

## Why Do Taggers Do It? Two Ex-Graffiti Artists Tell.

VORP experience says that a voluntary decision to do something makes it more likely that it will really happen, and if it involves change it is more likely to last longer.

Since graffiti has been such a problem in Fresno I wondered what those who do graffiti would say would cause them to want to make a voluntary choice to stop doing graffiti. I talked to two young men (about 19) who have actively participated in doing graffiti in the past. They said that they are not now doing graffiti.

They said that most graffiti is done for recognition and self expression. They spend significant time working on just the right design for their tag. They take great pride in having their tag seen by friends and are especially gratified if their tag appears on television. They said that although some graffiti is done by gang members to mark territory, they estimate of all the graffiti, 95% is done as an artistic self expression and/or to gain recognition. They said graffiti is beautiful. So I asked, "would you do this at your own home?" And they said yes, especially in their own bedroom.

I asked them what it would take for a graffiti artist to want to make a voluntary choice to stop doing it on other people's property. They described a number of punishments that could be meted out. When I asked them if they stopped because of punishment, they said no. In fact, they had been the recipients of some punishment and they still continued.

Then they talked about the thrill of it. They often do it when there is the possibility of being seen. They said it is inexpensive and thrilling entertainment. They added that one of the reasons that graffiti artists do graffiti is that they don't have a lot of money to buy thrills.

Again I asked what would cause them to want to make a voluntary choice to not do graffiti on other people's property. They talked about the effectiveness of having it painted out immediately. By painting it out immediately the recognition factor is removed and since that is one of the major motivators, this does cause some frustration. But then they added that it creates a challenge to find a place to put it that is seen but hard to get to and cover up.

They finally said they quit because they got a job. They each talked about the great feeling they had when they received the first pay check. They talked about how the job provided a different type of recognition that they preferred. They talked about how they now had some money, legitimately earned (they've also done auto theft and burglary), to buy their thrills--for one it was a car. They talked about how the job restructured time schedules. They both said that now that they have a job they just don't have any desire to do graffiti. Finally, they said, "I guess if we want to stop the graffiti problem, we need to make it possible for all kids to get jobs." They were adamant that of the graffiti artists they know, they would far prefer having a job to doing graffiti.

## Voluntary Decisions Are Always The Most Effective

Our story this month illustrates how VORP encourages voluntary decisions. Our story is from VORP Volunteer Mediator Susan Lamadrid-Fujino. She is a member of United Japanese Christian Church. Some names and details have been changed to protect identities.

I thought the joint meeting might never take place. I had received the case of a twelve year old who had shoplifted. After several postponements and canceled meetings, I thought everything was finally set for the joint meeting. Then I found out that the store manager whom we were supposed to meet with, had suddenly been transferred to another store. I began wondering if I had been doing something wrong? Could I really handle this case? Should I pull out now? I hadn't thought there could be so many delays, and with my pregnancy due date coming up, I wondered if I would be able to finish the case.

I called my advisor at the VORP office. Barb was calm and reassuring. Talking with Barb gave me a second wind. Lydia, the new store manager, was very receptive towards VORP. She told me how shoplifting affected her and the store overall. Lydia was willing to participate in VORP and meet with the offender the following week.

Getting everyone (Lydia, Dan, Dan's father, his translator, my VORP advisor) to agree on the same date and time was the hardest part of the case.

A couple of days before we were to meet, I called everyone to confirm with them. Midway into my conversation with Dan, he told me he had changed his mind and did not want to meet with the store manager anymore. I felt my heart drop into my stomach, but I realized if he wanted to pull out

of the program he had that option. I just had this sad thought that if he didn't meet with Lydia he would never reconcile this matter. When I had first met Dan, I believed he was sincerely remorseful over his offense and he initially wanted to participate in VORP, but now it had been several months since I had last met with him. As I now spoke to him, he said that he was embarrassed and apprehensive over the meeting with the store manager. I told him that those feelings were understandable and I personally believed that he could get through the joint meeting and benefit from it. I also told him that the manager seemed like an approachable person. By the conversation's end, he willingly recommitted to the meeting with Lydia. I went down to see him once more to review the outline of the joint meeting.

The meeting time finally came and I was growing quite nervous because Dan was 10 minutes late. I had just asked the translator to help me contact his family when they showed up. Once everyone had been introduced, Dan told of how the incident had occurred. He had gone with his friends to the store and that they had dared him to steal something. He was reluctant, but was assured by them that if he was caught, he could give a false name and no one would ever find out. He decided to steal some candy. Immediately he was caught. He tried the false name plan, but soon discovered it was devoid of logic. The store security called the police. Dan told Lydia that he was sorry and never intended to steal again.

**He decided to steal some candy... The store security called the police.**

*(Continued on back)*

Lydia then explained how shoplifting affected her. Lydia told us how she had to deal with shoplifting every day of the year. Her statement amazed Dan and all of us. Lydia wanted Dan to come by one morning and see first hand the impact shoplifting has on the store. As for future intentions, Lydia said that as long as Dan agreed to respect their agreement on not repeating the offense, he and his family were welcome in the store.

At 7:00am that Friday, Dan, his father and I met at the store. She took us on a tour of the store. Aisle after aisle, like a detective, she showed us evidence of shoplifting and items damaged by people who had disregard for the store's property. We saw empty hangers and many empty boxes. Lydia said she wonders how these people would feel if they had items stolen from their house when they had visitors.

It is a matter of respecting other people's property, she said. Dan agreed. She then had to leave us for a few minutes. Dan said that he would be mad if he was her. He thought Lydia was a really nice person.

Now his reason for not repeating the offense was not only because he didn't want to get caught, but because he could now empathize with Lydia. As we left the store Lydia said goodbye and reiterated that she hoped to see Dan and his family again.

I was really glad that I stayed with the case. The next week I gave birth to our first child, a baby girl.

Thanks Susan!

VORP relies entirely on your contributions!!!! VORP could grow to handle 4,000 cases per year with your help. No amount is too small!!

The next VORP Mediator training events are scheduled for July 22 & 23; Sept 8, 15, & 22; Oct 14 & 15; and Nov 15, 22, & 29. The training equips participants to lead the separate meetings with victim and offender and to lead a joint meeting to help them recognize the injustice, decide how to make things as right as possible, and to make commitments for a better future (like Dan). VORP Mediators report that the skills learned are helpful in relationships at home, at church, and at work. Call Barb or Linda (291-1120) to register.

Shalom

Ron Claassen, Director

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