Scott Weiland: 'This Is My Life, a Cautionary Tale. Maybe Somebody Can Learn from It.'

"I guess the reason we're here is I feel like there's been only one side of my story told. People know rock stars only on the surface, people know celebrities only on the surface, and people know me only on the surface: I'm the junkie rock star handcuffed in the backseat of a cop car..."
In 2005, Scott Weiland sat down with Esquire Writer-at-Large Mike Sager for perhaps the most revealing interview of his life. On Thursday night, Weiland was found dead on his tour bus. Here, reprinted in full, is the original story from 10 years ago, "The Devil Gives You the First Time for Free."

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Over the last decade, Scott Weiland established himself as the quintessential junkie rock star. Now thirty-seven, he has to his credit several platinum albums, five drug arrests, a six-month jail stint, and uncountable attempts at rehab. Think Kurt Cobain without the shotgun.
In 1987, he formed the group that became Stone Temple Pilots, or STP. (The acronym originally stood for Shirley Temple's, er, private part.) One of the biggest acts of the mid-nineties, STP followed the lead of bands like Nirvana and Pearl Jam to the top of the charts with its hard, lyric-driven rock. Fabulously rich, monumentally fucked-up, Weiland crossed over to mainstream consciousness in 1996, when the members of his band—his closest friends—held a press conference on the eve of a national tour to out their buddy as an incorrigible heroin addict, "unable to rehearse or appear."

The tour was canceled. A predictable spiral ensued, culminating in an epic shitstorm of arrests, overdoses, domestic disharmony, prison, and parole violations. Following another heroin and cocaine bust in 2003, he was ordered to six months of rehab.

As of this writing, however, Weiland says he's back. He's on a world tour with his new group, Velvet Revolver. He has more than four hundred days of sobriety behind him. He is living happily again with his two young children and his wife, Mary. Touted, somewhat negatively, as a supergroup, Velvet Revolver (featuring former Guns N' Roses members Slash, Duff
McKagan, and Matt Sorum) has received critical acclaim and sold millions of albums worldwide, earning three Grammy nominations.

Recently, Weiland approached Esquire about telling his story. "I needed to get it out," he said. I met with him in Los Angeles in late December.

-Mike Sager
My parents were from the Bay Area. My dad was a surfer and a rock 'n' roll guy—you know, hot rods and slicked-back hair; he drove a '58 Impala. Later he fell in love with the Stones and the Beatles and became more of a longhair. I remember going out to visit him every summer. The first thing I'd do was raid his weed stash. My mom was the cheerleader in the poodle skirt. She was a lifeguard; they surfed Santa Cruz together. They were intensely in love and got married at a young age. I don't want to open up their whole can of worms, but certain things happened. I was born in '67; the whole sixties thing was really going strong. I think my dad was a bit of a flake back then. He wanted to have a good time, you know, tune in and turn on, whatever they used to say back then. My mom was just not down with it. They ended up getting a divorce. It crushed me. I was three years old.

My stepfather was the complete opposite of my dad. He was a corporate guy at TRW. He'd
played football at Notre Dame and then got his master's degree at USC in aeronautical engineering. His favorite group was the Kingston Trio. If I were to sum up my stepfather in one word, the word would be **responsible**. That word was always coming out of his mouth: "You have to be responsible, Scott." "Scott, you have to be responsible." Responsible, responsible, responsible. And he was responsible. I think that's what attracted my mom to him in the first place.

We lived in southern California until my stepfather got a promotion, then we moved to Ohio. I was four and a half. It really broke my heart because I was pulled away from my dad. After that, I used to fly out and spend the summers with him. I remember how I used to feel as the plane was getting closer and closer to the gate. You know, I'd look through that window, trying to see my dad, because at that time anyone could come up to the gate and pick you up. Sometimes I could see him. He'd be right up against the glass. And I'd just come running through the passageway, you know, and he'd be waiting there with this big smile on his face...and he would get down on his knees and just grab hold of me.
But then I would have to leave. The drive to the airport was really...it was really...it wasn't good. I remember I'd have to say goodbye and get on the plane. I'd get the window seat and just look out that window, and he would just stand there at the gate, and we'd just look at each other. When I would get back to Cleveland, I would be a wreck for a couple of weeks. For nine years of my life, that's how it went: anticipation and separation. Those were my summers.

From an early age, I had a preoccupation with catching a buzz. I remember the summer right after my eighth-grade year. We lived in northeastern Ohio, in this very preppy town, Chagrin Falls. There was this family that lived across the woods. I was friends with the kids; they were a little bit older than me, high school age. Their parents worked late, and we would play quarters,
the drinking game. When no one was home at their house, I would sneak in and fill up a big tumbler full of liquor. I'd put in a little bit of vodka, a little bit of gin, a little bit of Black Velvet—a little bit of this and a little bit of that. And then I'd just go off into the woods and sit up against an old oak tree and chug it down.

Then I'd load up my BB gun and go shooting birds, which was always quite fun until you actually hit one and were consumed with guilt.

We moved back to California, to Huntington Beach, in Orange County. It was right after the movie *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* had come out. And I remember thinking to myself, *This new school is identical to the movie!* There were parties every weekend. I guess the parents' overall philosophy was, you might as well do it here, where we can supervise you. You could ride your bike from kegger to kegger.

My drinking kind of escalated. At the beginning of my freshman year, we'd get fucked up on
Friday and Saturday, and then we'd make it all the way till the next Friday before doing it again. But as time went on, it became a fixation. An obsession. All you could think about the whole week was getting to Friday again so you could party. That was all I ever thought about. That, you know, and sex.

My first experiences with cocaine were just completely...it was, like, sexual. It was unbelievable. I didn't think that there could be anything that good.
I'd formed my first band when I was a sophomore. I'd just turned sixteen. There was this cat who used to hang around, watch us rehearse, this really nerdy guy. He was a lop, you know, but he was nice. He ended up becoming a coke dealer.

One time, he came by rehearsal with a briefcase. It was very eighties, very *Miami Vice*. He opened it up, and he had these neat little half-ounce packages. And this stuff, my God—it was not that nasty, gasoline-tasting, cat-piss-smelling shit that they have nowadays. It was this fuckin' *shale*, you know? It was that mother-of-pearl stuff they used to have in the old days. It was so hard, you had to slice it real thin with a razor blade, like little slices of garlic. They don't even make that shit anymore. Maybe you can get it down in Colombia, but not here.

The guy cut us out a couple lines each, like, six inches long and about an eighth of an inch wide. I had two of them. And that was all we needed. We were high for five hours. And there was no grinding teeth. There was no big comedown. I think the devil gives you the first time for free.

The summer after my sophomore year, my band was playing clubs regularly. We were putting on two nights a week at a club in Newport Beach, then driving up to Hollywood on the weekends, playing Madame Wong's West, Cathay de Grande, lots of underground clubs. We would do coke if we could get it. Everybody I knew, all their money went for alcohol and blow. My car was pulling into the driveway at 4:00 in the morning. I was sleeping till noon. I wasn't really gettin' along so good with my folks at the time, though I don't attribute *that* to getting high. I attribute that to the fact that I was trying to break out from the mold that my parents had set for me, just really wanting to be making some decisions for myself. I was just experiencing what life had to
offer me.

Eventually, my parents caught on to the fact that my lifestyle didn't jibe with that of the average 16-year-old. At the beginning of my junior year, my parents went into my room and started raiding my drawers. They ended up finding a bag of weed and a couple empty little quarter bindles of blow and a mirror and a razor blade. They sent cops to pick me up at school. They took me to rehab.

I got out just in time for New Year's Eve.

I was never much of a weed smoker. I thought too much on weed; it made my mind way too overactive. There's no solace for me in pot.

There was always an intrigue for me when it came to heroin. Most of my musical and artistic heroes were connected to dope. Everyone from William Burroughs to Keith Richards and Gram Parsons to Bird, all the jazz greats—if you listen to the fluidity of that music, you can hear heroin in that music. There was something about it that I was definitely drawn to. I wondered why this substance had so much powerful appeal, had such a power to affect music and art and lives in such a way that seemed to be so beautiful but also so dark and destructive at the same time. Those two elements, the beauty and the darkness, are what created that seduction for me. It's what attracted me. Because those forces have always coexisted within me. I call it the Great Dichotomy.
When you start doing dope, there's a honeymoon period. At the time I started, when I was about twenty-four, I was with the woman who would become my first wife, Jannina. Heroin was definitely something that was on our radar. After I tried it for the first time—in New York, at the Royalton Hotel, the last stop of a tour STP coheadlined with the Butthole Surfers—we were excited about doing it together. It turned out her brother, Tony, was into it, too.

We started making trips to downtown L.A. to score. At that point I had this Toyota Landcruiser—the first significant purchase of my success. The whole thing was very ceremonial, like a ritual, like a religious event. The copping. The smoking. The need. I started referring to it as my medicine.
The four of us would just hang out—myself, Jannina, Tony, and his chick at the time. We were just smoking it, you know, chasing the dragon. It was all pretty innocent. We'd drive downtown, grab a few bags, smoke... and then we'd just kind of lie around and have that sort of dope sex where you can fuck for eight hours. They call it a dope stick. You stay up forever but you have a hard time, you know, finishing. It's, like, tantric.

As time progressed, I was finding that there seemed to be a certain ceiling to the high when you were smoking heroin. And smoking is inefficient. Any junkie will tell you that: A lot of the dope goes to waste.

But not knowing anyone who fixed, I had to wait for my opportunity. It came on Thanksgiving 1993. We went over to Jannina's parents' house. Tony lived in a room in the garage. After dinner, he's like, "I got a couple rigs. You wanna fix?" So naturally I was like, "Sure." He tied me off and shot me up. And then he said, "Now you got your wings."

I remember just lying back on his mattress, and there was something barely on his TV, which was right by his bed but had bad reception, just static and snow. Complete warmth went all the way through my body. I was consumed. It's like what they talk about in Buddhism, that feeling of reaching enlightenment. Like in Siddhartha, when they say there's that feeling of a golden light. It's near the end of the book. After going through all those different journeys, Siddhartha finds what he's been looking for all along. There's that moment when he's sitting there, and
there's this feeling of warmth, a golden light that just goes through his entire body. I can't remember exactly how they describe it, but there's this feeling in Buddhism where they say there's a golden glow that goes from your fingers all the way through every appendage and into the pit of your stomach. And that's what it felt like to me, slamming dope for the first time. Like I'd reached enlightenment. Like a drop of water rejoining the ocean. I was home.

All my life, I had never felt right in my own skin. I always felt that wherever I went...I don't know, I always felt very uncomfortable. Like I didn't belong. Like I could never belong. Like every room I walked into was an unwelcome room.

After doing dope for the first time, I knew that no matter what happened, from that day forward, I could be okay in every situation. Heroin made me feel safe. It was like the womb. I felt completely sure of myself. It took away all the fears. It did that socially; it distanced me from other people, made me feel less vulnerable. And it did that for me musically, allowing me to sort of go for it, you know, to dare to succeed. And it gave me a certain amount of objectivity, though what ends up happening with opiates is you get to a point where you get too much objectivity. It becomes all objectivity. You don't have any more connection to the heart, to the body, to anything real. You kind of cease to exist. All that exists is the need.

Once I started shooting, I realized I'd made a career decision; you can't hold on anymore to regular life. It's like your life becomes a friend dangling over the edge of a building. You're trying to hold on, but the hand is slipping from your grasp, just slipping and slipping, and you just know that you're going to lose that person. And that person is your former self.
At one point, over the Christmas holidays, I ended up slamming some coke. We were at this other couple's house, and the way it was put to me was: "You wanna experience something that you're not gonna believe?"

So we booted up, you know, we slammed—a solution of coke and water. And he was like, "Look right at that painting." And I remember the rush hit like a freight train. And out of this painting came this beautiful angel. It was just an average painting, you know, a cheesy picture of a flower basket, I think it was, or maybe a ship at sea. But out of this picture came this beautiful angel. And I'm looking at it and I'm like, Oh...my...God.

For a while, there was a lot of positivity to it. But I started doing way too much cocaine. There was a period when I was shooting so much cocaine that I think I broke into another dimension. I opened a door, but I let some things in that were malevolent and aggressive. Sometimes it was just like a sort of dark almost presence. Sometimes I could see it a bit more. And the weird thing was, my dogs were totally aware of it. They would be aware of it even before I was aware of it, usually two to three seconds before I would sense it coming. And my dogs, depending, would act in different ways. Either they would come to me and, like, try to make me feel comforted,
sometimes almost molesting me, you know, trying to lick it off me or something. Or sometimes, if they felt threatened or felt that I was being threatened, they would bark or growl. Or sometimes, if it was something monstrous, they would just split. Or sometimes they would whimper. One of them was an English cocker spaniel. She would always just split the scene like immediately. But my big dog, a really big male golden retriever, he was a strong-willed dog. He liked to bark and protect me. But sometimes, even he was terrified. Like a couple of times, there was this thing that was huge. I couldn't really tell the shape of it, but it was almost to the ceiling. It would pound on the wood floors as it would move forward.

I guess it lasted for a couple of months. I became so terrified that I didn't want to experience it anymore. Sometimes I still wonder if it was all hallucinations or something more.

**When I started doing heroin,** I felt almost immediately like I had become part of something bigger than myself, that I'd entered into a new social realm. There was a period of time when I liked to go to downtown L.A. and hang out in the parks. I'd end up on these weeklong adventures. Sometimes I'd get a suite in an expensive hotel. Other times I'd get a fifteen-dollar
room right across from the park. I'd meet crackheads and hypses. I'd be in the room with a couple of brothers and everybody would be, like, jiving, you know, you'd all be gettin' down, and then all of a sudden you'd notice they'd be sort of talking among themselves, almost like they were talking in tongues, you know, 'cause I couldn't understand them, and they'd be kind of looking at one another and whispering, and you'd get that sort of feeling when your hairs stand up on the back of your neck. You'd be thinking to yourself, *This is sort of going south here. It's time to bail this scene.* And I'd stand up, like, "All right, guys, I'm outta here. I'll see you later." And they'd be like, "No, man, it's cool! Come back here. Where you going?" And I'd be like, "Hey, I'm outta here."

My first arrest? That would have to be nineteen ninety...[1995]. I'm so bad with dates. I never really had any perception of time when I was on dope. That was part of the problem. That was *really* part of the problem. I'd go out to buy a pack of cigarettes and end up missing for three days.
There was this one spot where we liked to cop rock—because by this time I was trying to keep away from slamming coke as much as possible—on Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena, near some of these shady hotels where the hookers used to congregate. Wherever you have hookers and pimps, you have crack dealers. We would go to this one room, and there were always dealers and chicks in there, or sometimes these prostitutes would just call the dealers for us; they were actually pretty cool.

This one night, no one was around. I went and knocked on the door, and no one was in the room. I went back to my car, which I'd been careful to park down the street, you know; you never want to drive right into the spot where you're going to cop. And I got into the car. And before I even could decide what to do next, the cops just kind of swooped down on me. They came from nowhere...a bunch of them.

I didn't think that I had any dope in my car. That's the mistake a lot of dope fiends make. You get sloppy and you get lazy. The cops asked me if I had anything on me, and I said, "Nope." And I really thought I was telling the truth. But then they checked my car and I did. It was inside the ashtray. I swear I didn't know it was there. That's the thing about being a dope fiend with money. You don't count your crumbs; you leave it littered all over the place. You can be rich enough to really fuck yourself up.

I got taken to the sheriff's station and booked. The next morning, my wife came and bailed me out. The thing is, I woke up dope sick. So when I got into the car, I was like, "I need to go get well. I need you to take me over to my dealer in Silver Lake." And she's like, "No fuckin' way!"
What are you talking about? You were just busted!" And I'm like, "I don't have a choice. I'm sick." And she's like, "I'm not taking you. I'm taking you home." And I'm like, "Lookit, we'll deal with the situation later. But first, I just gotta get well. I can't think right now. I need to fix myself. And then we'll take care of what needs to get taken care of."

And you know, even though she'd done a bit of dope herself, it's easy for some people to get self-righteous in situations like that. She was driving me in this candy-apple-red convertible Mustang that I had gotten her. We were arguing. We'd just started moving at a green light. So I said fuck it. I just popped out of the car, jumped out without opening the door.

I walked down the sidewalk and hopped on a bus. I think I was in Rosemead. I didn't have a choice. Heroin addiction takes away options and choices; it leaves you with nothing but one mandatory decision: to get well. To get unsick. That, basically, becomes your life. That's the definition of reality bites. And I'd just been bitten big time. I went directly to my dealer. Then I hopped a taxi to the Chateau Marmont.

They gave me a room next to Courtney Love. We shot drugs the whole time. Most of the time she just walked around in panties. There was never anything that went on between us. When you were getting high, you know, there were never any sexual overtones; at least that wasn't the most important thing. Dope was the most important thing. But gettin' high with her was sort of like watching a reality show unfold. It was very entertaining. I was trying to stay as loaded as I could just so I could avoid reality. I think we both stayed there a month. It definitely had its rock 'n' roll moments.
I meet Mary in 1991, when she was sixteen and a young model in L.A. and I was twenty-three and had yet to sign my first record deal. There was something between us that can't be described. It's that kind of love that people chase forever and never find. We continued this for years, with me promising to leave my wife. I should have earlier, but I couldn't man up. By this time, I was already pretty deep into another relationship—heroin.

I remember one night at a party we were there late and a friend who had been clean for a while had some dope. Well, I hadn't shot up in front of Mary before, but that night I did and I remember her wanting to do it. She wasn't afraid. She felt if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. And we were off!

For about six months we went on a legendary run of speedballs [heroin and cocaine]. She was new to it, but I had never seen anyone escalate to that level in such a short time. She was my match. My equal. The run took us coast to coast several times. Jet-setting, going to parties with her friends in the fashion business in New York, and the movie-star bullshit in L.A. But what goes up must come down. After a while, it was only us who thought we were looking good and doing well. We couldn't make appointments. Our friends started questioning our every move or they walked away. We started questioning ourselves. And to be honest, it was all right for me to despise me, but I couldn't stand seeing Mary do that to herself. So we went to rehab.
I went through, like, a million different detoxes. I don't know how many times. I lost count. Every time we would go on tour, I would kick. Every time. I'd check into the place for a week to get cleaned up, a private hospital or facility. They'd give you pills and shit—a supervised detox, not a blood transfusion; that's something else. This was a method of rapid detox developed by the Israelis, I think. Rapid, rapid detox. It leaves you feeling like a Mack truck hit you. Beaten, bloodied, and boiled. Sickened, drained, unable to feel—it was a feeling like you can't imagine being able to feel any emotions ever again. No sadness, no excitement, no highs, no lows. Nothing. You're wondering when you'll be able to feel comfort again, physical comfort even. That's why it's so difficult to kick. Your pleasure receptors are so fried that your brain has no ability to feel any pleasure on its own. You're so depressed. It makes you want to get high.
You want to kick. But in a sense, kicking to me was always just kind of a way to prepare your body to be able to experience that first fix again. I mean, there are always those noble intentions in the beginning, but ultimately that's all it ever was...back then, at least. Back then it was, like, too little too late, you know, a little half-assed pass at getting clean, always at the request of others, at the request of family members, the manager, whoever. At some point it just becomes, you know, how to get them off your back. Because I never wanted to quit. *Never*. I saw narcotics as something I needed in order to function. I believed at the time that I was born with a chemical deficiency. Which I was. I was totally correct. But at the time, I believed I was born with this *particular* chemical deficiency that only opiates could fulfill. My basic thought was: How the hell can all you people want to keep me away from the one particular medicine that could keep me from blowing my head off?

I have this dark place. It's a place of loneliness. It's a place of complete shame and self-hatred, where I deserve to feel all alone because I'm the one who has caused me to feel the pain that I feel, the loneliness and the sorrow that I feel. And I feel like I deserve to feel that way.

I know where it comes from. It comes from my parents divorcing, you know, abandonment and all that. And it also comes from a lot of guilt and shame. And I guess feeling that you caused that feeling yourself becomes its own self-perpetuating thing; it takes on a life of its own.
The first tour I ever did strung out was to support my solo album in 1998. It was misery. Absolute misery. I tried to take a stash. But you can never have enough dope on the road. There were times when I had it FedExed. A couple of times I had to fly my dealer out to meet me. But most of the time I just got in a taxi, you know, and went out looking.

Copping in a strange city—partly it's an adventure, but mostly it's just, I don't know, very expensive, very problematic, nerve-racking. You're a walking target. You get in a cab and you go look for the hookers and the freaks, or you ask the driver, you know, "Where's the bad part of the city?" and they'd take you. The worst places were, like, Chicago—Cabrini Green. Miami. Atlanta. New Orleans. You're going into an unfamiliar ghetto. You're really, really white.

Probably the worst place was Washington, D.C. That's where I had my worst situation happen. I'd bought on one corner, on one side of the street, and this guy on the other side of the street starts screaming at me, like, "Get your skinny ass over here, white boy, and buy from me." So I went over there, and I gave him money, and he pulled out a gun and stuck it in my chest. The barrel was hard. Really hard. And it was like, This guy is really gonna shoot me! It was fucked-up. He had these yellow, bloodshot eyes. And he fucking took my money and then he says, "Get the fuck out of here, white boy. Run!"

Dude, I fucking ran. And then some guy tripped me and I went down on the ground. Really hard, like, splat. Like a side of beef. I skinned my knees hard on the concrete. I was all fucked-up.

After a probation violation in '99, I was sentenced to a year in a county-jail recovery center in
East L.A. I did five months. It was very depressing, very lonely.

I was in over Christmas. It was rough. I got a few guys together. One of them was a hardcore Nazi gang member with white-power swastikas all over his body. And two of them were Crips, you know, black guys from the gang; one of them had killed probably six people in his life. I got these guys together and formed a quartet. I had always sung in choirs. Even when it was something to be laughed at or made fun of, you know, in school. And I was always the kid who was picked at the Christmas concert to sing the solo, you know, while the other kids snickered in the front few rows.

So I taught these guys a bunch of Christmas carols with harmonies and everything. We sang to the eighty inmates who were in our dorm and to the sheriff’s deputies and to our counselors. There was something special going on there—an ability for people to break past the normal barriers and closed-mindedness that they had grown up with. It was cool to show the fuckin' sheriff's deputies that we had something good in us, you know what I mean? It sort of shocked them to see us singing so sweet and in harmony. It was a great sort of passive-aggressive way to say fuck you.

**Mary and I** officially got engaged from jail. She visited me every weekend. We wrote letters to each other every day, and it allowed us to find a whole new level of intimacy that might not have existed. She was now clean as well, and we planned to start a family.

After I was released, we got married. The first year of sobriety out of jail was great. Our life was
great, but I always had a problem feeling like an outsider in "the program." Our son was born November 19, 2000. On the day after, I relapsed on prescription pain pills I’d gotten following dental surgery. The next three years were very rocky, with high highs and low lows. My daughter, Lucy, was born July 20, 2002, but Mary filed for divorce in September. It was all of this that got me where I am today. The prospect of losing my wife and my children changed everything.

Having children showed me a whole different kind of love that I had never known. It was something that had always been missing. Complete love. I would die for them. But I could not get clean for them. First, I would have to know loneliness. Emptiness. Solitude. Complete desperation and disgust with who I had become and who I wasn't—a father, a husband. Myself.

Reality came screaming back because I started asking for it. And God helped a little in the form of a black-and-white police car [Weiland's arrest in May 2003 for heroin and cocaine possession and again in October for DUI]. I dropped the scum I was bottom-feeding with, decided to join a band with guys whose new lives I admired (they used to be losers, too), and I decided to man up. It was the hardest thing I ever did. Easy to stop killing myself, but trying to find who I am in order to find my wife and kids again, well, that was like walking through a maze blindfolded; every time I felt I was getting close to them, I would suddenly get hit in the gut with a bat.

It took a year. My family is the most beautiful thing in my life beyond anything else, even music. But it took loving them before I could love myself.
The great thing about kids is the immediate gratification. As soon as I get home from touring, my wife and kids become my life. There is nothing sweeter. I get up with my kids every morning. I get them breakfast right away, and then I step outside to have my coffee and my cigarettes, 'cause I really am not good at talking to anybody until I've had a cup of coffee and a couple of cigarettes. But as soon as I've had my coffee and cigarettes, I'm like, All right! Let's go! What do you wanna do today, kids?

Right now, for the first time in my life, I'm finally happy. I don't think anymore about getting high. I've struggled with it for so long. I've gone through kicking so many times, I've been on and off—it's just played out, you know?

I'm finished avoiding myself.

*This story originally appeared in the April 2005 issue.*
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