been a shrewd police informer, it's amazing how little it takes to open such people up and how eager they are to talk about themselves. And in that very conversation, with its gradual processing of pain, lies the answer to all violence. Yet governments the world over go blind with their antiquated eye-for-an-eye rhetoric and recidivist repressive reflexes right out of Lucifer's right-wing fortress.

The rest of the day, John and Connie recounted the violence that ran through their whole family. "Just look at Angel here." Connie lifted up the abused the two-and-half-year-old. "She's full of violence against her sister. She's the bad one!" And both Eli and I thought that that's how she would end up if told from childhood that she was "bad" and "not good enough." The mother gave her several proper spankings, but we almost never saw her cry. Instead, her red-eyed face carried a permanent mortified look of resentment.

Both parents talked openly about how it was only when they were drunk that they exploded in violence,



John demonstrating how he twisted the knife in the black man



John teaching 7 year old Natasha how to use guns



John showing me some of his gun collection on children's bed

and we quickly formed a picture of how horrible the conditions must be for the two children. They gave endless examples of all the violence they'd been involved in. I didn't even need to ask about the murders of blacks; their bloody side comments about them were a perfect fit with Woody's descriptions. When I asked to see the weapons used in the various murders, John brought out seven rifles and three pistols, which he'd already taught the little girls to use. He even demonstrated with his knife how he'd stabbed a black father in front of his family. I tried to frame my photos of him under a picture of his own father, the one who'd passed all that violence on to them. It hung on the wall in a gold frame, radiating an eerie evilness that couldn't be covered up by the photographer's neat studio setup or Sunday dress.

John wanted us to stay the night and go alligator hunting with him the next day. (He made a living illegally poaching alligators and had filled the fridge with alligator meat.) I was willing, but Eli objected to "going on an alligator hunt in the swamps with a serial murderer in dense fog." So after a warm farewell, we set off in the dark. We were petrified on the drive back and could hardly talk about anything else.



Family photo of Johns parents, Rose and Vincent

1996 Fall trip

In the fall I invited the Danish TV-reporter Helle Vibeke Risgaard to record the traumatized family for TV. John was working “offshore,” so Connie could talk more openly about him. For several days we heard about one murder after another—this time for an open Betacam video. Since it all came in a raving stream or in side remarks, it didn’t take long before we were falling-down dizzy. After a few hours, we could neither remember nor even care about all the murders we’d heard about.

Connie was a strange concoction. She appeared to be a rational woman of exalted composure, and yet we knew from Rose and Adeline that she was even more violent than John, whom they actually saw as her victim. Several times she said that if it hadn’t been for her religion and the children, she’d long ago have left him. Yet we soon began to doubt that; without her children, whom would she be able to beat? With John away, we had the courage to drink with Connie, usually until 4 in the morning, and we had ample opportunity to see her relationship with the two abused children. She was loving one moment but the next would fly into an uncontrollable rage, whipping 3-year-old Angel with a leather belt. This developed into a momentary conflict between Helle and me. Helle impulsively tried to reach out and protect the child, which drove me crazy since that prevented me from photographing the abuse. “What an evil man you are!” she shouted, along with similar accusations (understandably I might add). “If you had traveled a little more in black ghettos,” I snapped, “and seen that kind of abuse every single day, you’d know it’s not your job to save every single child in a moment of sentimentality. No, your job, through your empowering presence, is to give these parents the love for themselves that’s necessary for them to express love for their children. Yet to avoid the very sight of violence and abused children, we do the opposite and all flee the ghetto. And that’s how we ultimately become the direct cause of its abused children.” I also knew that I didn’t have to lecture Connie



The crocodile infested swamps John and Connie lived in

about how it’s wrong to discipline her “evil children” with violence, for all people know deep down that it’s wrong to beat children. If I’d started in with moralizing sermons, however, she’d just have felt even worse about herself. Also, my “higher common sense” told me that it wasn’t necessary to intervene because the child so obviously expected the beatings. She didn’t even cry. Instead, out of spite she continued the behavior that had made her mother crazy. While I knew that this was an extraordinary chance for me to get some pictures for one of the most central and educational sections of my show about poor whites, photographing this abuse was certainly not something I enjoyed. Often I asked myself what the limit was—when would I actually step in?

Contrary to the unrestrained violence common among poor blacks, the presence of a stranger generally quelled the aggression of poor white parents. My photography was itself what told Connie that her behavior was unacceptable but in a way that was gentler than if we’d reprimanded her or accused her of being “a bad person.” Indeed, that would’ve been a replay of what she was doing with the child. I’ve probably offended a lot of readers at this point (although the same offended readers never complain about the violence in my show). When my show had a renaissance in the 90’s, I think it portrayed the growing violence in us as reflected in increasing child abuse. This led to a growing interest in the pedagogy of oppression. Raising the collective awareness of the roots of oppression will be the true salvation of the child. Nevertheless, I would also readily defend the opposite view, which claims that it’s critical to stop the around-the-clock violence against children (and women), however briefly, even if it means destroying key photographic proof of it. For if the few of us who seek out these outcasts—solely to document and thus exploit them—don’t step in, then who should? No matter what the reason for being in such a situation, the Good Samaritan doesn’t close his eyes, open his lens ... and pass by!



Connie beating up two-year-old Angel

The worst thing in this whole situation wasn’t the conflict of these Dostoevskian ethical views, but what both Helle and I soon felt toward the abused child. When we first stepped into this waterlogged hornet’s nest, our immediate sympathy had been for the two battered children with black circles under their eyes. We’d soon feel how “we” always end up helping to force such victims into the oppressor’s role—the vicious circle. Never have I seen it so clearly as in the three-year-old Angel; every single reaction of hers was out of spite. We all know how the abused often bite the outstretched hand and how they destroy everything around them to get attention. At first you feel like picking up the child and caressing her, but the child rapidly obliterates all the surplus affection and love we can muster. And when, from 8 in the evening till 4 in the morning, that “evil” little “Angel” ended up destroying almost all our cameras, microphones, cords, and tapes, then, yes, we gradually felt violence in ourselves build up—all the way to the point where we too had an unspeakable desire to heap verbal abuse on her, beat her up, and kick her across the floor. This is how all over the world we hurt the injured. And when year after year you’ve been teaching this to students, it’s



The mistreated Angel. Was she looking for help?



Connie whipping the children

indeed a good pedagogical lesson to suddenly “feel” how quickly you yourself can become part of the vicious circle of oppression. How quickly we became Connie’s coalition of the willing! Slowly sinking with her out there in the swamps.

Most appalling for both of us was experiencing the close connection between abuse and racism. When we asked three-year-old Angel what she thought of blacks, she became utterly confused. “What do you mean by ‘blacks’? Niggers? We shoot niggers, don’t we, Mom?” When the camera was running and her mother was sober, we could occasionally experience Connie becoming so self-conscious that she said “black” and sporadically tried to use that word in front of the child. This was interesting because it showed that the argument of Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* was valid in even the lowest strata of society, that is, there is a conflict between society’s higher ideals—“e.g., we are all equal”—and the completely different messages parents nurture in their “gut” about “subhumans,” which end up trickling into the child’s unconscious.



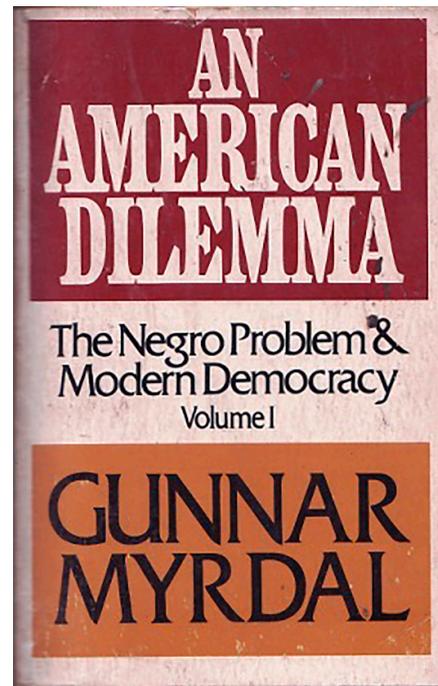
7-year-old Natasha on the day she proudly confessed to having crushed the head of a black boy

We saw this even more clearly in Connie’s relationship with 7-year-old Natasha. Connie thought it was okay that Natasha had caused some trouble in school because, Natasha explained, “The nigger sitting in front of me smelled.” But Connie scolded Natasha because the school had just kicked her out for starting a gang with four other girls. I sensed something more going on and asked Natasha, “Was the gang to confront the blacks?” This was a difficult question because in itself the term black told Natasha I was on the side of “the niggers.” So her answer wasn’t quite as easy for her as when she’d theatrically repeated “Niggers smell!” A little later she became herself (rather than the well-behaved girl society wanted to see). She admitted that the four girls had lured a black boy into the woods and smashed his head with a rock until he was pouring blood. She visibly enjoyed describing this horrifying assault in graphic splatter language. Why had she done it? Because one day her mother, apparently in a moment of political correctness, had told her that “niggers bleed red just like us.” It was Connie’s way of telling her (when she was sober) that “we are all equal, so talk nice about your school friends.” Natasha didn’t believe this message, which contradicted all the other messages she’d gotten from her parents about “killing niggers” (usually when they were drunk). So she’d started a gang and wounded a boy to find out whether it was true. To this Connie simply replied, “It wasn’t a nice thing to do, Natasha.” But we’d all been drinking, and Connie said it with a big smile. She was obviously proud. So Natasha got the message that it was all right to smash a boy’s head open with a rock to find out whether “niggers bleed red”!

Rarely have I seen such a classic lecture in the pedagogy of racism: This was the crushing “double-edged” killer’s sword, the double message as it’s practiced by the vast majority—that is, by us, the more ordinary “liberal” right-thinking people—constantly hammering “we are all equal,” the American creed, and “Christian love” into our children. And yet, when the issue comes to people in “the inner city,” blacks, homosexuals, Jews, Muslims, etc., we lift our eyebrows or change our voices a bit, without even being aware of it, and send the opposite message to the child, somebody is “not as equal.” The child can’t process such a double message with its hidden oppression and out of hurt and in confusion acts out in various racist patterns while growing up.

Connie somehow gave me hope for humanity, for she underscored what I’d always experienced among vicious criminals and even Ku Klux Klan members: One doesn’t have to teach an adult like Connie about right and wrong (as Ivan insists in *The Brothers Karamazov* regarding living without a God). No, everyone knows that it’s wrong to kill, to hate, to inflict pain. While being imprisoned in their own excruciating pain, however, they can’t always live up to their higher ideals.

Since Connie better than anyone expressed our deeper common humanity, I couldn’t help but feel a greater and greater affection toward (and joy around) her. She was this huge lump of explosive violence and hatred, with a peculiar mix of common sense, tenderness, and love, yet she held a deeply entombed desire to express the best of ideals.



The “Bible of racism research” inspiring Johnson to his civil rights laws

I was happy to feel this violent attraction to her since it somehow reminded me of the feelings I’d always nurtured for poor blacks as victims. That she herself was a victim became clear when we met Connie’s desperately alcoholic and insane father (although Connie claimed there’d never been a directly incestuous relationship between them).

At some point the extent to which moral concepts had slipped from us after only a few days with Connie out in the swamps dawned on us. During the summer, John had caught a raccoon, which became a family pet. The children constantly rolled around in bed with their new toy and fed it crackers. I enjoyed taking baths in the insane mess of their “bathroom,” because the raccoon—a “washing bear” in Danish—with its big tail helped wash me in the tub. It was so cute that Helle got the idea she could make a wonderful children’s TV program about how it played with the mistreated children (at home she usually produced children’s programs), but she’d run out of video tapes. That was my fault. Before our arrival I’d warned her, “This is a family so distraught that you can’t directly interview them about their violence. Just let your camera run the whole time, especially when they’re drunk, and you’ll get the most shocking footage—they’ll casually remark on all of their murders.”

When we ran out of tapes during the nights of “our drinking and killing sprees,” Helle suggested erasing some of the previous tapes. And since murder and violence had after just a few days become the boring everyday “banality of evil,” I told Helle that it was okay even though the reason

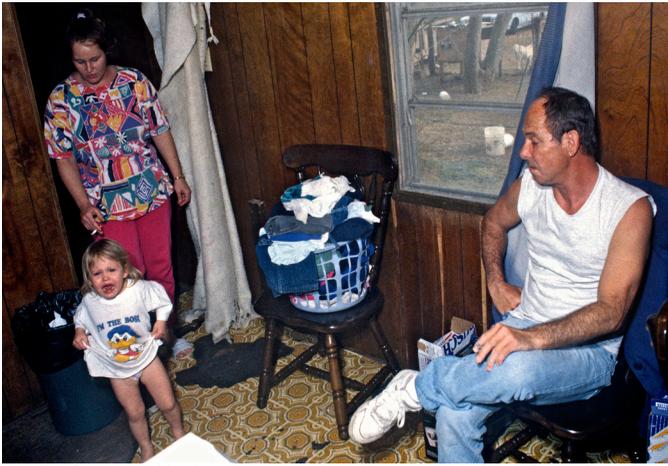


Angel with her beloved new playmate

I’d invited her in the first place was to record it all. Only when we were out on the highway did it dawn on us that she’d erased much of the evidence of a—even by American standards—shocking serial-murder story in favor of a trivial children’s program.

This was a dreadful example of how quickly we’d been brainwashed into Connie’s perverse logic of violence, which she herself best expressed when at one point she asked, “Tell me, are you writing a book about us?” I got defensive but replied honestly: “Perhaps someday, but I’ll make sure to protect you all (from legal action).” “No, you don’t have to worry about that,” Connie said. “The only thing I wouldn’t be happy for you to write about is that night when I broke into a restaurant with Woody and stole seafood out of hunger.” She knew very well that burglary was illegal and had strong opinions about it since one of the “niggers” in the neighborhood had once stolen her chickens. But she didn’t think of killing “niggers” in droves as illegal or wrong (when she was drunk)!

After a short time, apparently neither did we. This was another valuable lesson she taught me: Violent killers aren’t created only by beating them in childhood. No, even the best and most righteous of us can be brainwashed into these roles in a short time as we know from soldiers and torturers all over the world – not to forget American police such as George Floyd’s killer.



Angel mistreated by Connie, who was herself mistreated by her father to the right

After warm hugs, we said goodbye to her and the kids in front of the dilapidated trailer with its plastic-covered windows. I knew I'd miss her—or at least the contact with the violent side of myself she'd exposed for me. A good reason to leave now was the presence of Connie's raving-mad father, who ruined every conversation with his sex-crazy fantasies about Helle. "Can you really sleep in the car with such a sexy blonde without having sex?" he kept asking. You often hear the truth from those who are drunk or insane (he was both). He expressed openly what Americans usually imagine when I invite Danish women on my trips—that if nothing else it's to avoid falling in love with my photographic victims, such as his daughter, Connie.

Later in 1996

I'd been writing to Woody for several years and got permission from the prison to visit him. After almost 20 hours of driving, I arrived. As per usual in America, the high-security prison was located in a remote area few families could afford to drive to. Woody hadn't had a visit for five years and looked forward to our reunion as much as I did. But it was a shocking experience. After we both went through all sorts of security measures, Woody entered the visiting room chained hand and foot, his body looped with still more (and still thicker) chains. Trying to reach around this iron man felt like embracing a space alien. The beautiful "innocent" look I remembered, of a young boy with long bright locks, had been blown away. With his short hair, tattoos, his missing teeth (they'd been knocked out), and wounds on his arms, he was a creepy replica of Sean Penn in *Dead Man Walking*—but far, far worse. While I had a hard time believing in his mass murder stories that night five years ago, I was now able to believe everything about him. He'd been ferociously brutalized in this prison, which seemed far worse than Angola despite the latter's reputation for being the worst. And he'd spent half his



Nothing left of this beautiful young man in prison 5 years after

time in the darkness of solitary confinement because of perpetual disciplinary offenses. How many fights, I asked. He counted twelve with black prisoners and three with whites—all life-or-death struggles. His 25-year sentence had been extended each time. But having ended up almost exclusively with blacks, he'd gained more respect for them. They could also fight back! He told me about how angry he'd been when he'd first—before I'd picked him up in 1991—shared a jail cell with a black man. He'd had a gun smuggled in and shot the "nigger." Not to kill him (years would've been added to his sentence). He'd shot him in the leg to get him moved from his cell.

That wasn't possible in this "high-tech" prison, and he'd learned to live with his black cellmate. "He does not fuck with me and I do not fuck with him." They never talked about race relations. Neither even knew what the other was in for. Sarah was the only one of his victims I knew, so I felt a special responsibility as her messenger. Since Woody had no recollection whatsoever of the night he'd stabbed her, he asked me to tell him in detail what had happened. "That poor girl," he said several times during our talk.

About his "animal-like" behavior in the courtroom, when he'd threatened her, he could only remember that he'd been "an asshole" without even knowing that Sarah was present. I told him how important it had been for Sarah to see Woody's letter to me in which he asked for her forgiveness, and I asked whether he was ready for a victim-offender meeting to heal the wounds. After much deliberation, he replied that he wasn't ready for it. Then I made a terrible mistake. I said that Sarah had been more understanding than I'd expected because her own brother was in prison. Woody's efforts to think in compassionate terms were immediately crushed, and the killer in him emerged. "You have to give me the name of Sarah's brother," he demanded. "I've heard from inmates transferred from Angola that there's a prisoner here who's out to kill me. Here you have to kill or be killed." I knew the prisoner was probably Sarah's brother since, during my conversations with her, her other brother kept saying angrily, "If only I could get my hands on that guy!"

So now I was suddenly involved in a life-and-death struggle and realized that being a messenger, bridge builder, or man of reconciliation might not be as easy as I'd imagined. Like Our Lord Himself, I had to decide which of them was going to die! If I didn't reveal the name, it would be Woody, my friend, who'd one day probably have his throat cut from behind. I knew I wouldn't say the name to Woody, but I also knew that if I kept refusing I'd push him away.

Overall, meeting Woody again was a shocking experience. There were a number of reasons for this, one of which was that I had to review much of what I'd said about him in my slideshow. I could still glimpse the wounded child in Woody, but it was harder and harder not to see him with the judgmental eyes of society. I knew that I wouldn't have the courage to set this man free in his present state, but I also knew—as I kept reminding myself—that this condition was caused by this very same judgmental disposable society, not to mention the additional brutalization prison had subjected him to.

As difficult as it was to withhold Sarah's brother's name, it was almost as difficult not to tell Woody about Dawn, the only love of his life. That very morning I'd called Dawn's mother, Adeline; she was in shock. Dawn had attempted suicide the night before. She'd been found half-dead in

a gas oven. Adeline had asked me not to tell Woody, but Woody kept asking me about her. And there was other news: Dawn had had a child with Woody's best friend. I knew Woody would want to kill him along with Sarah's brother.

In this brief account, I've merely hinted at some of the problems I'd run into in my attempt to be friends with all parties in an underworld of violence that has its own confusing rules. During the three-day drive back to New York through a depressing rain that lasted all three days, I didn't think of much more than this: MY American dilemma.

1998

Almost two years after I visited Woody, I received a surprising Christmas letter. It was from the worst of the three serial murderers—Woody's oldest brother, Sammy, whom I'd tried to visit in prison (also in 1996). As the leader of an Aryan gang, he continued murdering blacks in prison, e.g., by pouring gasoline on them and setting them on fire while they slept. Now he was apologizing that he hadn't replied to my letter. He was legally prevented, he said, since he'd spent two years in the "hole" for stabbing a black prisoner to death. Now, however, he wanted to do something more creative and asked me whether some of my friends would be his pen pals. Several of my black friends in the area were his prison guards. After using them as references and waiting for many years, I finally got permission to visit Sammy. (The warden was a Christian who believed in forgiveness.) Unfortunately, after driving almost a week to get there, I found the prison under lockdown because of a swine flu contagion.

With a Black Woman in 2003

In 2003 I decided to take a black woman with me to see how the family would react. "I want to see whether they'll kill you too," I joked to Rikke Marott, a model from Denmark. "Jacob," she said nervously, "I'm a young black woman. You're a middle-aged white man. Half the men in these areas are in jail for killing or raping blacks." I replied, "They also kill whites." "That doesn't make it any better."

We first went to see Sammy's and John's mother, Rose. I wanted to hear more about her background. Rose said she came from an extremely poor family: "I grew up far out in the swamps, inhabited by almost no one but our family. Our house had only one room, where all nine of us slept.

We were so poor we all had to stay home and help Mom and Dad work. Like most other poor people, we helped to work in the swamps as shrimp fishers. Really hard work. Not until I was 13 did the authorities find us and send us to school, but I stopped after 5th grade because Mom and Dad needed us for work. So I never learned to read and write then.”

Rikke pointed to her adorable young daughter on the wall. “Yes, my daughter there disappeared back in ’67. She was 16. I got an anonymous call—a voice said she’d drowned in a harbor.” Rikke asked, “Who was calling?”

“Maybe the killer, because no one else knew where she was. She was never found. That’s the worst part.” Her voice trembled and her eyes brimmed with tears. “It’s 35 years ago, but I’ve never let go of the hope that she’ll come back one day.”

“What about your other children?”

“Our family is cursed. There’ve been so many murders and accidents—we are cursed. My stepson is in jail for attempted murder—he cut up a young girl’s belly. She survived, but she’ll never be able to have children.”

When I interviewed Rose about how Woody’s father had ripped out her uterus, she broke down in tears, embarrassed



232 Rose showing her picture of her son Sammy in prison to Rikke Marott

that I knew about it. After it had happened, she’d been so ashamed to be without a womb that she didn’t go to the hospital for a month. Even then she only went because the bleeding was so severe. In the moments leading up to the tragedy, Vincent, who’d been drinking heavily, shouted, “I’ll make sure you can never have children with another man!” Rose said she’d wanted to leave him, but before I turned off the camera, she went on to confess that she’d killed her husband with an axe. He hadn’t “fallen out of bed” as everyone had told me. Becoming even more emotional, she talked about the murder of Woody’s eldest sister. Adeline had told me in the spring that she’d committed suicide at the age of 16, after a long incestuous relationship with her father. Now Rose said that her daughter had, in fact, been murdered. Numb from hearing about all the murders we forgot to ask if it was also by the father, when she quickly continued.

“I have another son in prison for murdering negroes,” Rose continued. “He killed people at random.” She described in detail (and on video) all the killings but failed to mention the victims were all black. Rikke said later, “She’s trying to protect me because I’m black, but she didn’t have to. I felt comfortable with Rose. I could feel that she didn’t care what color I am. What was important to her was that there was another human being who was trying to understand where she was coming from.”

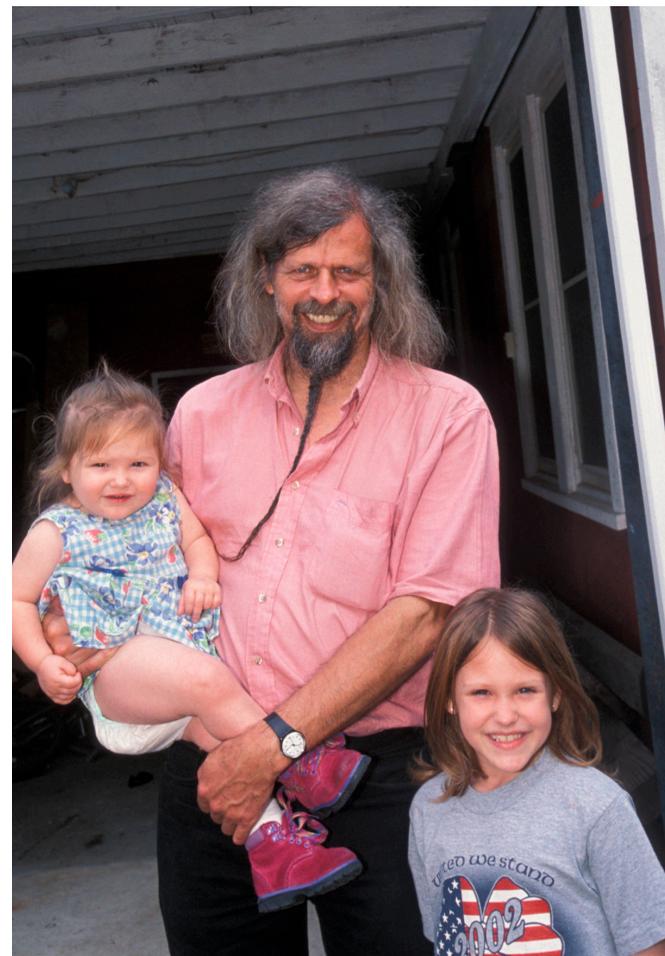
As we were getting ready to leave, I said, “Well, Rose, we’re on our way out to visit John.”

“John’s wife is dead,” Rose said. “Connie was killed last year in one of their drunken fights when she drove off in the car and crashed it. John’s no longer a shrimp fisherman. He works on a boat and is away for days at a time. He’s not in town right now.”

“What about the kids?” I asked.

“They were taken by the authorities,” Rose said. “My Christian daughter has the two youngest. The eldest, who’s 17, lives with John and his new girlfriend.”

I was shocked but not surprised. Connie’s violent death was caused by a dangerous mix of cocaine, endless alcohol, and unhealed anger. I’d longed to see her again and was in tears as I made the long drive to visit her children. Would they even remember me after seven years? I was relieved when we drove up to their new home, “with a good Christian family,” and, as if I were a dear uncle, Angel came running out and leapt into my arms with uncontrollable joy.



9-year-old Angel with her new sister Sally in 2003

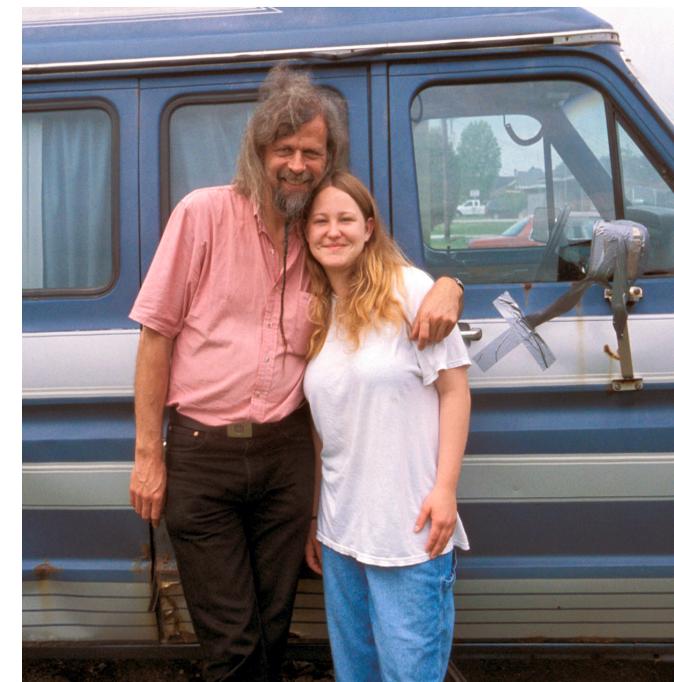


Angel with letters to her mom about being a better child

It’s said that children can’t remember anything from before the age of 2 or 3, but clearly she’d remembered me, arriving with my shame for having wanted to beat her when she was a toddler. Fortunately, this was not her lasting memory of me. Apparently, she’d experienced me in childhood as the only “sane” outsider to witness how deeply she’d been traumatized. Hers was a family that both whites and blacks had fled from out there in the swamps. Although I’d only been with the 2 and half-year-old Angel for one day in spring 1996 and for a few days in the fall when she was 3, I could now see how much our short visit at the time had meant for her as a 9-year-old. She dragged me by the hand to meet her new family, to show me the younger sister she’d acquired and a love letter she’d written to her mother, now dead, promising to be “a good kid.”



16-year-old Natasha loved Rikke Marott



With Natasha in 2003 shortly before she escaped from her father

The 17-year-old Natasha, who'd nearly killed a black boy with rocks and had since spent two years in prison for other crimes, was equally enthusiastic about our reunion. She was also thrilled to meet Rikke, with whom she wanted to be photographed incessantly. They may have been brought up to "kill niggers," but their pain didn't discriminate against the color of the woman offering them love and the hope of soothing that pain. Rikke, who was adopted into a loving Danish middle-class family, came with all the surplus love these affection-deprived children were craving. On my subsequent visits over the years, they kept asking why I hadn't brought that "lovely colored woman" with me.

2009

Yet, the family curse continued to haunt the children—John managed to get them back. He worked offshore, so I didn't see him again until 2009, now in another trailer with a little land around it. I came to expect surprises when visiting a serial murderer and figured I was in for another when I asked him why his lawn was red with blood. He answered with the rusty voice of a hardened older man:



John showing how the lawn got red from blood in 2009



John with his stepson and grandchild Connie showing the guns he used for the killing the night before



John with Natasha's youngest dumped child



Angel at two with her uncle Woody who later raped her

"Well, Jacob, you know we always did crazy things when we got drunk. Last night I was so drunk I went out target shooting at my only cow. The cow got so frightened that it jumped the fence and ran off. I ran inside to get my rifle and got on my horse to chase it down. And after a wild midnight ride through town, I killed the damn bastard about five miles on the other side of town. And this morning I went with my 15-year-old stepson out to get it in the pick-up truck. We've just been butchering it here on the bloody lawn." I replied, "Well, at least you're not killing blacks anymore." "No, we all mellow out when we get older. I think I stopped that around the time I met you."

I was so relieved his youthful (and lethal) anger had subsided that this time I went shrimping with him deep in the swamps, where for the first time we had time to really talk about his life and his violent fights with Connie, which in the end had cost her her life. What saddened me was that both of his daughters, whom I'd come to see, had disappeared.

Natasha had fled from him around the time I saw her last and now had two children, whom she'd dumped with John. He didn't know where she was; "probably in jail again," he guessed. And Angel was now in prison. Woody had, after 16 years, been released on parole and moved in with John. He'd raped 13-year-old Angel and made her into a drug addict. John was so furious that he put his own brother back in prison—this time for life—for breaking parole. Angel was no saint either. At 13 she'd stolen a car to take some of her friends to a McDonald's and was sentenced to a juvenile facility. She escaped a year later by stealing one of their yellow school buses. I have no idea how she, small as she was, could even have reached the foot pedals. Perhaps she couldn't since she crashed the bus, totaling it. She was now serving a sentence of several years in a prison so far away John couldn't afford to go there. John, I observed, along with his new wife, was trying to do a better job of bringing up his two granddaughters than he'd done with his daughters. One had been named Connie after their dead grandmother. I felt that John was now on the right track and was more worried about Natasha and Angel.

2012

I didn't locate Natasha until 2012. She contacted me because she wanted my help in sending her father to prison. She'd learned from Rose, her grandmother, that it was actually John who'd committed the murder in the marketplace for which her uncle Sammy was serving a life sentence. Although Natasha had never met Sammy, she felt it was unconscionable for him to be locked up when she knew that her own father had killed far more blacks. I'd never understood why Sammy had gotten life for murdering a black father in front of his family when Woody clearly says on my tape that it was John who committed the crime. (Sammy's conviction had been the reason I'd often doubted Woody's story.) John had even shown me how he'd twisted the knife in his victim's heart. Since there were so many witnesses to the crime, Sammy and John knew that one of them would be going to prison. According to Natasha, the brothers made a deal on the spot. Sammy offered to take the rap "because you, John, are trying to raise a family. I have no children and am wanted for so many other things that I'll end up in prison anyway." Wow, I thought. Because of this bizarrely honorable deal, struck to prevent Natasha from being fatherless, Natasha wanted her own father in prison.



With Nastasha during our therapeutic conversation in 2012



Nastasha with her crazy meth cooking friends in "the hole" same evening



Nastasha and friends in the late night bar



Drinking Tequila "shots" from Nastasha's breasts



Nastasha and Angel in family photo

She was now 23 and I felt this was the time to ask her how much she could remember of the murders that had occurred in her childhood. I set a video camera up in front of us in a noisy backyard behind the shack she lived in. She insisted that we first buy a bottle of whisky: "I have so much to tell you."

At first it seemed as if she had for so long suppressed the memories that they reemerged only with difficulty, but after a couple of hours, I got the idea to play a sound clip from the digitalized show I'd made 20 years earlier with her uncle Woody. When I played this tape, she broke down in tears and began shaking violently while I held her. It was like it opened deep wounds from her childhood, and she told me how often she'd helped cleanse the car of blood after John had been out "killing niggers" and about some of the killings she herself her witnessed.

"We were on the road, and this black guy in a little Honda cut dad off. Dad chased him down and clipped him. I watched this nigger fucking tumble out in the ditch—Dad literally clipped him at 50 miles per hour. Dad was just sitting there laughing, saying that this motherfucking bitch

is not going to cut anybody else off. So a day later it came on the radio, that if there were any witnesses to come forward. There was a reward and everything."

"So, you heard it on the radio, and you knew it was your father."

"Yes, I was there with him."

"And then you felt remorse. Was that the first time you felt something was wrong?"

"Yes, about the only time I ever thought anything was wrong—because I saw it with my own eyes."

"Only because he was wanted for it?"

"I don't know if it was because he was wanted for it, but I was there and saw it all. I am not a violent, violent person. Don't get me wrong. I have a lot of anger issues, and if somebody pisses me off, they will see the worst of me, but I am not a cold-blooded killer. Dad will fucking look you in the eye and stab you—just for standing there. He has no guilt, no remorse."

"But didn't you know it was wrong to kill people?"

"No, we were fucking raised to kill niggers, so how could I? Not until I was around 14 and heard that on the radio did I start turning against my dad. And shortly after I saw you and the nice colored lady last time, I ran away from home."

I was in shock because she now wanted to use my tape of Woody as evidence in court against her own father. She loved him but now saw him as a remorseless killer. And yet John had over the years become my trusted friend. He would tell me anything, but I somehow always thought or hoped that he was just bragging. Also, I always saw him as a victim.

The whisky and the horrific bloody details got us both increasingly excited. Sitting next to me in front of the camera, she began to kiss and hug me (eagerly photographed by her new boyfriend - the father soon after of her third child). She did this more and more—a reaction to the joy of lifting from her heart something she'd repressed for so long. As she talked about her father, she

kept justifying his actions with phrases like "My dad didn't want to be fucked over by the niggers." I picked up a few more clues about John's past in her language, but it was she herself who casually mentioned his rape.

"Your dad was raped? By whom, his father?"

"Yes, he was raped as a child. Before he was thirteen. And Sammy too. All the time."

"How do you know that?"

"Because my dad told me when he was drunk."

"How did he tell you?"

"We talked about a lot of things, and he said he'd been taken advantage of as a child. I said, 'What do you mean, taken advantage of?' One time he said, 'Baby, the reason I was so overprotective of you when you were young was because of what happened to me when I was a child.' He wouldn't go into detail—why would he? He's a grown man. So, I didn't ask for more. Certain things guilt me and him. As father and daughter, we can curse each other out, but when it comes down to it, we will stand back to back and fight through such things without showing emotions."

Later that night I would see that such feelings are acted out in different ways. We were both emotionally devastated after these day-long revelations, during which she, as an eyewitness, had confirmed the gruesome murders of blacks Woody had told me about 20 years earlier. More importantly, she'd also given me the deeper explanation for it all: it was rooted in deep unhealed anger, itself stemming from the constant rape of two small children or young boys.

We were completely exhausted at the end of the day, but Natasha now insisted that I take her to the liquor store. After that, she wanted to take me "into the hole," which I knew was the worst place in America. Down in the hole (hang out for criminal addicts), we were joined by her friends—the wildest scariest crack heads and meth-cookers I'd ever seen. With Natasha now clearly out of her mind, one of them forced us into my rental car (me in



Carrying Nastasha home at 5 in the morning

the back seat and Natasha in the front). The wildest ride of my life was about to begin. We drove 100 miles an hour through the streets—against the traffic on one-way streets and through dark alleys, often with garbage cans flying around us just like a Hollywood chase scene. Several times Natasha tried kill herself by throwing herself out the door. At first, I thought, "Damn! Why didn't I take out insurance on the rental car at the airport in Atlanta?" A little later, I thought, "Why didn't I get life insurance?" I was absolutely certain that with such a drunk and doped-up driver my life was about to end exactly the same way it had for Natasha's mother. Late at night, after a high-speed chase over many rivers and swamps, we ended up in an empty bar where Natasha woke up. Taking out her knife, she demanded shots for all of us and insisted I drink them from a glass squeezed between her breasts. Local tradition, I think they said. I felt safer among their knives than I did driving with them, so I postponed the ride home until Natasha had passed out. She seemed so "dead" we thought she'd had a heart attack. We carried her out to the car and drove home, where, at 5 in the morning, we carried her enormously heavy body—it



Angel pregnant with her temporary husband in 2012

resembled her mother's with all the weight she had now gained—into the living room. I then fled the crime scene, relieved that I was alive but fearing that the police would show up and compare the dents in my car with the things we'd wrecked that night. Natasha, as it happened, was pregnant and soon after gave birth. When she landed in prison again, this child was also taken from her.

Later the same day, luck was with me and I found Angel in a distant town. I hadn't seen her for almost 10 years (she'd been in prison) and was again surprised that she came running out to embrace me in the same way she had when she was 9. Now 19, she was pregnant. Her husband was a rough Hell's Angel type resembling the young prison-brutalized Woody. Natasha hadn't announced my arrival since they no longer stayed in touch. When I mentioned Natasha wanted their father in prison, Angel couldn't understand why, but then she'd been too young to witness all the killings. At 2 she'd only learned the words she'd remember as her first—"We kill niggers"—without understanding what they meant. After years of acting out the rage of her parents, dooming her to be "the bad one,"

she'd been released from prison and wanted to start a family. Sitting there interviewing her, I was again struck by how small she was. She was hopeful about the future, and before I left, she asked me to take some pictures of her with the man she'd married in John's house. Although she lived in relative comfort with her husband's parents, she clearly didn't want me to leave.

For the next eight years, Angel sent me one desperate letter after another despite the fact that she was barely able to write. First about the birth of their two children, with the exact size and weight of each, then about how her husband had left her and how she'd ended up in a trailer as rundown as the one she'd been born in—dirt poor and alone with her two children. Then came one cry for help after another from various prisons after her children had been forcibly removed. When I asked about Natasha, all she knew was that she was also in prison.

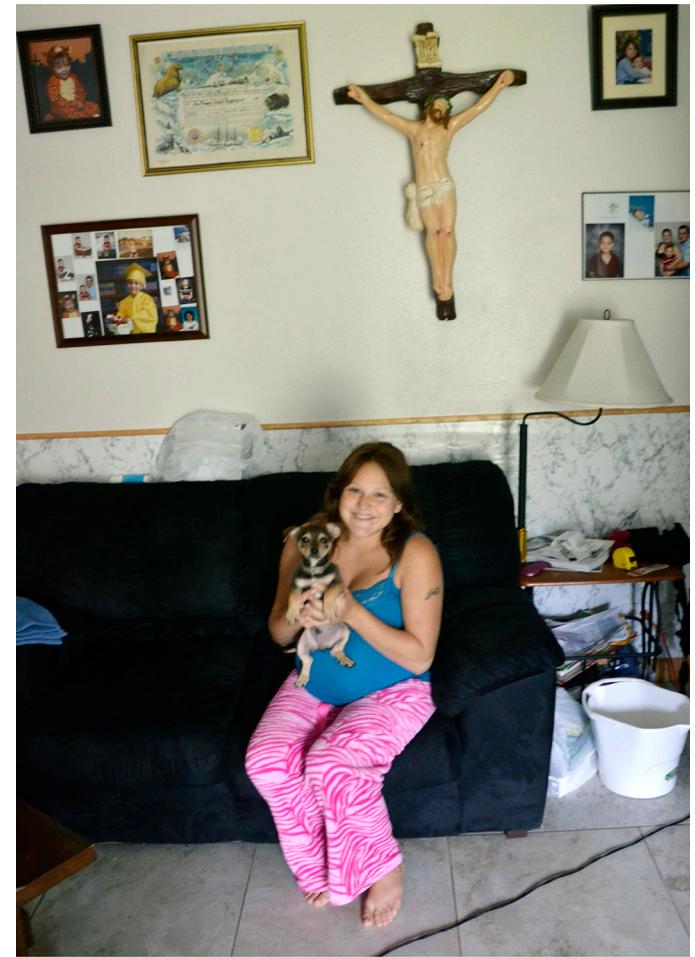
More recently, having served out her sentence, Angel found a new husband, had a baby with him, and seemed fairly happy. Now she sends me cries for help when John, her



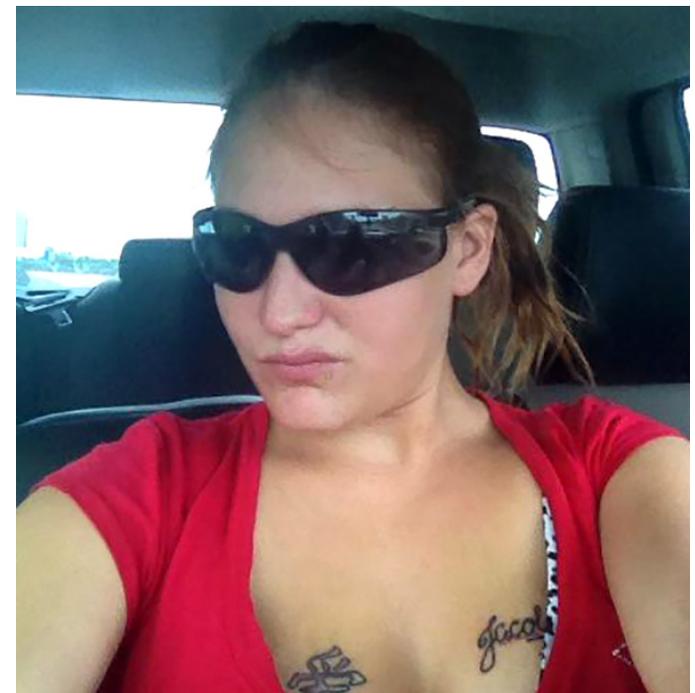
Connie beating up Angel - "the bad one" - in 1996

father, has been hospitalized—a result of years of heavy drinking. "Dad wants to see you. Please come back, Jacob. I'll pay the airfare." It's obvious that she has no idea how far away Denmark is or how expensive such a ticket is. During the last few years, their last desperate hope has been President Trump, and Angel's new husband writes long posts on Facebook about "the unfair treatment Trump got after all he has done for us poor people."

While I feel that this traumatized family has been treated unfairly by all of us winners in society, one thing my 30-year friendship with them has taught me is the importance—no matter how little time we have left over from our busy careers—to intervene as saving angels on behalf of the abused and neglected children around us. For even though I only spent a few days with Angel when she was 2-3 years old, she never forgot me, as she made clear one day when she was 9 and one afternoon when she was 19. To this day she constantly writes and calls me, and now even has my name tattooed on her breast (as seen here).



Pregnant Angel happy in home of her parents in law 212



Divorced and alone with two children and Jacob tattoo 2018