

## [Transcript] Sword and Scale Nightmares / Dorm Life

In the early morning hours of September 5, 2007, Diane, a resident assistant at the University of Arizona, awoke suddenly, but what she thought was the reverberating sound of someone moving heavy furniture. She couldn't be sure, so she sat there listening intently. Down the hall of the dormitory, Stacey Wallace, a freshman, awoke to the noise as well. But she was closer and could tell that it wasn't just the sound of furniture being dragged across the floor. It was also screaming. She couldn't be sure where the screams were coming from. It sounded like it was coming from all around. It could have been coming from above her, below her, in the hall, or even next door. Then, as quickly as it started, it stopped. And there was silence. But as she lay there in bed, pulling the blankets up to her chin, anxiously awaiting some clue as to what was going on, she heard another scream. This time, the scream was from right outside her door. And it said, help me, Stacey. Welcome to Sword and Scale Nightmares, True Crime for Bedtime, where Nightmare begins now.

Less than a month prior, it was early August 2007, and it was the beginning of a new school year at the University of Arizona. Students that left over the summer were returning to the sprawling campus in Tucson to resume classes. Also, freshman students were moving away from their home for the first time and into the dorms. It was a beautiful campus with grand brick buildings that seemed to

go on for blocks. There were the colleges of science, engineering, fine arts, aerospace, and even medicine. To a freshman student, the sheer size of the campus could be daunting. But the school had many programs to help new students adjust to college life. One such program was the Native American First Year Scholars Program, or FYS. Arizona is home to nearly two dozen Native American tribes, from the Apache to the Pueblo to the Hopi. But the largest tribe is, by far, the Navajo Nation. And the University of Arizona reflected this in its student population. Mia Henderson, a member of the Navajo tribe, was starting her freshman year, and she was excited to be in the FYS program. She was a hometown star known by the nicknames Princess Mia, Skipper 15, and Mighty Mia. She was looking to make an impact in university. She was an excellent student and graduated with honors from Tuba City High School. She was a member of the National Honor Society,

and she was awarded a prestigious tribal scholarship, the Chief Manuelito Scholarship. The highest award a high school senior in the Navajo tribe could receive. And on top of that, she played basketball and softball. But she really stood out playing third base, even being picked for the regional team. It was her first time away from home, but it seemed like she had been preparing for college her whole life. Both of her parents encouraged an education, having college degrees themselves, and her grandfather, once the vice chairman for the Navajo Nation, inspired her. She was no stranger to hard work and the success that came along with reaching your goals. Mia was ready to take everything she'd been taught and go to university to major in biology. She wanted to be a doctor and had attended a summer science program at the university. She was picked to be one of the 25 students to

spend seven weeks working on a biomedical research project studying albinism in American Indians. Members of FYS were exclusively assigned rooms at the Graham Greenlee Dormitory. The three-story building sat on the corner of North Highland Avenue and East 4th Street and had a giant courtyard in the center with four wings branching out, east and west. All the FYS students were

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in one wing, spread out amongst the three floors. Mia was assigned room 247 with Gala Rika Harrison, or Rika, as she was known. They were both Navajo, but Rika was from the town of Chinle, about a hundred miles east of Tuba City, near New Mexico. Other than that, Rika and Mia had a lot in common. Like Mia, Rika had an active athletic life. She ran track but was much more involved in the rodeo. She loved it and devoted herself to her three-quarter horses. She excelled at breakaway roping where a rider ropes a fleeing calf. Two years prior, she was named Rookie of the Year in an event by the All-Indian Rodeo Cowboys Association. Academically, she was a good student also and was attending school on a full scholarship. She even wanted to go into the medical field like Mia, except she wanted to be a pharmacist. They had so much in common, they seemed to be a perfect match for roommates. But just three weeks into school, on September 5th, Rika would make her way to Stacey Wallace's room, screaming for help.

At 5.46 a.m. on September 5th, it is nearing the end of Officer Xavier's shift when he receives a high-priority call. He and three other officers respond to the Graham Greenlee dorm. He turns on his lights and sirens and races to that part of the campus, arriving just two minutes later, and parks his car on the south side of the building, blocking the street. He runs to the southeast entrance and quickly scans his ID card that unlocks the door. He swings it open, rushes inside, and runs up the stairs to the second floor. On his way, he meets the RA, Diane, who directs him down the hall. The first thing he notices is a hysterical girl, lying on the floor in the hall, crying from pain. It's Rika. One of her legs is cut, badly, and there is blood trailing from her dorm room. When he enters the room, he finds obvious signs of a struggle. The room is small and most of the space is taken up by two twin beds and two small desks. Everything is in disarray. In the middle of it all, he finds Mia, crumpled on the floor. She's in the fetal position, resting on her knees, and there is blood everywhere. He immediately calls for paramedics. Paramedics arrived a short time later and rushed both girls to the hospital. Sadly, at 6.32 a.m., only 46 minutes after the police were called, Mia was pronounced deceased. Rika was treated for a deep puncture to her calf that went all the way to the bone, two cuts on her hand, and some minor injuries to her fingers. The wound to her leg required staples, but after that, she was released. Now, it was up to cops to figure out how this all happened, and the best place to start is with the lone survivor. Detectives brought Rika into an interview room to find out what happened. She was calm and didn't seem to be suffering any pain. They started with idle chit chat, to which she responded casually, even giggling at comments made. That is until she started telling them what happened. She walked them through her Labor Day weekend leading up to the 5th. For the holiday weekend, she went back home for a rodeo competition and rode with a friend

there and back. When she returned to the dorm, she dropped off her stuff and went to hang out with friends all night, not returning to the dorm until 2 a.m. That's when her story became very concerning. As she enters her room, she notices all the lights are off. She walks through the closet area that precedes the living portion of the room. It's dark, but she can tell Mia isn't alone. She can't really see, but she can make out just enough features to tell it's a man. She stifles the urge to pry and just says she'll be back later. But before she can leave, the man grabs her and asks her not to leave. Rika did not want to stay, so she said no. The man becomes angry, grabs her and throws her on the bed next to Mia. He begins to talk

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to them for nearly three hours. The way the dorm rooms are laid out and their size makes it impossible for Rika to get past the man. When you first enter the room, you have a closet on either side. Through a small doorway, there are two twin beds and two desks on either wall, with just enough room to walk in between. The man stood at the head of the beds, essentially blocking the only exit. Rika described him as thin, wearing all black and a baseball cap. She can see his face because of the dimly lit room. His topic of discussion was his own death, and he wanted one of them to do it. Rika claimed he wanted to die and that he wanted either Mia or Rika to do it. So Rika sits and listens to the man for hours while he tries to get them to murder him. He threatens them that if they don't, he'll stalk them, and if they went to the police, he would kill them both. At this point, Rika is getting really scared. She looks at Mia and says, just do it. Finally, Mia says she will, but when the time comes to grab the knife, she can't bring herself to take it. When Mia doesn't take the knife, the man erupts into anger and grabs the knife himself and attacks Mia. She immediately begins wailing in pain, but tries to fight off the man. Rika jumps on the bed and tries to get him to stop stabbing Mia, but he turns and attacks Rika. Realizing she was in way over her head, she decided to run for help, but the man's attention was now on her. She runs but trips over the transition between the tile and the carpet. As she desperately tries to get back on her feet, he grabs her leg and starts pulling her back. She reaches out with her hand and tries to push him away, but the knife slices her hand twice. Then the man stabs her in the calf, but in the commotion, Rika manages to get away and run into the hall screaming for help. She makes it to her friend Stacey's room before her leg collapses and she falls to the floor. The officers sat patiently and listened to Rika's recollection of events. Her story only seemed to raise more questions than it answered. From the time of the 911 call to when police entered the room was only about four minutes. So where did this man go? When they asked Rika, she guessed he must have gone out the window. Of course, the police questioned this because Rika and Mia's room was on the second floor, and there was no sign that the window had been opened. No one else saw this man and there were no footprints in the blood from the room or below the window outside. The police were getting suspicious of Rika and the fact that while Mia was savagely murdered, Rika was minimally wounded. Her story just wasn't adding up. Then there were the comments that Rika made to hospital employees. While she was being treated for her minimal wounds, she exclaimed that Mia had attacked her, not some man in black. Caught in a string of inconsistencies after hours of telling a story about a man, Rika admitted that she made the story up. Then she began to tell the real story. Ever since school started, despite seemingly being perfectly matched roommates, Mia and Rika had been at odds. Rika claimed that Mia was stealing money from her. At first, it was just \$30, so she began to hide her money. Then the next time Mia needed money, she pointed a handgun at Rika and demanded, give me all your money. Rika didn't know what to do. She had never had a gun pointed at her, so she gave Mia some money. This didn't stop her, though. She pointed the gun closer to Rika's head and said, I know you have more. So Rika gave her more. Soon after that, Mia gave Rika her cat card, which functioned as a door key and debit card attached to a school account. She told her to go buy her an iPod, and she did. After that, she told her to go get her a book. Rika didn't understand why Mia couldn't do this herself, but she was afraid and just did what she was told. Mia essentially made Rika her servant. Later, Mia forced Rika to forge

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three checks. One for \$500, one for \$1,000, and one for \$2,000. She then turned to Rika and threatened her to cash the smallest of the checks. Rika couldn't do it. She chickened out. She knew Mia would be mad, so she texted her, I'm sorry, forgive me. She hoped that after the Labor Day weekend, Mia would not be so mad. That morning, when she returned to their room after hanging out with friends until 2am, she began to unpack. Mia was there and began taunting her. She tried to ignore it, but as she stood there unpacking her bag from her holiday weekend, she caught a glimpse of a reflection in the window. Mia was right behind her with a knife raised in her hand. Rika spins around and catches Mia's hand and brings the knife down, and they begin to struggle. As they bounce off furniture in the cramped dorm room, Rika gets the knife away from Mia and pokes her a few times, but she doesn't stop. They both tumble to the floor where the knife covered in blood slips from Rika's hand, and Mia is able to regain control of it. Rika tries to kick the knife from Mia's hand, but gets stabbed in the calf. As they struggle on the floor between two beds, Rika finds herself in possession of the knife and above Mia. She only wants to get away and stabs Mia in the back three quick times before she stops fighting. Rika scrambles to her feet, fueled with adrenaline, flings open the door, and hobbles down the hall before collapsing in front of Stacey's room. The story about a man just didn't make sense to detectives, but this story that they were hearing made even less sense. Mia was from a well-off family. It just didn't make sense for her to be shaking down Rika for money. Rika, on the other hand, was from a far less affluent family, and she had recently confessed to the police that she was solely responsible for the forged checks. On the 28th of August, eight days before the bloody fight in their dorm room, Mia had called the police on Rika claiming she found her cat card and ID in plain view, sticking out of Rika's wallet. She had also noticed a withdrawal from her account for \$500. She was sure Rika was the one to blame. Officers talked to Rika and confiscated the cash, and Rika's possession were two more checks for \$1,000 and \$2,000. Rika confessed right then and there to the officer, but nothing happened. The officer said they needed to shake hands and let bygones be bygones. It was of the opinion that this was a freshman mistake and that no harm was done, especially since the cash was recovered. Rika claimed that Mia also forced this confession at gunpoint. Officers were scratching their heads. Why would Mia force her to confess to theft that she was responsible for and that came from her account and where was this gun she used? But while they were trying to get to the bottom of Rika's story, an officer at the scene of the crime found something quite important. On Mia's desk was a small piece of paper and on the paper was a suicide note. It read, in part, I'm Mia Henderson and I can't live with myself because I have accused my roommate of false things. I've thought over the whole weekend of just putting an end to life. I didn't know how to tell my parents about the situation. I felt completely lost. I felt crazy. I must end my life. The detectives weren't buying this story either. First, there was an unknown man responsible for the murder, but Rika admitted to making it up. And now she was saying that Mia was on the verge of suicide because she felt so much guilt for falsely accusing Rika of theft, then decided to attack her before killing herself. A lot of this didn't add up, but the suicide note had more information to give, information that would lead to the real story of what happened in Room 247. When officers looked at the suicide note, they noticed a couple of things. First, the note was not signed. The only evidence that it was Mia's was the opening line saying it was. Second, the note was typed and not handwritten, as most suicide notes are. It's unlikely that a

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suicidal person would take the time to both type and print their suicide note. That's the thing about suicide. When you want to do it, you want to do it right then and there. So if you just take a minute and wait, things eventually get better. The biggest discrepancy with the suicide note, however, was that nothing about Mia's death seemed like a suicide. Who decides to kill themselves, but then attacks someone and fights them to the death first? And why wouldn't she use the gun she supposedly had? As detectives poke and prod Rika with little clarifying, annoying questions, and go over the story again and again, Rika eventually figures out she's not quite as smart as she thinks she is. She hangs her head and goes silent. Then, finally, she decides to tell the truth. At the start of school, Rika was assigned to be Mia's roommate. It was her first time away from home and she got off to a bad start. She had a full scholarship to college, but Rika misunderstood

what that meant and confused it with the idea that she had a full ride. So on the day she moved in with only a couple hundred dollars to her name, she realized the school didn't provide all the things she expected, like books, a laptop, or even bedsheets. To make her money go further, she began skipping meals, replacing them with diet pills. Mia tried to be friendly toward Rika, but she was away from home for the first time, shy, homesick, and out of her depth.

Rika would only ever respond with short, one-word answers. This led to a bit of disdain between the two. Mia perceived Rika's awkwardness as an insult and began making disgusted faces when she passed Rika on campus. Of course, this led to Rika not really liking Mia all that much, either.

So when Rika quickly became desperate for money, she began stealing from Mia. In addition to her ID and cat card, Rika also took her Social Security card just to make sure she had the identification required to cash the check for \$500. Of course, Mia noticed the missing items and the money. When she spotted the card sticking out of Rika's wallet, she knew it was her, and called the police to file a report. The officer downplayed the whole ordeal, but Mia was very upset. She told the dean and the FYS what Rika had done and asked to be assigned to another room. The text message from Rika sent saying, I'm sorry, forgive me, was in reference to theft, not her failure to cash forged checks for Mia. When Rika asked Mia what she was going to do

about the theft, Mia flat out said, I'm going to press charges, and I don't want to live with you anymore. After that, Mia avoided Rika in the dorm room for nearly a week until after the Labor Day weekend when they both returned to school. Over that long weekend, Rika had come up with a plan

and she started putting it into action as soon as she caught a ride back home.

She casually mentioned to her friend Yolanda that she knew someone at the school that was thinking about suicide, but almost in the same breath, she asked what happened to people who steal. On the way back to school after the long weekend, Rika brought up the TV show CSI and asked

if fingerprints could still be identified through gloves. Clearly an amateur, am I right?

Once back in Tucson, Rika needed to stop at Target. Yolanda found it odd that all she bought was gum

and an 8-inch chef's knife and asked her about it. Rika explained the knife was for class, but didn't elaborate. Before parting ways that evening, Rika left Yolanda with a final thought. She had a bad feeling that something was going to happen. Once back at the dorm, when Rika noticed

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Mia's stuff was in the room again, she left, knowing that soon Mia would be back and she could put her plan into action. But she didn't go hang out with friends like she told police. Instead, she went to the library to fabricate the suicide note and text her friend Stacy. She texts her several times through the night, all asking the same question. As she's still awake. Stacy, whose room is next to Mia and Rika, never really checked to see if Mia was asleep. So, after waiting until the early morning hours, Rika returns to her dorm room, where Mia is now asleep. She creeps through the room and places the suicide note on Mia's desk. Then, she sits on her bed and thinks about all the trouble she was about to be in. For hours, she imagines explaining it to her parents and how excruciating that would be. And then, she thinks about how mad Mia made her. She just wants to be free. She wants it all to just go away. And she wants Mia also to just go away. She unzips her bag and grabs the knife and stands over Mia. She raises the knife in the air. But before she can plunge it into her roommate, Mia wakes up. Mia immediately tries to shield herself from the blade. Her wounds show that she was the one defending herself. She rolls off the bed trying to escape, but Rika is on top of her. Rika tries to cover her mouth and stifle her screams, but she bites her fingers. They tumble all over the room while she's stabbing Mia, but Rika never loses control of the knife. And in the struggle, stabs herself in the leg while stabbing Mia 23 times, 15 times, in her back. With the final blow after Mia is already crumpled on the floor beneath Rika, she grips the handle with both hands and buries the eight-inch knife, seven and a quarter deep inches. So deep that Rika has a hard time pulling it out. In the seconds of silence that followed, Rika knew her suicide cover-up wasn't going to work. So she quickly fabricated a story about Mia attacking her first, only to change her story to the one about the mysterious man before talking to the police. And she did this all because she blamed Mia for all the trouble she was in, rather than her own actions. She was charged with first-degree murder, forgery, and identity theft. Rika was sentenced to life in prison without parole for the murder charge, and an additional 2.5 years to run concurrently for the forgery. But in 2013, her sentence was changed to life with the possibility of parole after 25 years because her attorney didn't properly present any mitigating circumstances of Rika's childhood and home life during sentencing. Room 247 was cleansed by a Navajo medicine man in a traditional ceremony the day after the murder. Mia was laid to rest in a family cemetery in New Mexico. If you enjoyed the show, please consider joining plus at [swordandscale.com](http://swordandscale.com) slash plus. But if you can't consider leaving us a positive review on your preferred listening platform, sweet dreams, and good night.