

Undercover white supremacist from Reno tells his story

Publisher's note: *John Matthews is a resident of Reno.*

By R.M. Schneiderman, Newsweek

John Matthews had long been a shadowy presence in his son Dan's life. Every six months it was a new city, a new state, a new apartment. Dan, who lived with his mother, suspected something illegal was going on. He was estranged from his father and even used his stepfather's last name, Candland. Once, when Dan was 16, Matthews called him from a pay phone to say he was going underground and might appear on the television show America's Most Wanted one day. Months later, when they reconnected, neither brought it up.

Matthews, who is now 59, recognized how he must have looked to his son: a troubled Vietnam veteran, a paranoid man who wandered between jobs and marriages, despised the government, and always kept a camouflage backpack filled with food, water, and clothing by his bedroom door. "Danny always figured I was trash," Matthews says. "Or a bad person."

Now they were outside the federal courthouse in downtown Salt Lake City; Dan, 33, had no idea why. A grizzled man in a Stetson hat smoking a Toscanelli cigar introduced himself as Jesse Trentadue, attorney at law, and led them into his office across the street. There, Matthews divulged the secret he had harbored for two decades: while his family thought he was hiding from the law, palling around with white supremacists and other antigovernment activists, he was working as an informant for the FBI, posing as an extremist to infiltrate more than 20 groups in an effort to thwart terrorist attacks. "[Dan's] eyes got bigger and bigger," the lawyer recalls. For Dan, the revelation brought sanity to a childhood of mystery

and frustration. Finally, he says, "it all made sense."

It is rare for an informant to unmask himself, especially one who has found his way into the violent world of heavily armed bigots. But Matthews had developed a fatal lung condition and a drastically weakened heart, and he wanted his family to know his true identity before it was too late. "I ain't gonna be around for more than a couple of years longer," he says. "So I figure whatever's gonna happen is gonna happen."

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