

Torture suspects' criminal history, actions stood out in Big Creek – 9/12/07
Victim had been in area before, neighbor says
By Greg Collard

Lead: Just about everyone who's heard about the three men and three women charged in the rape and a torture of a woman have probably asked the same question: Who could do such a thing?

The Logan County Sheriff's Department says that the victim, 20-year-old Megan Williams of Charleston, was also forced to eat rat and dog feces, and drink from a toilet. The sheriff's department says her ordeal lasted about a week as she was held captive in a single-wide trailer in the community of Big Creek. While the horrific details of this case are shocking to the community, many locals figured it was only a matter of time before the six people wound up in prison for something. Just about everyone in Big Creek knows about this clan. Especially Frankie and Bobby Ray Brewster. Greg Collard has more.

Collard: The rape and torture of Megan Williams had a lot of people talking Tuesday in Logan County. They were talking on local radio.

WVOW Host: "It makes you physically sick"

WVOW Caller: "They need to be prosecuted to the highest extent of the law."

Collard: And they were talking at the 7-11 store a few miles from Big Creek, where assistant manager Kara Robinette was familiar with all six of the defendants: 49-year-old Frankie Brewster and her 24-year-old son, Bobby Ray; 46-year-old Karen Burton and her daughter, 23-year-old Alisha Burton; 27-year-old George Messer and 20-year-old Danny Combs.

Kara Robinette: "They would come in here at least once or twice a day – all six of them came in here. They were usually together. They ran in the same care, they would come in here together everyday and they would buy the same things over and over. They bought cheap cigarettes and cheap beer like 40s Hurricanes, and they would also get a small, really odd amount of gas like \$2.63. And they would come back three or four times, and it always seemed weird to us why they didn't just get a larger amount, and why they would come back and get smaller amounts each time. Just a weird bunch of people. They have a reputation – they've all been in trouble before, especially the Brewsters."

Collard: Frankie and Bobby Ray Brewster have a disturbing history. In 1994, Frankie shot and killed 84-year-old Polly Ferrell. Ferrell was the mother of Frankie Brewster's live-in boyfriend, Bisha Tomblin. Frankie Brewster served about 5 years of a 20-year sentence. Bisha took care of Bobby Ray while Frankie was in prison. Everyone knew Bisha as Bobby Ray's stepfather.

But in 1998, Bobby Ray Brewster shot and killed Bisha Tomblin, according to Logan County Sheriff Eddie Hunter. It's not clear how long Bobby Ray was incarcerated. All records of the shooting are sealed because he was a juvenile at the time.

Then, last March, just one day after the 9th anniversary of killing his stepfather, Bobby Ray was arrested on charges of threatening his mother with a machete. Deputies told the Logan Banner that Bobby Ray was hearing voices, and that he needed to kill to stop the voices.

Frankie Brewster locked the doors of her single-wide trailer to save herself from her son. This is the same trailer where Megan Williams was held hostage for a week or so.

Krysti Sumpter: "She was really nice and sweet. She was just scared that night."

Collard: Across Big Creek Road, Krysti Sumpter says Megan Williams was on her front porch late at night about a month ago. Megan needed to use a phone.

Sumpter: "She was a tiny little girl – she was probably about 5-foot tall and maybe not even 100 pounds. A few weeks ago she came through here – because one of the guys was her boyfriend or something, and she came down here saying they had threatened her with a knife and gun and stuff like that. Well, my mom who was here too asked her if she wanted to go to the State Police. She ended up going there."

Collard: The commander of the local State Police detachment declined to comment because the case is under investigation.

Clerks at the 7-11 also say Megan Williams had been in their store the past few weeks. They recognized her picture in Tuesday's Charleston Gazette. On Saturday, sheriff's deputies arrived at the Brewster's trailer after receiving a tip that a woman was being held against their will. The sheriff's department says that Megan limped toward the door, held her arms out, and said "help me."

Megan Williams told police that her attackers hurled racial slurs at her. The FBI is investigating the case as a hate crime. But many along Big Creek Road doubt that racism instigated this crime.

Tom Duty: "I think if it had been a white girl, they would have done the same thing. I really do. That's just the Brewsters."

Collard: Tom Duty has kids who grew up with Bobby Ray. When he was a kid, Bobby Ray would sometimes dive into Duty's pool uninvited. Duty says the Brewsters were never a family you'd want as neighbors.

Tom Duty: "It just runs in their family. It's how they're brought up."

Collard: Back at the 7-11 store, Kara Robinette says the Brewsters and their clan stopped by one more time Saturday, a few hours before their arrest.

Kara Robinette: "I waited on the Burtons, George Messer and Bobby Brewster and his mom were all in here Saturday afternoon. I remember Karen Burton. She was hassling me about the price on beer actually, trying to see if I would give it to her cheaper than it was priced."

Second 7-11 clerk: "And trying with food stamps."

Kara Robinette: She pulled me to the side and said, 'Can you run this on my food stamp card?'"

Collard: The Brewsters' trailer is deserted now, except for their dog left behind. (dog barking).

Police tape is wrapped around the front and back porches, and a shed. Neighbors say they hope the Brewsters and the people who ran with them are gone for good.

For West Virginia Public Broadcasting, I'm Greg Collard, in Big Creek, Logan County.