

F I V E

Violent Girls - The Fastest Growing Problem

I don't like Mondays. Mondays always get me down.

—reason given by 16 year-old Brenda Spencer after being asked by police why she had opened fire on a crowded playground of children at a San Diego Elementary School in 1979.¹

One night while her parents were out, fifteen-year-old Casey sifted through their dresser to find the small revolver they kept hidden; her mother kept it in the top drawer to protect the family from the “riff-raff” at the trailer park where they lived. There was nothing more satisfying and suspenseful than playing “Russian Roulette” with her younger brother, age ten, and a few friends from the trailer park. Casey would put the gun up to her brother’s head. The look of fear in his eyes when she cocked the hammer gave her feelings of both power and guilt. But once the game was over (and luckily no one was hurt) Casey would become furious with her brother and threaten to “slice his head” if he told anyone.” Her brother lived in terror of Casey. He thought about the day a bullet would find

its way into the chamber of the gun and cause him to lose his young life. If this fear weren't enough, he also had to deal with Casey's violent moods; she would hit him just for being in the same room with her or if she felt he was getting on her nerves. At the age of ten, this boy still wet the bed. But this all stopped the day his sister was arrested and sent to juvenile.

I saw Casey after she had been in locked up in juvenile for over a month. She had been caught at school with a box cutter (considered a weapon) and suspended. The authorities were called in because it was alleged that Casey had been making threats against another girl, Anita. When I walked in and saw Casey, she hardly looked the part of a potential killer. She had long blond hair and baby blue eyes that looked up at me innocently as I questioned her. Casey denied to me that she had any emotional problems or animosity towards anyone. At one point, she started to cry, stating between sobs that she had never meant to hurt her brother or anyone and had "learned her lesson." She described herself as an innocent person who had never harbored angry feelings. I found this posture of innocence rather amusing since she had been sent to a reform school at one point – and then sent back home for setting the place on fire. She had also falsely accused her father of beating her and turned him in to the Department of Human Services; she was angry at him for not letting her go out one night. She vehemently denied making any threatening gestures toward the girl in her class, Anita. "It was Anita threatening me. She said she was going to hit me with a baseball bat and I told the principal but he would not do anything. I put the box cutter in my purse because I was scared of her. I would never hurt her." What Casey did not know was that I had seen some drawings she had done (her family had found them) showing her cheerfully stabbing Anita through the heart with the words "Die, Anita, Die!" proudly emblazoned across the top.

Casey's denial of aggression is typical for many girls. They like to portray themselves as angels who would never harm anyone but, in reality, their feelings can be similar to boys': they are just less direct about their aggression. In part, many

are this way because that is what society expects. But sometimes, even females who are direct about their anger do not make the national news. That is because we often see what we expect to see.

When people discuss the school massacres, they only focus on the cases of boys committing these atrocities. School killing and crime are thought of only as "boy problems"; there have been a slew of books written about boys and the problems they face in our society. *Lost Boys* by James Garbarino and *Real Boys* by William Pollack became best sellers. Granted, the most recent headline-grabbing episodes have involved boys, but girls and women have been involved in many actual and potential school shootings and stabbings. However, this rarely makes the news. Female crimes are given very little mention. After the Columbine tragedy, the *Boulder News* posted a list of school shootings that had taken place since 1979. Two out of the ten shootings listed were orchestrated by females but no mention was made of this fact.

But girls and women do kill. In the chapter on school killers, I discussed the case of Brenda Spencer, who opened fire on an elementary school in 1979. She killed two people and wounded eight children and a police officer before ending her rampage in a six hour stand-off with police. In another school shooting, a mentally disturbed woman named Laura Denn opened fire in a second grade classroom with two handguns in Winnetka, Illinois in 1988. She killed one child and wounded five others before killing herself – and left poisoned food and booby-traps behind in the hopes of killing others after her own death.² At the tenth anniversary of this event, no one in Winnetka wanted to discuss the incident. My brother-in-law was living in North Carolina after the Jonesboro shootings in 1998 and called to tell me about a girl who had brought an arsenal of weapons to school with the intent of using them. Her plans were thwarted when classmates told school authorities who quickly put a stop to her plans. It never made the news. In another school-related incident in December of 1999, a thirty-three year old woman named Kelly Chapman bought

eighty-five cents worth of gasoline and set nine-year-old Vincent Williams on fire as he walked to Weatherill Elementary School in Pennsylvania. Chapman did not know the boy and he had done nothing to provoke the attack. Luckily, the boy remembered his “stop, drop and roll” training which saved his life.³

Anger over boys seems to drive some girls to kill others out of jealousy. On April 21, 1995, Marsha Mayfield stabbed seventeen-year old Shelisa Hunt in the heart during a quarrel about a boy. This death took place at Holly Springs High School in Mississippi. In another stabbing in 1995, a twelve-year-old girl killed thirteen-year-old Stephen Givens at Jefferson Middle School in Rochester, New York during another feud over a boy.⁴ I found it interesting that when I was interviewed after several of the school killings, very few reporters (except for one doing a story on girl crime) wanted to know anything about girls who had committed violent acts. They focused only on boys and asked “why are they so violent?” The real question, I told them, is “why are *people* so violent?”

Could it be that our society does not want to believe that women and girls could commit such violent crimes? According to Patricia Pearson, author of *When She Was Bad*, when women commit crimes, people often think that they only do so because they have been coerced, victimized or forced to act in self-defense. Our society *desires* to avoid seeing women as willful aggressors.⁵ I remember once in elementary school when a very lady-like little girl named Lauren fell down and skinned her knee when a boy threw a kick ball at her too hard. My teacher told me to go and get her a bandage out of a closet in the back of our classroom. Lauren came with me and as I bandaged her knee, she looked at me and said, “You know, it does not bother me when men or boys get hurt, but if a woman or girl is hurt, it breaks my heart.” I thought this was an odd thing to say at the time but as I think about it as an adult, Lauren parodies many people’s feelings about the vulnerability of girls. People imagine girls being the ones getting hurt, being abused or victimized. They cannot imagine that the girls themselves may be victimizers, aggressors and predators, who actively go

out and seek to harm others. It is surely not their nature. But this assumption is false. Violent girls are real and numerous, and society’s almost wilful blindness only makes the problem worse.

Teenage girls are one of the fastest-growing groups participating in violent crimes in the country. One in four juvenile arrests in 1996 was of a female. Overall, increases in arrests between 1992 and 1996 were greater for juvenile females than juvenile males in most offense categories.⁶ In a study done in Denver, it was found that the prevalence of serious violence among girls thirteen to fifteen was more than half that of males the same age. In a study in Rochester, New York, at age thirteen, eighteen percent of the girls admitted to committing seriously violent acts as opposed to only sixteen percent of the boys.⁷ In my work with juvenile courts, I have heard many of the male case managers say that they would prefer a caseload of five boys for every girl who comes through their door. Their reasoning is that the girls are indirect and manipulative in order to get what they want and use techniques such as crying, flirtation or feigning innocence. Many times, they will act as if they are victims whom no one can possibly understand but all the while (like Casey in the example at the beginning of the chapter) they harbor a violent angry side that when let loose can cause destruction and damage in much the same degree as any boy or man. The murder of a family of Jehovah’s Witnesses that took place near my home town of Knoxville, Tennessee is a good example of what can happen when violent, angry girls strike out.

The Lillelid Family Massacre

And this good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all nations; and then the end will come.

—Matthew 24:14

I gaze into the glassy eye of your fearsome Jehovah, and pluck him by the beard; I uplift a broad-axe, and slit open his worm-eaten skull!

—Anton LaVey, from the Satanic Bible⁸

David Davenport is now the Sheriff of Jefferson County, Tennessee. The first time I spoke to him about the Lillelid case, he was still working as a special agent for the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI). A burly man with graying hair, he was sweating profusely on the July day he visited my office in Knoxville. I watched him wipe his brow again and again as he sat in my office complaining that I needed “to do something with that air-conditioning.” Davenport told me that he had been a special agent for the past twenty years and in that time had seen many gruesome murders. But none was as tragic and senseless as that of the Lillelid family, whose only mistake was encountering the six “out-of-control” teenagers (including three girls and three boys) who ended their lives one day at a rest stop off Interstate 81 in Baileyton, Tennessee. The whole truth of what happened on that memorable April day now lies only in the minds of the six teenagers who are serving life sentences for the murder of thirty-four-year-old Vidar Lillelid, his twenty-eight-year-old wife Delfina, and their six-year-old daughter Tabitha—and the attempted murder and blinding of then-two-year-old Peter.

When I heard of the murders, my blood ran cold. How could anyone, much less six young people, take the lives of a family who had never done them any wrong? When news of

the killings was blasted all around the Southeast, people viewed the tragedy in terms of good versus evil. There was the good Lillelid family whose only crime had been “witnessing” to the teens (the family were Jehovah’s Witnesses) and then there were the six demonic young Kentuckians who were nothing short of horrible Satan-worshipping monsters. The names of the six young people charged with the murder were flashed all over the news: Natasha Wallen Cornett, age 18, Crystal Renea Sturgill, age 18, Karen Renea Howell, age 17, Joseph L. Risner, age 21, Edward Dean Mullins, age 20, and Jason Blake Bryant; Jason was only 14 at the time of the murders. None of the Kentucky youths could agree on who did the actual shooting (each pointed a finger at the others), but they all pled guilty to first-degree felony murder. Why and how had the paths of six young people, desperate enough to kill, and an innocent immigrant family crossed and culminated in such a tragic way? Was the motive for this heinous murder really as simple as a carjacking gone wrong or did fate bring these people together on that April evening? I wondered what forces had been at play long before the Lillelids inhaled their last breath of life in a ditch along dark dirt gravel road off Interstate 81.

What I found out for certain was that emotion ran high when it came to the Lillelid case: the slaying of the Lillelids was ranked as the top news story in Tennessee for 1997 according to the Associated Press. This murder, more than many others, seemed to symbolize to Tennesseans all that was wrong with the morality, values and religious upbringing (or lack thereof) for America’s young people, particularly kids in the rural South. There was a wide difference in opinion over why these teens would engage in such a hideous act of murder and destruction. Many people who knew the Lillelids told me that these adolescents murdered because they were “rotten, evil, lived in a moral vacuum, and were the devil himself.” On the other side, those who knew the defendants or had interviewed them felt that somewhere along the line, the system and society itself had failed these kids: they were sick, impoverished or in need of spiritual guidance.

The Jehovah's Witnesses

The Jehovah's Witnesses are devoted to their beliefs and have a great desire to spread the word of Jehovah or God. I receive a lot of mail from readers around the country, and I have noticed that much of the time it comes from a Jehovah's Witness sending me literature on the wickedness of men and the coming of the Armageddon. The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that it is important to preach the word of God to one's fellow man. All I knew of the Jehovah's Witnesses came from pamphlets and brochures that members had sent me. One in particular looked especially ominous. The title, "Spirits of the Dead: Can They Help You or Harm You, Do They Really Exist" caught my attention immediately. I glanced through it to glean information that might help me to better understand the Lillelid family. Further research led me to talk with Witnesses and with religious studies experts.

What I learned is that there are more than four million Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide. However, because they believe the end is near, the Society has defined its mission as bringing as many as possible into the "new system" before Armageddon. Armageddon will be the final climactic battle between the forces of good and evil, with God or Jehovah fighting for the good, and Lucifer or Satan fighting for evil. Many of the local Jehovah's Witnesses felt that the Lillelid slayings were a sign of humankind's last days. Somehow this analogy of the battle between good and evil seemed to fit the Lillelids' murder. Even though the Jehovah's Witnesses beliefs are quite different from the Christian beliefs the Kentucky youth grew up with, the Lillelids still seemed to symbolize goodness and selflessness. In contrast, the six Kentucky youth were said to worship Satan and were thought by many to represent the "devil himself." I was starting to see that this case was much more than a carjacking gone wrong; the Lillelids' murder was a quest by the Kentucky youth for vengeance against a God-fearing

society that had rejected them. Perhaps to the six teens the Lillelids stood for all that had gone wrong with their own lives. Surely it was not coincidence that the teens had chosen a family of Jehovah's witnesses as their victims: They were the perfect symbol of religious hope and faith to antagonize a group of teenagers who had long ago lost their way. In destroying this family, they would let the world know the ultimate hypocrisy of the Christian upbringing that had preached tolerance yet treated them as outcasts. Little did the Lillelids know what was in store for them.

The Lillelids were returning to their home in Knoxville from a Jehovah's Witness conference in Johnson City on the night of April 6, 1997 when, according to testimony, they decided to break away from the other members after the conference and take their two young children for a picnic at a rest stop on the way home. Troy Love, an Elder (an Elder is an older wiser member of the congregation) with the Jehovah's Witnesses in Knoxville, told me he was with the Lillelids that day at the conference. Mr. Love had very strong views about the Lillelid case, of which he gave me an earful. He recalled other members of the congregation asking them if they would want to caravan back with them to Knoxville, but the Lillelids declined. They had a strong sense of family togetherness and wanted to spend more leisurely time with their children on the way home. There was a pretty little rest stop in Greene County, Tennessee just off Highway 81 and they wanted six-year-old Tabitha and two-year-old Peter to get some fresh air before going back home to their small apartment in Knoxville. Friends of the Lillelids say that Delfina and Vidar, the parents, constantly had their children with them wherever they went; they did not want to leave their children with babysitters.

They also enjoyed following a simple lifestyle: Vidar worked at a Holiday Inn in Knoxville as a busboy. Delfina was a homemaker who took pride in caring for her children. In this, the Lillelids were like other Jehovah's Witnesses: most male members work at low-income blue-collar jobs. They were also alienated from their families, having left theirs behind when

they came to the United States from Norway, Vidar's homeland. Many people who become Witnesses have been estranged from their families or have weak family ties prior to joining the group, or have moved away to new communities. The Lillelids had moved to a small apartment in Knoxville near Vidar's work, certainly far from their immediate family members. Members of the Jehovah's Witnesses describe the Lillelids as "quiet people who were very unpretentious, caring," who seemed to take simple pleasure in their religion. Some members described them as people who seemed to stay mostly to themselves. This seemed odd in light of the later reports that Vidar Lillelid was proselytizing to the six teens. However, proselytizing is expected for the Jehovah's Witnesses and almost all members are involved in this activity. Proselytizers are divided into four categories: special pioneers, pioneers, auxiliary pioneers, and publishers.⁹ Vidar was a pioneer in his congregation which meant that he was committed to proselytize for a minimum of ninety hours per month. Vidar's dedication to his faith and the ultimate goal of spreading the word of Jehovah took precedence over his reticent nature in his attempt to help save the "lost souls" of six young people. However, he and his family paid the ultimate price for his zeal to instill the hope of his religion.

The Murder

*It is said by many men that the eyes are the keys to the soul.
Well, if I take them, I have their soul. I like that thought.*

—Dean Mullins, one of the youth charged with the murder of the Lillelid family, in an untitled short story written while still in school, mentioning the removal of a corpse's eye.

Many of the events that took place at the rest stop that day are unclear. What is generally known matches what I heard from friends of the Lillelids. Witnesses placed the Lillelids at the rest stop sometime around 6:45 in the evening. One family

had actually spoken to the Lillelids before leaving the rest stop. Members of the Ross Sinclair family were heading home from the same Jehovah's Witness conference in Johnson City when they stopped at the rest area and spoke to the Lillelids. They claimed to have seen three of the suspects there dressed completely in black. A rest stop employee also saw the Lillelids and the suspects there. There are a number of versions as to what happened next after the Lillelids met up with the six youth. Reports from the media suggest that Vidar Lillelid approached the group outside a bathroom. The blond, smiling father was holding his two-year-old son Peter in his arms and asked the teens if they believed in God. Natasha Cornett answered "No, he never answered my prayers when I was little." At this point, Delfina and six-year-old Tabitha came up and Tabitha offered Natasha and Karen Howell a Hershey's kiss.

Natasha started talking to Delfina, mainly about what a pretty little girl Tabitha was. Natasha had always wanted to have a child of her own: She thought that by having her own child, she could "treat it good and heal her own pain." Joe and Jason were at a picnic table talking to Vidar about religion; Vidar was probably anxious to talk to such troubled-looking young people. From his perspective, this was his chance to save some young lives that were on a sure path to destruction and hell. It was within his power to turn their lives around through the power of Jehovah (It certainly seemed naive on his part to risk his family's safety in order to try and convert six shady-looking young people – personally, I would have been out of there like a shot. But I'm not that kind of a believer). But Vidar knew little of the psychology of these kids; they all appeared to have narcissistic tendencies—high but unstable self-esteem. In the study I described in chapter four, it was found that narcissists tend to react aggressively toward people they feel are judging them—whether positively or negatively. Therefore, the six youth were probably reacting to their feelings that Vidar was evaluating them in a negative light and saw this as a threat to their sense of self.

There was talk between the boys in the group and Vidar about going to a restaurant to talk further about God and religion. But the family had no money to go to a restaurant, and this is when things started turning ugly. Joe Risner pulled out a gun near the Lillelids' van and told them to get in: "I hate to do you this way, but we're going to have to take you with us and take your van."

In the Lillelids' van, Joe Risner sat in the front seat holding a 9 mm gun. Jason Bryant, Natasha Cornett, and Karen Howell were in the middle next to Peter Lillelid in his car seat. Jason was holding a .25 caliber pistol. Delfina and Tabitha were in the back. Delfina was singing to her daughter; Jason said to Delfina, "You'd better shut up!" The Lillelids tried to assure their kidnappers they could let them go without fear of repercussions. Delfina went as far as to say that she wouldn't be able to recognize their faces anyway because "all teenagers dress alike these days." But their pleading did not placate their kidnappers. It only served to enrage them.

Crystal Sturgill and Dean Mullins were driving the Chevy Citation and followed the van onto Payne Hollow Road. What happened next on the dirt gravel road is hard to determine. What is known is that Vidar Lillelid was shot first and was struck in the eye. Until the end, he tried to reason with the teens. Natasha supposedly told him to give her the children to them to keep them from being hurt. Vidar stated that if anything happened to their parents, his children would be hurt anyway. He kept the children with him but it was too late. Although Joe Risner muttered that he could not do it and turned, Jason Bryant opened fire and shot Vidar Lillelid in the head and eye. As Vidar dropped to the ground, Delfina, who was screaming, was shot eight times, first in the leg and then in the back. She was probably trying to run away as she fell. Experts estimated that she lived about 20 minutes after being shot, enough time to see her children gunned down. Tabitha stood over her mother's body screaming and what happened next proved that these teens were either truly monsters or were standing in horror, too numb to do anything to stop the shooter. All

the youths claimed to have watched Jason walk up to six-year-old blond Tabitha, put the gun to her head and pull the trigger. How and when Peter was shot is a mystery. The children were placed on top of their parents' bodies. After the shootings, Jason jumped into the passenger seat of the Lillelids' van. He and Joe Risner were laughing. Jason fiddled with the stereo and said, "I've gotta hear some Marilyn Manson." Much to his dismay, the stereo didn't work.¹⁰ The van backed up and ran over the Lillelids.

As dusk fell on the evening of April 6, Mark Gaby, a construction contractor, was walking on a ridge off Van Hill Road checking on a prospective job site in Baileyton. He heard three shots ring out, followed by a group of five or six shots—"just like somebody pulled a trigger as fast as they could." From a distance, Gaby also heard the sound of "children's voices—like on a playground." When the gun fire stopped, a dog was barking. Then a second series of shots "from a distinctly different gun" were heard. Janet Brown was heading home on Payne Hollow Lane around the time Gaby was checking out his job site. She heard nothing unusual when she was outside until a short while later when she was heading indoors to escape the chilly air. She heard three distinct gunshots. After a short pause, the shots were followed by "a bunch of rapid ones." At 8:20, Greene County Deputy, Jeff Morgan was on patrol when he was called to investigate a report of gunfire on Payne Hollow Lane. As he drove down the road, a blue Chevrolet Citation with its headlights on caught his eye. The car was backed into a tree and stuck in a ditch. Morgan looked inside and saw that the keys were gone and so was the license plate. Meanwhile, just two-hundred and sixty-three feet away, Greene County Sergeant Frank Waddell stood in the spot Morgan had just passed by. He was standing alongside the Lillelid family. Vidar and Delfina were already dead—lying on their backs in a muddy, vine-covered ditch. Their feet were extended partway into the road and their clothing bore the tire tracks made by their own van. Across Vidar's mid-section was Tabitha, unconscious with her shoulders twitching. Peter was on his

mother's abdomen whimpering. Near their bodies were spent cartridge cases from a 9mm and .25-caliber handgun.¹¹ The Lillelids had been shot a total of seventeen times.

Ambulances, investigators and backup officers were called to the murder scene. The children were rushed to the hospital. Tabitha Lillelid died the next day at a Knoxville hospital: she was six years old. Her brother, Peter, was shot through the right eye and blinded (but later recovered and went to live with paternal relatives in Sweden). There are those who think the shots in Peter's and Vidar's right eye were significant as that practice is associated with Satanism. At first, I did not agree, thinking that it was probably coincidence, but later after interviewing and testing the killers, I could see that it must have meant something important to the teens. Vidar was also reported to have shots in his chest that were the shape of a pentagram, a symbol of Satanism; the family was said to have been found with their bodies forming the shape of a Pentagram. I decided to check this out with Sheriff David Davenport and called him up on the phone.

Davenport told me that he did not believe that the bodies were in the shape of a Pentagram when they were found. However, the tire marks the van had left on the Lillelid's bodies were present. Vidar's pants legs bore tire-track impressions and Delfina's skirt and panty hose were covered with tire-tracks. In Davenport's opinion the teens were "just trying to get the hell out of there" and did not try to arrange the bodies in any manner. This cool assessment was in sharp contrast to some of the statements made by officials just after the killing, but that is not unusual. Robert Hickman, author of *In Pursuit of Satan*, suggests that sometimes authorities are more interested in determining whether they have Satanists in their midst than in the actual murder itself. This desperate need for the police and authorities to blame Satanism as the cause of the murder became even more apparent at the later trial proceedings.

The Capture

After the murder, the six teens took the Lillelids' van and headed for Mexico, hoping to go there and start over, maybe raise children. Their dreams came to an abrupt end when they hit the Mexican Border. They were stopped and turned back because they did not have a permit to get into Mexico. In order to obtain a permit, they would have had to produce money or a credit card or risk being turned away. Mexican Customs is very strict and would not let them in; they were sent back through U.S. Customs. On the day of April 8, two days after the murders, U.S. Customs Inspector Mark Springer was inside his booth on Lane No. 1 of the U.S. Port of Entry from Mexico near Douglas, Arizona. News reports stated that Springer was having some trouble reading his computer screen that day because of the hot midday sun. I contacted Mr. Springer who told me that this was not the case. The computers had been down off and on all day. Those vehicles he was not able to check by computer were allowed to travel through customs. Miraculously, when the six teens pulled up to his booth, his computer screen started to boot up. Only one line of his computer screen was visible, but that was enough for him to make out the words "Armed and dangerous." He read that the van had been denied entry into Mexico—the van was stolen, taken in a triple homicide in Greene County, Tennessee. Anyone in it was to be held for fingerprinting.¹²

Even before seeing the computer screen, Springer already had a bad feeling about the youth. The way the teens were dressed and their "hygiene problem" led him to conclude that these were "antisocial people, they had that look." They were all dressed in black, were unbathed and scraggly looking. Joe Risner was in the front seat driving the van. Inspector Springer quickly scanned the situation and saw there was a youth in the passenger seat beside Risner, there were two occupants in back and two behind them. This arrangement made it especially

difficult for him because any one of the teens could start shooting if he pulled his weapon. Taking a chance, he caught them off guard and yelled “Raise your hands and get out!” Luckily for him, they did as they were told. Springer later thought to himself and told me, “You know, there’s something to having a uniform, a gun and a loud voice that commands authority.” He was surprised to find out later at the trial by one of the defendant’s attorney’s that the group had been totally petrified of him and he had “scared the hell out of them with his booming voice.” While this announcement surprised Springer, I found it consistent with what I knew about young murderers: Contrary to their image as steely-eyed predators, they are really only dangerous when they have a good chance of getting away with a crime. Out in the open, with everyone watching, they don’t dare fight. They certainly did not put up a struggle for the group of inspectors who led each of them in for questioning. Also, remember from the discussion in chapter four on narcissism that narcissistic aggression is a specific response to specific threats, not a general inclination that may break out anywhere at any time. The six youth retaliated against the Lillelids for directly judging them (for being heathens) which threatened their sense of self. The inspectors, on the other hand, were just doing their job.

The van and its occupants were searched. Items belonging to the Lillelid family were found in the van and later used as evidence at the trial. Natasha Cornett had Tabitha’s Social Security card and Karen Howell was found with a small cat face known as a “Miss Kitty Lock” that had belonged to Tabitha. It was on a wallet with a chain. Delfina’s housekeys were found on Crystal Sturgill who denied knowing whose they were or where they came from. The 9mm and .25 caliber handguns used in the murder were also found in the van along with a copy of “The Book of Black Magic” and “Complete book of Magic and Witchcraft.” Interestingly, Anton LaVey (author of the *Satanic Bible*) has a theory that homicide investigators can tell a lot about a killer’s MO by his weapon preference. For example, in his book, *Satan Speaks!*, LaVey states that a youth

heavily influenced by gang culture is more likely to employ a nine millimeter, large magazine capacity, semi-automatic weapon. A killer who uses a .25 caliber is likely to be a kid who got it cheap (or stole it like these kids). “Killers using a 9mm stand out; perpetrators who employ this gun often look the part, i.e. everything but the cammies.”¹³ LaVey’s descriptions certainly seem to fit these kids: their black wardrobe and unbathed skin gave them a sinister look that Inspector Springer had described as “antisocial.” But even without looking the part of suspected killers, the guns, along with the possessions of the Lillelids, were enough to provide overwhelming evidence against the six Kentuckians. They were taken into custody for a triple homicide and the attempted murder, and blinding, of Peter Lillelid.

The Trial

I have this vision of them moving around in a circle over those bodies in some kind of ritual.

—District Attorney Berkeley Bell, prosecutor in the Lillelid case.

After being caught in Douglas, Arizona, the six youth were extradited back to the place of the murder—Greene County, Tennessee. David Davenport was one of the detectives assigned to transport the six suspects from the airport to the Sheriff’s Detention Center. He remembered talking to Natasha while taking her to the Greeneville jail. He described her as a “vampire who worshiped Satan. She was on the dark side. I remember she was pale with reddish hair cut in different lengths and had several body piercings and dark eyes. She looked like a kid. She was an alternative person—not clean, not educated, very bitter towards everyone. I guess she was brought up in a poor rural area that was very isolated. She said she tried to reach out a few years ago but without luck. She asked the Lord for something and told me she had prayed. I guess she mi-

grated to the other side and worshiped the devil and did not want anyone to control her life.” Natasha, along with the other five suspects were taken to the Greene County jail to await their hearing. Meanwhile, the citizens of Greene County had little sympathy for the suspected killers: they were in an uproar about the murders. At a gas station before the defendants’ preliminary hearing, there were six nooses hanging to symbolize the citizens’ wish for vengeance.

After months of trial preparation, on February 20th, 1998, the six took an offer from the prosecutor, Berkeley Bell, to plead guilty to all charges in exchange for removal of the death penalty from sentencing consideration for the oldest four defendants who faced it. The juvenile offenders, Karen Howell and Jason Bryant, could not receive the death penalty. Despite the differences in the ages of the six defendants (fourteen through twenty-one) they were all tried together instead of separately. Their lawyers had argued that this would jeopardize all of the defendants’ cases, since each lawyer would be forced to defend all six defendants instead of just one. Greene County Criminal Court Judge James E. Beckner presided over the trial hearings. His decision was that the six murdered together and should be tried together.

Dramatic accounts of Satanism and witchcraft were prevalent throughout the trial. Natasha Cornett says she was coached by her first attorney, Eric Conn, to say that she was the “Daughter of Satan.” Numerous witnesses and the prosecution painted a picture of the six youth as demonic killers, would-be Antichrists who hovered over the bodies of their victims like vultures performing a satanic ritual. What was true, and what was hype?

Personally, I think all of this Satan stuff is overrated. People often get up in arms if they believe a “Satanist” is in their midst, yet young people who are involved in the occult are generally pretty harmless. Shiftless losers, yes, but typically, teens who dabble in the occult do it more for the intimidation factor and to appear unconventional rather than to engage in ritualistic killings. For example, I recently went to a bookstore to buy a copy of the *Satanic Bible* by Anton LaVey and noticed a flock

of teenagers surrounding the occult section, laughing and obviously feeling very daring for flipping through the book. When the crowd finally cleared, I took a copy of the book up front to pay for it. Startled, the salesgirl looked up and said without a trace of humor, “You’re the first person I’ve sold this book to.” Being naive, I said, “Oh, I guess you don’t have many people who are interested in the topic” to which she replied, “No, most people steal the book, I’ve never seen anyone pay for it.” That comment speaks volumes about the type of person who generally subscribes to the teachings of Satanism.

This aside is not to make light of the violence that the Lillelid murderers engaged in. It is just to make the point that many teens who seek out Satanic doctrine do so to be different and unconventional, but doing so has little to do with being a killer. People who murder strangers typically do so because they are psychologically unsound, not because they are Satanists. In the first chapter, we talked about some of the Satanic beliefs and noted that murder and rape were not advocated; in fact, the *Satanic Bible* strongly advised its readers against taking advantage of people (particularly children) who are weak or naive.¹⁴ The Lillelids’ murderers harmed their victims as much in spite of being Satanists (if indeed they were) as because of it.

Regardless of their status as Satanic worshipers, all of the defendants in the Lillelid case were convicted of first degree felony murder and aggravated kidnaping. They received the stiffest sentences allowed under Tennessee law: three consecutive sentences of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole and an additional consecutive sentence of twenty-five years’ imprisonment for the attempted murder of the Lillelids’ son, Peter.

The Prison

The Tennessee Prison for Women is a maximum security prison located in Nashville and is the primary facility for female felons in the state. Natasha Cornett and Crystal Sturgill were housed there shortly after being sentenced for first degree murder and aggravated kidnaping. I received some literature from Pam Hobbins, the prison's media relations officer, that described the various treatment programs provided by the prison. There is an academic/vocational program and an expanded medical unit that provides medical and dental services. Special needs programs are provided in the area of substance abuse and sexual abuse. Inmates also have access to a full range of psychological intervention. The treatment staff work closely with inmates in programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, substance abuse groups, decisions workshops, co-dependency groups, stress management, anger management and assertiveness training. Eyeing the literature, I couldn't help but wonder where all of the services had been before Natasha Cornett and Crystal Sturgill committed murder.

I was told by Pam Hobbins that I could take photographs as well as interview the inmates if I wished. Unfortunately, my skills as a photographer and ability to work anything remotely mechanical are limited so I brought my husband with me to serve as photographer. He had been a professional photographer in the 1980's and still had some pretty decent equipment. We drove up to the administration building through a long winding road which is typical for prisons (probably to make it harder for the prisoners to escape.) The administration building had the word "WELCOME" in bold letters in the front door—an odd greeting, I thought, for a prison. We proceeded to the front desk where we were greeted by a friendly woman at the reception area. Before I could open my mouth to tell her who I was and my purpose for coming, a pleasant-looking cor-

poral, Jack Sutphin, came up and told us to follow him as he had been expecting us sometime around 2:00 Nashville time. I looked down at my watch, surprised we had made it on time, given all the traffic we had encountered going through town. Mr. Sutphin led us back outside to the entrance of the treatment center that housed the medical and counseling facilities for the prisoners. Of course there was a metal detector to get through which was extremely sensitive and went off every few minutes. I have learned that nothing goes smoothly in prisons, so I wasn't surprised when the guard at the admission desk told us he had no record of our visit today. Numerous phone calls were made to locate a copy of the fax authorizing our visit, which had somehow been misplaced at the prison. All of this took about 20 minutes, leaving me time to sit and study the prison milieu.

Everyone has a loud voice in prison; perhaps it's just bravado because prisons are depressing places. For whatever reason, there was a loud conversation going on between the guards about an unsuccessful bombing plot that had taken place that day. It seemed that a man had decided to bomb the Percy Priest Dam in the hopes it would flood downtown Nashville. This accomplished, he could then rob the jewelry stores while police were attending to the flood. (Such an elaborate plan hardly seemed necessary just to break into a jewelry store, I thought, but then I'm not a jewel thief. Of course, neither was this guy, who was caught before anything happened.) All of this conversation was going on between the guards in a very nonchalant matter-of-fact way; I suppose it was the criminal story of the day.

Finally, the corporal came back. He had found the fax about my interview with Natasha Cornett and Crystal Sturgill. He ushered us through the metal detector which beeped loudly each time I went through. I finally had to empty my pockets and leave my purse in a locker up front. My husband never could make it through the detector without setting it off and finally had to have a full body search. This having been completed, we were finally on our way through some gated steel doors.

When I looked up after entering, I saw them standing there, Natasha and Crystal. It was strange; I had seen so many newspaper pictures of them looking so harsh, with headlines such as “The Daughter of Satan” printed in the *National Examiner*, but that is not what I saw. Reality is never as exciting as fantasy. I remembered at that moment what a colleague had said to me when I told her I was going to Nashville to interview some of the teens involved in the Lillelid murder. She shook her head and said, “I would never want to meet those kids.” When I asked her why, she replied, “Because they might look too normal, like real teenagers. I would want them to look different, maybe have a mark on them or something or look wild, so I would know they were murderers. The scary thing is not knowing.” As I looked down the hall of the prison at these two girls, I realized my colleague would have been afraid because standing down from me were two teenage girls who (except for their light blue prison garb) looked like they could be hanging out in



Fig 5.1 Natasha Cornett, convicted at age 18 of murdering a family of Jehovah’s Witnesses.



Fig 5.2 Crystal Sturgill, convicted at age 18 of first degree felony murder.

any mall in America. What I saw in front of me were two subdued girls who looked like watered-down versions of the newspaper pictures. They were both pale, especially Natasha who I recognized instantly. Her hair was pulled back and cut in what looked like different lengths. She had pretty eyes (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

Looking down at her, I could see the scars on her arms where she had cut herself (according to one article “to relieve pain.”) However, as I looked at the scars, I thought of something I had read – about a psychiatrist who believed that girls carve themselves for reasons of resentment and rebellion and that such girls are “mistresses of manipulation.” I wondered if this was true of Natasha. I would find out as the interview progressed that my initial hunch was probably right: she was quite manipulative. This cutting behavior is getting to be quite common among teenage girls. I have seen many girls who cut themselves when they are angry, depressed or frustrated.

The corporal went up to the guard on duty and called for “Sturgill” and “Cornett” as he did not seem to know them. The guard pointed them out to him and we were led into a room in the treatment center where interviews are conducted. It was a

bare room, very nondescript with several tables. I found one in the back since both my husband and the corporal were staying in the room and we would need some privacy. Oddly enough, most other male prisons I had been in have often left me alone with the prisoners. I felt no fear of these two women—they seemed harmless enough—but I knew this was an illusion. We all sat down (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4).



Fig 5.3 / 5.4 Interviewing the two girls convicted in the Lillelid murder near Johnson City, TN



The Interviews

Natasha

I prayed to God when I was a child... that my mom would quit beating me. If God would let a child get beat, then there is no God.

—Natasha Cornett, serving a life sentence for the murder of a family of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

“Pikeville, Kentucky is just a dot on the map” was the response to my first question about their views of their home town. Actually, both girls are from a small town outside of Pikeville called Betsy Lane. It struck me as odd that if these girls thought the town so insignificant and dull, why had it never occurred to them to leave? Natasha Wallen Cornett was born on January 26, 1979 to Madonna Wallen and a father she has never known well, Roger Burress. Her father is a police officer and seems to have little to do with his daughter. Natasha described her parents’ relationship as probably a “fling that didn’t last long” but resulted in her birth. Natasha has two other sisters who are a good deal older; Velina is thirty-eight and Faye, her father’s other daughter, is in her fifties.

Madonna Wallen is a talkative woman in her fifties who stays in touch with her daughter at the prison and visits when she can. I tried calling her a number of times but she never seemed to be home. When I finally heard her voice on the other end of the line, she was not what I expected; she sounded too intelligent. I caught myself, thinking “what does intelligence have to do with having a daughter who is a murderer?” Madonna told me she had been to business school and was hoping her daughter would “do something important.” Madonna very seldom gets to see Natasha. She is limited by the long drive to Nashville from Kentucky and a lack of resources.

I spoke with her before going to see Natasha for the first time in Nashville. She seemed pleased to have someone to speak to about the Lillelid murder although she expressed disappointment in the various systems that had been involved with Natasha prior to her being charged with the murder. Madonna felt that the schools, mental health facilities and even the court system had failed her daughter miserably. She told me about Natasha's turbulent childhood and her own dealings with feelings of depression and anxiety. Madonna herself had been in treatment for depression and taken various medications such as Prozac and anti-anxiety medications.

The common theme in Natasha's life was a sense that she was misunderstood and different. She felt restless in her town and felt she lacked excitement in her life. I asked if she felt restless in Betsy Lane to which she replied, "that's an understatement." Natasha went to Betsy Lane High School and was suspended twice over "stupid kid stuff." She quit after the ninth grade because "she was getting hassled by too many people for her beliefs and the way she lived." "They hassled me for my beliefs, the way I wore my hair, I wasn't a racist and anti-gay so they were against me for that." I wondered if she was really giving an accurate portrayal of herself (as a tolerant liberal type). How much was she leaving out about what she had actually been like in her hometown? Further discussion led me to believe that there was more going on than just "tolerant points of view about blacks and gay people." Still, she felt her beliefs and style of dress set her apart and led to her feeling like an outsider and insignificant. Natasha was placed on Social Security Disability at age 14 for a mental disability—that is, she could not hold a job due to her poor emotional health. The diagnosis for her condition was Bipolar Disorder. Remember that in the first chapter, it was mentioned that many teens gravitate towards the dark side of the occult because of a mood disorder such as Bipolar Disorder. In addition, they tend to have inflated self-esteem or grandiosity and to get involved in activities that have a high potential for painful consequences. Although her illness did not by itself lead her to go on a killing

spree, it certainly could have contributed to her getting involved in witchcraft and the "dark side of the occult."

At one point, Natasha was hospitalized at a mental facility in Kentucky. She was sent to Charter Ridge Behavioral Health System and diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder but released after only 11 days of treatment because this was all her health insurance would pay. I asked Natasha about her experience at the mental hospital. "Did you find the hospital and counselors there helpful to you?" "No," she replied, "they talked about things that were not significant, like, how was I doing or what kind of problems I was having at school, they never got down to it. I tried to talk about things that me and my mom were going through. They would always get off that subject." Natasha had been hit a number of times by Madonna, starting when she was very young. One time, her friend, Crystal, remembered seeing Madonna hit Natasha with a Bible. Natasha always had a feeling that she could not do anything right in her mother's eyes. At the same time, she felt her mother did not want her to be close to anyone, not even her husband, Steve Cornett, whom she had married on her seventeenth birthday. The marriage lasted only six months; one day Natasha returned home to find her husband gone, never to return.

According to Natasha's mother, Madonna, the staff at the hospital told her that her daughter was very sick and might very well be dangerous but they released Natasha anyway. This is frequently the case with many mentally ill teens and adults: they are given very little in the way of long term treatment, mainly because of the expense. Judge James Beckner, who ruled that the six defendants be tried together, made a point of saying that while fairness was the bottom line in the trial, "cost is also an unavoidable issue. Separate trials would cost more than six times one trial; the cost would bankrupt the state." But what about saving the state the hassle and expense of having a trial in the first place? Had Natasha's Medicaid insurance paid for some more inpatient hospitalization and treatment before turning her loose like a ticking time bomb, maybe none of this would have happened. Just like Natasha, there are patients

in mental facilities around the country who are dangerous to themselves and others but are released anyway, often only days before committing a heinous crime. In the case of Natasha Cornett, it was only a matter of time before her feelings of resentment and smoldering anger would culminate in a tragedy that could possibly have been prevented.

Crystal

Crystal Sturgill was born on March 13, 1979. She is the oldest of three and has a sister, Nicole, 14, and a brother, Estill, 12. The most significant thing she told me about her childhood was that her stepfather sexually abused her from the time she was four until she was seventeen. When I asked her if she had ever told her mother about the abuse, she stated, "My mom is delusional, she thinks everything is perfect. She still thinks I am getting out of jail now and talks about when I come home (Crystal is in jail for multiple sentences of life without parole). When I told her about the abuse, she thought I was lying." Crystal filed charges against her stepfather, Gene Blackburn, and accused him of rape. The detective assigned the case says that Blackburn admitted having sex with Crystal "about ten times." Crystal's stepfather was charged and jailed for the abuse and Crystal left her home in December of 1996. Her family had cut her off and she had nowhere to go. She told me she was sent to a foster home but news reports indicate she first moved in with an aunt and then a grandmother and then was living in Natasha's trailer. Crystal had never known her biological father.

Crystal had a very sober mood the afternoon of the interview. While seeming more intelligent than Natasha, she was far less charismatic and I found myself directing questions toward Natasha. Crystal's voice lacked inflection, making her speech flat and unengaging, even when what she was saying was significant. While I thought she did not take much note of the interview, she was quite aware of the pictures being taken

of her and Natasha. One day, several months after our interview, I opened my office mail to find a letter from Crystal which sort of surprised me. It read as follows:

Dear Dr. Helen Smith,

I am writing in regard to the interview Natasha Cornett and I granted you several months ago. During that interview your photographer took numerous pictures of us. I am asking you at this time to send me copies of those photos.

I appreciate your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Crystal Sturgill

I wondered why she would want the pictures, but then my husband pointed out that it is pretty hard to get pictures of yourself while in prison. Perhaps she wanted to send them to a family member or friend. I later read in an interview about her from a local newspaper that she liked to have pictures of herself to look at while in prison. I picked out ten of the best pictures, put them in an envelope and sent them to her. I asked her if she and Natasha would write back to me with more about their life or send some poetry that I could use for the book, but did not get any reply. I did not really expect one.

Their Version

When I questioned Natasha and Crystal about events the day of the murder, I noted that their countenance quickly shifted from looking up-beat and light-hearted to a down-trodden look of despair. I wondered if the sudden change was concern for their own situations or a quick flashback of what had happened during the last few minutes of the Lillelid's lives that April day. Feeling the sudden change of mood in the room, I took the

opportunity to ask them what had happened that had led up to the murder. “Natasha and Crystal, what happened that day?” I asked. What I heard next would help to make sense of the range of emotions that must have been simmering prior to the meeting between the Lillelids and their predators. Natasha turned to Crystal to help her recount the events leading up to the murders.

The days preceding the murders had been hard; Natasha and her friends had all been living in Madonna’s small trailer on Floyd Pike Hollow road and she wanted them out. The kids had been very destructive and Madonna could not enforce any rules. The teens decided they would get a hotel room where they could party without distractions. Despite the news reports stating that Natasha was gathering everyone up to go on a killing spree like in the movie, *Natural Born Killers*, she denied this. “It was a good movie,” was all she had to say in response to the allegations that she had been influenced by the killing sprees in the movie. Instead, the road trip’s purpose was to get Karen Howell off the hook for burning down the hotel room they had been staying in. Actually, they had all played a part in burning up the room, but Karen was the only one who had been caught. The road trip was a perfect opportunity to put some distance between Karen and the law. The teens all piled in Joe Risner’s Chevy Citation and headed for the Tennessee border. Joe told the group that Tennessee was a good place to go to “carjack people at the malls” (you would think this statement would have tipped off the other members of the group that there was going to be trouble, but then these were the same teens who had just burned down a hotel room for no obvious reason). When I asked them why they had burned down the room, Crystal and Natasha just shrugged and said “it was the thing to do, you know, everyone else is doing it and you just do it too.” For a couple of girls who think of themselves as non-conformists, they certainly seem to go along with the crowd. That’s typical, too.

Both girls agreed that they were not responsible for the Lillelids’ demise. At the picnic table at the rest stop, they did

not even think to say anything to the Lillelids about running for their lives. “It never occurred to us. Adults did not notice us or talk to people like us. We didn’t think they would listen.” Joe Risner, they said, started the kidnapping by pulling the 9mm gun out and telling the Lillelids to get in the van. The Lillelids said, “Don’t hurt us.” “They got in the van and Joe drove and we turned off at the first exit off onto a gravel road. “Why didn’t you do anything to stop him at that point?” I asked. Natasha answered, “At that point, Jason and Joe were holding guns on them. If we said anything..... Yeah, right, knowing Jason was trigger happy, he would have shot them. At first, the man was trying to be reasonable and talk to Jason. Delfina was screaming “they’re not going to do anything to us!” Tabitha was crying. The boy was sitting there peaceful and happy. We got out of the van. Joe and Jason were playing good cop, bad cop and were trading the guns back and forth. Then Joe turned to me [Natasha] and said, ‘I can’t do it.’” Both reported it was then that Jason Bryant pulled the trigger. Natasha said, “Dean and I were crying. The first shot I saw went through the man’s head. Everything was going so fast. Jason shot about twelve times.” Quickly, I interjected with, “yes, but there were a total of five shots left because the Lillelids were shot seventeen times. (In my head, I counted the remaining five kids, wondering if they had shot one time each).” “I’m getting to that,” Natasha replied, visibly annoyed by my impatience. “Jason went back to the van and got out the other gun and started shooting again. After it happened and we were in the van, Jason was bragging about how good it felt. They tried to say we shaped the bodies into an upside down cross, but we didn’t.”

Their Psyches

The Drawings

The content of a drawing tells something about the person; the nature of the person tells something about the drawing.

—Joseph DiLeo, M.D.

As we have seen from previous chapters, figure drawings are a good way to gain rapport with a person, particularly one who is reticent about his or her true nature. It seems harmless enough being asked to draw a figure of a person and it was a task that Natasha and Crystal seemed comfortable with, especially since it demanded little thinking. They had both described feeling exhausted by the barrage of psychological tests they had to undergo for the trial. Figure drawings are used by psychologists to assist in understanding more about the personality and unconscious world of a person. “In drawings, as in dreams, the recurrence of a theme and its symbols is a noteworthy phenomenon. It may be the expression of an important event, traumatic or impressive, in any case, breaking through the repressive barrier.”¹⁵ Natasha and Crystal’s drawings have a number of interesting themes and symbols of which I took note.

I asked them both to draw a picture of a man, a woman and a self portrait and observed them going about the task. Natasha made long artistic strokes; her drawings looked like she had either had some art training or had some artistic talent. Most unusual about her drawings were that the figures were only half present (see Figures 5.5, 5.6, and 5.7). At first, I thought she had just ignored my request to draw an entire person. But as Dr. Handler, the figure drawing expert I consulted, pointed out, she had taken her time making the drawings. Therefore,

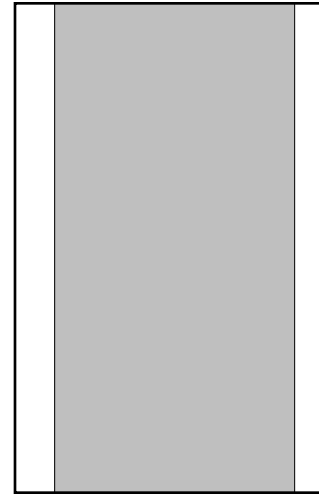


Fig 5.5 Male figure drawing by Natasha Cornett

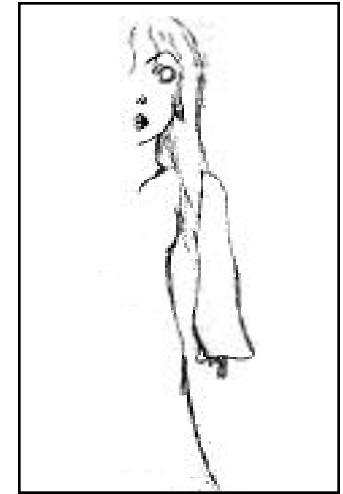


Fig 5.6 Female figure drawing by Natasha Cornett

rather than being oppositional, she was giving me insight into the way in which she views herself. She sees herself as half good (the male figure looks pleasant and represents the “good half of her” while the female half looks rather frightening and may represent the “evil” half of her. Her self portrait (Figure 5.7) looks seductive and may indicate the role she plays in life—as a kind of seductress who may use her feminine wiles to get what she wants. I realized that my earlier hunch—that she was a “mistress of manipulation”—was probably correct. During our interview, she attempted to show me her best side, as a basically good person who just happened to be caught up in some bad circumstances. But unbeknownst to her, the drawings showed me her true style of

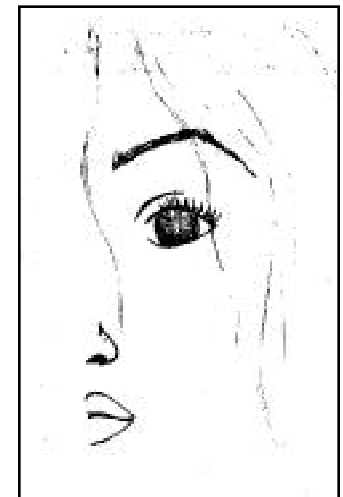


Fig 5.7 Self-potrait drawing by Natasha Cornett

interacting with others. She attempts to give the illusion of being warm and sweet, but knows there is another dark side to her personality. This Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde technique is very common to those with Bipolar Disorder. So many times, I have heard parents of Bipolar children tell me that their child is so sweet at times, it comes as a shock to see how angry and vindictive he or she can become in a flash. Natasha can probably come across as very vulnerable sometimes, particularly if she wants her own way. The corporal, Jack Sutphin, made a comment as we were leaving the prison that the style of interacting between the inmates is very different in the women's prisons as opposed to the men's. When I asked how it was different, he told me that instead of physical force, the women tended to use manipulation and verbal backstabbing to get what they wanted. This is consistent with how girls typically utilize power. Instead of direct physical aggression, they use social manipulation: they bully, name call and set up and frame other kids or in this case, cell mates. My sense was that these two women were probably expert manipulators well before gracing the Tennessee Prison for Women.

Natasha's figures also had no right eye. I remember reading in newspaper reports that there was some connection between the removal of the eye and Satanism – and both Peter and Vidar had been shot through the right eye. But I think in Natasha's drawing, it meant something different. In figure drawings, the eyes are often associated with sexual arousal, voyeurism, guilt, and shame. Guilt over incest led Oedipus to gouge out his eyes that they “might never look again on what they had no right to see...”¹⁶ Unusual treatment of the eyes drawn by an adolescent (such as omitting the eyes as Natasha did) might symbolize feelings of guilt and shame; if you have no eye, you cannot see what you had no right to see. In Natasha's case, it was the murder of three innocent people and the blinding of a fourth. I remember that during our interview, Natasha told me that she had rejected counseling at the prison because, “why relive the murder over and over, I already have trouble sleeping at night.” She said she preferred instead to be placed on

medication by the prison doctors to block out what had happened. But her drawings told me that even if she was trying to repress the events of the murder, it is still foremost in her thoughts.

Like Natasha, Crystal's drawings also depicted her true feelings about the murder and herself. I noticed that Crystal's drawing of a man and woman looked eerily like the Lillelid couple, Delfina and Vidar (from pictures I had seen of them) suggesting that the trauma of the murder also dominates her thoughts. After all, if her story is correct and she was not one of the shooters, she might feel a great deal of guilt or shame for standing by passively while the Lillelids were shot (see Figures 5.8 and 5.9). Or perhaps she was identifying with her victims as she sees herself as a victim also. She had trouble drawing the female figure, the body is only partially drawn. The male figure is easier for her to draw. Perhaps she was not comfortable drawing a woman's body because of the sexual abuse she incurred by her stepfather. The female figure also looks like a productive sexual being, the opposite of what Crystal may see herself as being. However, I couldn't help but notice that her self drawing was a very large head with very pretty features

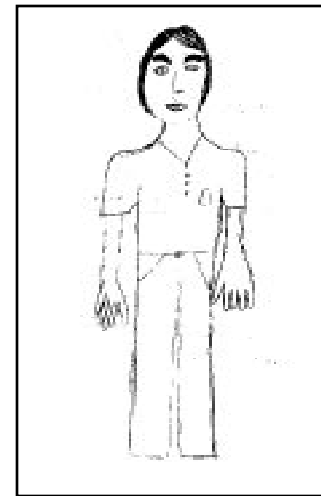


Fig 5.8 Male figure drawing by Crystal Sturgill

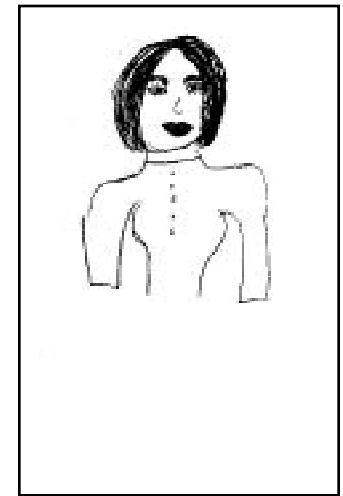


Fig 5.9 Female figure drawing by Crystal Sturgill

(see Figure 5.10). I wondered if this is the way she sees herself, as larger than life, almost like a queen looking down on her subjects, contemplating about what to do with them. The self drawing of a huge head in mental patients (and Crystal had told me during our interview that she had once been diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, but even if this is not true, I will take the liberty to say that she *should* be a mental patient) has a very complex meaning. A large head is sometimes interpreted to be a



Fig 5.10 Self-portrait drawing by Crystal Sturgill

depersonalized mask. The head and body are fused together in an attempt to gain control over the terrifying feelings that emanate from a symbolic decapitation in which mind and body go their separate ways.¹⁷ I suspect that Crystal had protected herself from the sexual abuse she had suffered at the hands of her step father by blocking out what was physically happening to her from her conscious awareness.

There was also clear indication from my interviews and the drawings that both Natasha and Crystal had narcissistic tendencies – that is, like many violent boys, they feel little empathy for others and are unwilling to identify with the feelings and needs of others. If they are telling the truth about their standby status during the murders, maybe they could not bring themselves to help the Lillelids because they could not feel the pain the family must have been suffering during the attack. They certainly misconstrued the emotions of their victims during the attack. This is illustrated by Natasha’s incorrect assumption that Peter Lillelid was “happy and peaceful” while his family perished, which hardly seems likely. As I discussed in chapter four, narcissists also have a sense of entitlement and believe they deserve favorable treatment; they are interpersonally

exploitive and will take advantage of others to achieve their needs. Natasha and Crystal were probably troublemakers in their home towns but thought that their offenses should be overlooked because they were “special.” One acquaintance of Natasha’s in Pikeville described Natasha’s manipulation; “I think Natasha liked to find your weak points and exploit them. She liked to use intimidation.” Natasha and Crystal, like so many others who have no empathy for others, required an excessive amount of admiration. Certainly all the press attention fed into their need to be viewed as important and special and to take center stage in the drama of their lives.

* * * * *

As we have seen in this chapter on violent girls, there are a number of differences between male and female killers. The main difference is that boys tend to use direct aggression and girls use indirect aggression more often. This does not mean that girls are less dangerous, it only means that their way of expressing aggression is different. Women use social manipulation and indirect means to express their feelings and to avoid responsibility. I have seen this time and time again in the young clients I see. One girl I saw recently in a detention center told me that she cuts her arms with a razor blade. When I asked why, she said, “because it makes me feel better, it is a way to release my anger. Once I was mad at my dad and I cut myself and the anger went away.” In another case, I saw a girl having behavioral problems at school because “everyone rejected her; she told me of her passive aggressive way of getting back at classmates. She did this by going to a local “witch shop” and buying beads which symbolized hate and wore them around her neck to school. She had the pleasure of knowing that she was basically saying “screw you” to all her peers without having to actually say anything. In both cases, the girls did not have to directly vent their angry feelings towards others and face the repercussions. They could simultaneously get their

feelings out and not have to deal directly with other people's anger or rejection (since the dad probably felt guilty that his daughter was harming herself and the peers did not know that the beads stood for a symbol of hate). This avoidance of responsibility is why many girls frequently manipulate others into doing their killing for them. They can act as the instigator of a murder and talk others into doing their bad deeds so they do not have to take the rap. For all we know, the girls in the Lillelid case did not try to stop the boys from committing the murder or may have even taken part in it themselves. It has become commonplace to see a news story about a girl setting up her boyfriend to kill a parent, another girl she is jealous of, or another boyfriend. The boyfriend often takes the full rap and the real murderer gets away scot-free. Is the girl any less guilty?

Girls also generally favor a different choice of weapon, preferring knives to guns. Knives are more up close and personal. You can feel the person dying. I have found an interesting phenomenon in my office whenever myself or my staff is asked to evaluate a teenage girl or a young woman to determine if she has bipolar disorder or borderline personality disorder (this is a mental disorder characterized by self-destructive behavior, self-mutilation, fits of anger and paranoia). We have an overwhelmingly large proportion of these girls tell us that they use a knife to go after her boyfriend or significant other in a fit of anger. Either diagnosis is then usually a cinch to make. Also, you rarely see one teenage girl going on a crime spree alone. Like Natasha and Crystal, girls are committing the most severe acts of violence in groups. This may suggest that they still need group permission to break their feminine taboos.¹⁸ However, stories of late that are making the news (such as the Chapman case where she set a boy on fire) appear to be committed by lone females, suggesting that we may be seeing more girls and women participating in solo crimes in the first part of the new century. In the next chapter on profiling dangerous kids, we will come to see how violent girls differ from boys in their expression of anger and how they react when they have feelings of rage.

Notes

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2. "Other school shootings." *Boulder News*, April 20, 1999 (the Laurie Denn story was from a list of school shootings that were listed in the paper the day of the Columbine school shootings).
3. "Woman sets Pennsylvania fourth-grader on fire". Nando Media, Associated Press, 1999.
4. National School Safety Center's Report on School Associated Violent Deaths, 1999.
5. Pearson, P. (1997). *When She was Bad*. New York: Penguin Books.
6. *OJJDP Research: Making a difference for Juveniles*, August 1999, page 25.
7. *OJJDP Report: Report to Congress on Juvenile Violence Research*, July 1999, page 5.
8. Lavey, A. (1969). *The Satanic Bible*, New York: Avon Books.
9. Kephart, W. M. and Zellner, W. W. (1994). *Extraordinary Groups*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
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11. Stafford, G. "Testimony chilling in Lillelid case: Grand Jury next step in legal process," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, July 20, 1997.
12. "Testimony chilling in Lillelid case..."
13. Lavey, A. (1998). *Satan Speaks!* Feral House, page 47-49.
14. *Satan Speaks!* page 70.
15. DiLeo, J. H. (1983). *Interpreting Children's Figure Drawings*. Brunner/Mazel.
16. *Interpreting Children's Figure Drawings*, page 116.
17. Halbreich, U. (1979). "Drawings of cephalopods by schizophrenic patients, and their meaning." In *Art Psychotherapy*, 6:18-23.
18. *When She Was Bad*, page 231.

