

## BONNIE AND CLYDE

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Bonnie Parker was bored with life and wanted something different. Her chance came when she met a young drifter named Clyde Barrow. But they were both in economic distress, which could have led to their crime spree; greed, the desire for wealth and financial poverty affected them. The fun and excitement that robbing brought them to make the choices that they made. They robbed during the Great Depression.

Bonnie and Clyde grew up very differently from each other. According to James R. Knight in his book *Bonnie and Clyde*, Bonnie Elizabeth Parker was born October 1, 1910 in Rowena, Texas. She had an older brother and a younger sister. Knight writes, "When Bonnie was 4 years old her dad died and her mother took her and her siblings to live with her grandmother in Cement City". When Bonnie was older, she was a very bright student who loved poetry and literature... She had dreams of becoming an actress during her childhood. There were no signs that she would become a criminal". When she was in her second year of high school, she got involved with a guy named Roy Thornton and in September of 1926, only a couple days before Bonnie's 16th birthday, they were married. In Knight's book, he talks about how Roy began to be physically abusive and their marriage fell apart. They never got a divorce. Roy was sent to jail for multiple robberies, Bonnie moved back in with her grandmother, "and they never saw each other again"(26-27).

Knight tells us that Clyde Champion Barrow was born on March 24, 1909, in Tellico, Texas. He had 7 siblings growing up and his parents were tenant farmers, usually not making enough money for their children. "When Clyde was 12 years old his parents gave up the Farm and moved to West Dallas, where his father worked at a gas station"(Knight 28). According to

the Wikipedia article on Bonnie and Clyde, “they lived in a bad neighborhood but Clyde did just fine there”. He and his brother Buck Barrow would often get in trouble for stealing things from small stores or gas stations. Clyde had two serious girlfriends before meeting Bonnie but he never married. Knight says that Bonnie met Clyde one night in January 1930 at a mutual friend's house where they got along instantly (27). Karen Blumenthal claims, in her book *Bonnie and Clyde: the Making of a Legend*, “Bonnie was very smart academically and there’s no proof of why she became a criminal”(214). When I interviewed Norberto Rodriguez, a prison psychiatrist at Allegheny County Prison, he said that it could’ve been because she didn't want to lose Clyde.

Jennifer Rosenberg claims in her book *Bonnie and Clyde* that a little bit after Bonnie and Clyde met, Clyde was sentenced to two years in prison for robberies. Clyde spent a couple months in a local prison, then he was taken to a prison called Eastham Farm. On his way there, he met with a guy known as Fults. Clyde asked him how the farm was and he said it was very brutal and that Clyde should escape anytime he got the chance. There, all the prisoners were told to work instead of sitting in cells; while the prisoners were working they would very often get beaten and whipped. One of the worst punishments was the guards told you to stand on a vinegar barrel for hours while handcuffed until they told you it was ok to get off. Beatings would happen if you weren't doing a good enough job. “The working hours grew a lot. First it was five hours then eight hours then it got to ten hours, and lunch breaks were only five minutes long and all the food was out of a can” (3). Knight says that you could only receive letters from family members, so Clyde listed Bonnie as his wife so she could send him letters. “To his prison mates she was known as his little blue eyed girl”(34). Clyde was sexually assaulted multiple times by one of the men at Eastham Farm. He retaliated by attacking and killing his assaulter with a lead

pipe, crushing his skull. Another inmate, who was already serving a life sentence, took responsibility. He ended up being moved to a different part of the farm, where there was a different kind of abuse. The prisoners were put on the job of beating the other prisoners. Clyde's mom was working on appealing his sentence. She said that she was a widow who needed the help of her son, "and she ended up shortening his sentence"(25). Governor Sterling signed papers to shorten his sentence on January 27. A couple days before he was released, he asked one of the prisoners to help him cut off two of his toes on his right foot to be excused from the overworking (37). This wasn't uncommon: "many prisoners purposely injured themselves to avoid working". They would sprain their own ankles, tear their achilles tendon, and break each other's bones just to avoid the abuse of working at the farm. Clyde was released February 2nd, 1934. He met up with Bonnie (38).

Jennifer Rosenberg stated that Bonnie's mother tried to convince Clyde to get a job and not commit any more crimes. He tried working, but he didn't like it. He started robbing local small stores with a group of men. His crimes sprees consisted of armed robbery, murder, stolen cars, abduction, and dramatic gun battles. He started all of this in Texas when he was 21 years old, and people who study him and his life say that him becoming a criminal was inevitable, or that he saw committing crimes as a chance for fun. One night they all went to rob a gas station, and Clyde stayed in the car because he knew the owner of the gas station and didn't want the owner to recognize him. He started hearing gunshots and one of the men killed the owner. Even though Clyde didn't kill him, he was still wanted for the murder of that man and had to face the electrical chair. And by the end of that year he was wanted for three murders by killing the sheriff and armed policemen. Bonnie joined Clyde and his group.(6) Norberto Rodriguez says there weren't many opportunities for Bonnie due to where she grew up, and she loved Clyde deeply. There really wasn't a way she could have turned her life around"(Rodriguez). Knight

says only a couple months after she joined, she got caught and was sent to jail. During her time in jail she wrote a lot of poetry and stories about herself and Clyde. When she was released, another man had joined the gang. His name was W.D. Jones; he didn't stay for very long, only a couple of months. After W.D. Jones left, Clyde's brother Buck and his wife Blanche Barrow joined what turned out to be called the Barrow Gang. Blanche also got sent to jail after being caught for robberies. She spent her time writing about Bonnie and Clyde's relationship. And after she was released, that's when their crime spree across the many states started. (Knight 119)

Clyde was the leader of the group: he decided where they went and when. He drove almost the whole time, driving about 300 miles a day to stay one step ahead of the police. While I was doing my artistic component for my project, I learned that they went all over: they drove through South Carolina and North Carolina, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and their final destination was Louisiana. They were very hard to catch. The police made it their number one priority finding the Barrow Gang. Even the local people wanted them caught; a group of people spotted them in the summer of 1933 and shot them. Rosenberg also stated that Blanche wrote about her experience that day: she said the only thing she really remembered was Clyde saying "look out" and the gunshots started. Everyone was shot, Buck was badly wounded, and he died a couple days later. Blanche got caught by the police and went to jail for 10 years. After that, it was just Bonnie and Clyde. (127)

Clyde hated prison. He had so much anger for how they treated him in prison, he said he'd rather die than go back. He especially hated the Eastham Farm; it was the most brutal prison he'd ever been to. He and Bonnie planned to raid it, and in January they drove to the

prison and Clyde went in. Bonnie stayed in the car as Clyde tried to release prisoners. He got five prisoners to escape successfully, and killed 3 guards in order to get out.(Rosenburg113)

Now Bonnie and Clyde had nothing to do but to keep running. On Easter Sunday, they were parked in a corn field as two policemen approached them without knowing who they were. Clyde grabbed a gun and shot the two men. After this, they were very hated by the people and everyone wanted them to be caught (Knight 41). “A man named Frank Homer was put on the job of tracking them. He traced their every move and even tapped their families’ phones”(Knight 139). While Bonnie and Clyde were driving through Bienville, Louisiana, six armed men waited for them behind a bush. One of those men was Frank Homer. When they finally arrived at the place, they jumped out of the bushes and started shooting them while in a stolen Ford (198).

“Blanche Barrow wrote in her letter that she was happy that they died together so that neither of them had to live without the other”(Rosenburg). Their childhoods, the need to get out of financial poverty, and lack of opportunities led them to choose to steal. Or perhaps it was the dreams of the life of crime that would free them from the Depression. Bonnie and Clyde were some of the most amazing American thieves.

### **Works Cited**

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Hello dearest Ana, this was a great essay and i enjoyed reading it very much thank you for letting me edit it much love your wife#2

ps . i edited in blue i mean you could easily have figured that out i just wanted to lyk