

Hale's parents relieved; his backers seek apology

Chicago Tribune (IL) - March 11, 2005

Author: Ray Long and Brett McNeil, Tribune staff reporters.

White supremacist Matthew Hale 's parents on Thursday expressed a mixture of relief and anger about news that a disgruntled Chicago man with no apparent ties to their son has been identified as the likely killer of a federal judge's husband and mother.

"I think the cloud ought to be off my son's situation," said Russell Hale, a retired police officer from East Peoria, during a telephone interview Thursday. "This is the most wonderful thing that could happen for us and for Matthew."

Evelyn Hutcheson said she believes reports that Bart Allan Ross left a suicide note claiming responsibility for the killings will benefit her son, who faces sentencing next month for a 2004 conviction that he plotted to have federal Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow murdered.

But she remained upset that for more than a week Hale's name was linked to the investigation by authorities and the news media.

"They were concentrated so damn much on my son, if this guy hadn't done what he did, they wouldn't have caught him," Hutcheson said by phone. "And when Matt went before his judge to be sentenced, they would have enhanced his damn sentence."

Authorities investigating the Feb. 28 murders of Michael Lefkow, 64, and Donna Humphrey, 89, had been focusing on white supremacy groups and sympathizers, including former members of Hale's formerly named World Church of the Creator. Ross, a self-employed electrician and Polish immigrant, has not been identified as a white supremacist or sympathizer by authorities.

"They would have railroaded Matt and given him 50 years," Hutcheson said. "My second thought this morning was the FBI and the prosecuting attorney is going to be [angry] because they wanted to nail Matt to the cross on this."

The news of Ross' suicide in suburban Milwaukee was met on white supremacist Web sites and chat rooms with aggrieved indignation.

In an online essay titled "Say You're Sorry!," Billy Roper, director of the Arkansas-based White Revolution, called on federal authorities and the media to apologize to the white supremacists for casting what he believes were unfair suspicions on their movement. And in a typical post Thursday in the forum section of Vanguard News Network, a writer with the screen name Alex Linder wrote: "Let's see if we can find ONE story in which ONE `reporter' or columnist apologizes to the White Nationalist community for his or her prejudice."

Don Black, 51, founder of the stormfront.org Web site, said he shares those sentiments but doesn't expect any apologies.

"I think this event was used to demonize the White Nationalist movement," Black said during a phone interview Thursday from West Palm Beach, Fla., where he works as a computer consultant. "Any objective observer would have concluded that judges and attorneys would make enemies, lots of enemies."

Black said historical examples of violence by white supremacists, including a 1999 shooting spree by former Hale follower Benjamin Smith, do not fully explain the law enforcement and media scrutiny of Hale and his sympathizers.

"This whole thing was a witch hunt directed at us, and I think a lot of people were hoping it would be a White Nationalist so that could be used as an excuse to shut us down," he said.

Hutcheson and Russell Hale both said they knew of no connection between their son and Ross.

Hale's legal troubles, which included a ruling by Judge Lefkow enforcing an Appellate Court decision that forced Hale to change the name of his group, have been a cause celebre among white supremacists. Lefkow's home address and photos of her family have appeared on hate group Web sites, along with erroneous claims that she and her husband were Jewish.

Hutcheson, who is divorced from Russell Hale, acknowledges her son is a racist but says he advocates separatism, not violence. Hutcheson also has repeatedly denied Matthew Hale was in any way responsible for the shooting spree by Smith, who killed two and wounded nine in an attack on Jewish, black and Asian people before shooting himself.

As the "pontifex maximus" of the Creativity Movement, Hale also promoted a set of beliefs that clearly endorsed murder. In an essay titled "Life, Death and Immortality" posted at the Web site of the group's successor organization, Creativity Movement founder Ben Klassen wrote: "Killing our enemies ... is under certain circumstances a necessary measure for the survival of our own race. Therefore, we condone it, and it, too, is no sin in our religion."

Memo: THE LEFKOW MURDERS: REACTION.

Edition: Chicago Final

Section: News

Page: 20

Index Terms: PROBE ; CHICAGO ; FEDERAL ; OFFICIAL ; FAMILY ; MURDER ; WISCONSIN ; POLICE ; PROFILE ; FOUND ; SUICIDE ; REACTION ; PARENT ; GROUP ; QUOTE

Dateline: EAST PEORIA, ILL.

Record Number: CTR0503110238

Copyright (c) 2005, Chicago Tribune Company. All rights reserved.