

# *Cedrick*



*The Best Stuff  
ever written  
about  
Rotten Kids*

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**Wise words from the mouths of  
fools do oft themselves belie ...**

# The Best Stuff Ever Written about Rotten Kids

**By Cedrick of Toxteth, S.F.A., CYC (Pending)**

**(With the reluctant collaboration of  
Gerry Fewster, Ph.D.)**

**CYC-Net Press**

**The Best Stuff ever written about Rotten Kids**

Cedrick of Toxteth (with Gerry Fewster)

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# The Author

Among those who have actually met Master Cedrick of Toxteth, many regard him to be a lay-about, a wastrel, a ne'er-do-well, a philanderer and a fool. Rather than be perturbed by such labels, he has come to value them as valid descriptions of his beloved sense of self and chosen way of life. From this solid foundation he has spent the last ten years systematically acquiring, practicing and exhibiting all the symptoms currently listed in the DSM V in order to show how the real pathology lies in the minds of the classifiers rather than the behavior of the classified.



The bi-product of a back stage quickie between an Italian Tenor and a Scottish Illusionist, he was raised by a brotherhood of Frisbetarian Monks at the Toxteth Home for Undesirable Children in Liverpool, U.K. Under the devoted tutelage of Father Divine, he learned to read, write, sing, dance, and share the odd laugh with the Almighty. Within the company of his fellow undesirables he became a star performer.

For the past twenty years Cedrick has been meddling around in the only 'profession' that has ever made any sense to him – Child & Youth Care. Unfortunately the authorities of this discipline haven't always made sense of him, although he did receive an honorary certificate from the Black Creek CYC Association for his offensive



incursions behind enemy lines. As a man of letters, he has written piles of nonsense and was a regular columnist with Relational Child & Youth Care Practice. He is currently President of the Thorngumbald Malt Whiskey Society.

*If you wish to contact Cedrick, for whatever reason, he can be reached through his long-suffering editor at:  
fewster@shaw.ca or info@cyc-net.org*

# Foreword

The early issues of the journal *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice* (and, more recently, *CYC-Online*) have included a refreshing, irreverent, tell-it-like-it-is series by one “Cedrick” who had regaled readers for some years with his outpourings, some topical and critical, others laugh-out-loud funny, clearly modelled on his thinking and experiences in child and youth care.

Working in this field, all of us can dredge up stories, experiences, opinions, illustrations, from our past or present, which bear repeating. Few are as entertaining – and provocative – as this too-short collection from Cedrick.

Pity. We live and work in this profession which brings us into daily contact with remarkable human events which stir our thoughts, our hearts, or our funny bones. Some of these encourage us to brush up our awareness, our knowledge and skills, and all areas of our practice. Others just remind us of our humanness and of the privileges we enjoy in simply sharing in the the lives of young people and their families and neighbourhoods – the puzzles, hurts, contradictions, struggles, challenges, successes ... and the laughs.

Often enough, child and youth care workers are troubled by the egg on their faces. This small book will probably not remove the egg, but it will add some healthy laughs and smiles. Enjoy it.

Brian Gannon

# Acknowledgments

According to my venereal editor, books written by nice people about doing good things should contain at least one page of ‘acknowledgments. This means that the author thinks the work is so bloody brilliant that a touch of humility can be insinuated by referring to the influence or support of insignificant others. It’s also an opportunity for the self-indulgent scribe to seek future considerations from potential benefactors. So, in accordance with his lordship’s wishes, I offer the following codswallop for your enlightenment. If you don’t give a monkey’s toss about all this, please feel free to flick the page and immerse yourself in the brilliance without the preliminary bullshit.

First and foremost, I’ll acknowledge ‘uncle’ George who set me off on my illustrious career by calling me a “filthy little freak” for peeing in his lunch box. Later he took to calling me “the devil boy” after I nabbed the pictures he hid in the coal shed and handed them over to Father O’Malley for the price of three Hail Marys. After a rare old snot- fight in the alehouse, my mother gave him the boot and brought in uncle Bob who I choose not to acknowledge because he wanted me to do naughty things. He was followed by many other unmentionables.

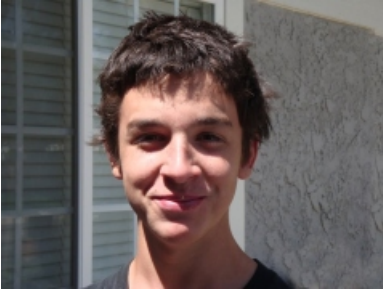
My grade-one teacher Miss Partridge, on the other hand, is very mentionable. Having been bottle-fed, followed by endless bowls of pre-digested Pablum, I developed this obsessive fascination with the mysterious little mounds she kept in her blouse. The first time she leaned over my desk, I discovered a sense of purpose that

remains to this very day. The objects of my obsession where nothing less than vanilla cream puffs topped with tantalizing sand coloured soothers. From that point on, I became a very attentive learner and conjured up many ways to attract her dedicated attention. In my mother's words, I was intent on becoming "a manipulative little sod."

I hereby acknowledge Mr. Charlie Farfort, a psychiatric social worker trained at the infamous Tavistock Clinic. His suggestion that my "trickery and disobedience probably arose from an unresolved Oedipal Complex due to my father's decision to beat it back to Italy and mother's subsequent disdain for anybody wearing testicles.

This theory was a fertile source of endlessss amusement to my old chum Little Richard (a.k.a. 'Big Dick') Weatherspoon whose testicles were the envy of our institutional community. But I prefer to acknowledge him for his obdurate belief that there's nothing in our insane illusions of life that can't be laughed at. It's true that much of his humor was lavatorial, for which he invented the disciplines of "Pissology" and "Shitography" but his genius also took him to the highest levels of divine absurdity. In all the years we guffawed together, 'Willy' Weatherspoon never told a single joke – and if that's not worthy of acknowledgement, give me another punch line.

Last, and by all means least, I hereby acknowledge my parents Gloria and (we think) Giovanni. Without them this book would certainly not have been written. May the good Lord have mercy on their souls.



## Some Nasty Thoughts About Kids

### EDITOR'S NOTE

In this first section, the 'author' uses broad brushstrokes to present a totally incoherent picture of what's happening for kids in today's world. If you have never read this 'writer's' stuff before you may be offended by his total disregard for the accepted standards of decency and literacy. Do with it what you will, but please do not hold the editor responsible. If you had seen the original scrawl, you would have only the highest regard for his ingenuity and perseverance. If you manage to struggle through this section, you may wish to seek help from a qualified psychotherapist. If you enjoy it, you are beyond help.

**Gerry Fewster**





## **PART ONE**

# Chapter 1

## **Everything You Never Wanted to Know about Being Stupid**

Just because you're a kid doesn't mean you're stupid. If your parents or teachers think you are, they're probably pissed-off because you're not following their program. Now, in my book, that might make you courageous, stubborn, brilliant, misinformed or misunderstood, but to them, you're simply stupid. Ignore their demands or tell them to go to hell and there'll be other words, like 'defiant,' 'disruptive' or 'devious', heading your way. They may say they still love you, even throw in a trip to Disneyland for good measure, but stick to your guns and the only trips will be to your room, if you still have one. You may wonder how they can really love you if they don't know what you think and how you feel, but "love" is a word with many meanings, just like "stupid".

But be prepared. If you continue to challenge the

regime the experts will come sniffing around and the bullshit will get even deeper. You'll become a 'client' for people called "counselors" who'll use all kinds of trickery to throw you off course. They may say they're interested in your thoughts and feelings but what they really want is to get you into line with the "good" kids. Learn how to play their game and you might come out unscathed, but tell them to fuck off and you're back in the snake pit. Next come the Shrinks with their handbook of phony disorders and diseases. Before you can learn to say "psycho-pathogenic mega colon," you'll be diagnosed, drugged and duped into becoming a 'patient'. No longer responsible for your stupidity, your critics will back off and those little pink pills will seem to whisk your troubles away like a hit of Ecstasy. Life will become easier. Your teachers will welcome you back into the classroom and your parents will smile at you again. That trip to Disneyland is back on the schedule and when those old troubles begin to bubble up again, as they surely will, there'll always be more pills and the odd injection to keep them at bay. So now you can just go on to become what they wanted you to be in the first place – attentive, compliant, successful, and incurably stupid.

What really pisses *me* off is that so many adults have this idea that kids need to be told everything from the get-go, like the difference between right and wrong. This doesn't mean they'll tell you everything you want to know. Some things you're not supposed to know because they think you're too young to understand. But most of the interesting stuff is still missing because they don't know about it themselves. They'll never admit this because folks who don't know about interesting things are called "ignorant" (an adult word meaning 'stupid'). So the message is clear – pretending to know what you don't

know is a very important part of growing up. You don't have to be smart to look smart – just make sure you don't end up looking ignorant.

Something you probably don't know is that one of the smartest people on the planet, a guy called Dalai Lama, said that all kids are born knowing more than their parents. Most parents don't know he said this, and those that do tend to keep it to themselves because they don't like the idea, or more likely, they haven't two clues what he's talking about. Either way, they wouldn't want *you* to know. You see, Dalai is a rather strange man and most people don't want to be associated with some weirdo in a red robe that likes to sit around thinking about life, rather than just getting a real job like a normal human being. It's true that some strange people can become very rich and famous, but most are either laughed at or locked up. There are all kinds of words for these poor suckers.

Your parents don't want you to be strange. They want you to follow in their footsteps, believe what they believe and make sure you have all the things they always wanted but never had, like being a doctor with a big house in Snobsville. According to the experts, this is what it means to be a 'good parent' and, if you stay with the program and make them proud, everyone will call you a "good kid." Then, if all goes according to plan, you'll end up wearing the smug smile that identifies you as the successful product of a happy family. And, should the smile fade, as it undoubtedly should, you'll still have all the dough you need to rent the best Shrink in town and paint it back on. You may never know who you really are, but you won't be a loser and you'll never let down those wonderful folks back home who sacrificed everything to make you a success.

If you want to test your parents, ask them to tell you



what the Dalai Lama said about kids and then check out his Blog, “Hello, This is the Dalai Lama Speaking”. This won’t only help you to understand your parents better, it will also remind you to always check out information from at least two independent sources. The word ‘independent’ is very important. Kids can be easily conned into believing poppycock just because Mom and Dad, and everybody down the street, is saying the same thing. Millions of flies might agree that doggy-poo is a good thing, but that doesn’t mean it’s good for you, now does it? Don’t be fooled, dog shit is bad for you, even if it’s been dished out by dotting parents and dedicated teachers. You don’t even have to check this out, you just know. I think this is probably what the Dalai Lama was getting at.

Well I’m not like the Dalai Lama. I can’t keep saying really deep things that nobody wants to hear or understand. But I can say things that your parents and teachers might not say, whatever their reasons.

For example, let me tell you the biggest con job of them all. The world you were born into is one unholy mess. Your parents, grandparents and all who went before have fucked things up so badly that there’s hardly anything worth hanging on to. If they tell you otherwise, just smile and listen carefully. It’s never too early to suss



out the smell of bullshit. Just don't make any commitments. This is your time for exploring options, not for collecting obligations. If you buy into the claptrap, you'll be slotted into a world in which everybody is competing with everybody else for everything imaginable – power, status, sex, money, trophies, oil, real estate, trees, school grades and, of course, sneakers. I could go on, but you get the point. If your devoted advisors have their way, you'll even be led to believe that you must compete for your freedom because there's only so much to be had. Well you don't need Uncle Dalai to tell you what a pile of doggy-poo that is.

The good news is that no matter how much they grind you down, you can still be free on the inside. So *just do it*, even if you don't have the right sneakers. Give your imagination a chance to roam and you can dream up a much better world than the one they want you to enlist in. Just don't tell them about it. If you do, they'll call you "childish" and end up tagging you as an idiot. You must understand that any threat to their ambitions and beliefs scares the crap out of them – even if it comes from kids. When it comes from competing adults, they would rather slaughter each other than face the possibility that what they've always believed is a crock.

As long as you're a kid the odds are against you, so stay cool. Play as much as possible, it will help you to experiment with your ideas. If they want to show you how to play, go along for the ride, but keep having fun in your own way whether they like it or not (you can still become a ballet dancer or play pro-football if that's what you really, really want). Read the books you like, even if you have to hide them in your secret place. And when you're imprisoned in school, listen to what they have to say – you'll find some good stuff in among the garbage.

Remember, it's not about what they want you to know, but what you're interested in knowing, so create your own program and stay with it. If you get trapped in the mindless competition for grades, medals and scholarships, all is lost. Oh, and one more thing – watch out for the guilt trips. You are not a 'bad' person bound for Hell because you're not able to please Mommy, Daddy, Pastor Joseph or Mr. Codswallop at Pewk Bay Elementary. On the inside, your goodness is beyond question.

Maybe you think I'm just dissing your parents, teachers and all those helpful experts, so let me say a couple of things on their behalf. They don't mean to be against you. In fact most of them are convinced they're acting in your best interests. The trouble is they're stuck with what was shoveled out to them and will probably cling onto to it even as the world crumbles around them. If you blame them, ignore them, or hit back in anger you'll be just as stuck in your own bullshit as they are in theirs. But if you're respectful, kind and thoughtful, you could break the deadlock. Who knows, you might even help them to get along with each other. Learn to say your real yes's and no's, even if they don't give a tinker's-toss – it's great practice for when your time comes around, as it certainly will. Then, when it's your turn to call the shots, you'll have everything you need to have fun and create a better world along the way.

You may decide to toss-out everything I've said and that's just fine, as long as it's your opinion and not someone else's. I may be a Fool, but I'm certainly not stupid.

# Chapter 2

## **Pull the Lever Billy, the Kids Are Revolting**



The other day my favorite tabloid ran yet another rant about how today's kids are "undisciplined, disrespectful, demanding, lazy, uncommitted, resistant and aggressively entitled." Fair enough. Take a stroll through the shopping malls or high school precincts and it's there for all to see. But, having made this perfectly rational observation, editor

William (Billy) Bombast spews out a familiar and totally irrational solution. In a nutshell, he argues that we should bring back the child rearing methods that made him what he is today (i.e. a self-righteous blowhard who thinks the relationship between cause and effect is an infinitely negotiable arrangement). A world full of Bombasts might be fun for a while, but definitely 'unsustainable'. Silly Billy.

When it comes to logic, I'm the last person to shout the odds. But it doesn't take a genius to figure out that if A causes B, when you really want C, you put the boot to A and take a shot at something else. Even laboratory rats know this. When their strategically placed little lever produces an electric shock rather than a food pellet, they catch on very quickly. First they defecate, then they shift into 'learned helplessness' and, unless the 'Great Experimenter' changes the program, they finally die of starvation. Yet, even in the throes of their miserable demise, nobody jumps up and yells, "Never mind the shit and the pain lads, just keep pressing, we're bound to get a pellet someday."

To be fair, Billy isn't alone. This evangelical brand of simplistic reasoning runs rampant in the world kids are destined to inherit. Take the global financial meltdown for example. We all know what caused it – greed. And we all know who led the way – the bankers. So what do our leaders do? They hand over whatever chips we have left to the Wall St. Boys so they can keep pulling on the same levers until the kitty runs dry. Brilliant! And what about the environmental crisis? How did we get conned into believing that power-addicted politicians, profit-seeking corporations and soul-less technocrats will become our ecological saviors if we recycle our Coke bottles and turn our lawns into cabbage patches? And what about the twisted logic of the pulpit-prattlers who tell us that spiritual harmony will prevail if we keep seeing off the rabble in the other camps? Perhaps we should learn from the rats and shit ourselves before making the next move.

Anyway, back to Billy the Kid ...

Pampered, over-indulged and spoilt rotten? Oh no ... not our Little Willy (a name disparagingly bestowed upon him at birth by his father, Big Willy). From the get-go he

was taught to obey his parents, respect his elders, listen to his teachers and mow the neighbor's lawn every Saturday. If he'd been a good boy all week, Big Willy would unlock the cookie safe after church on Sunday. Oh how he looked forward to munching on one of mommy's special goatmeal crumbles while they sat around the kitchen table listening to Lawrence the Whelk on the old steam radio. But, if his evaluation was below par, the cookie safe would remain locked and he would be dispatched to his room to "think," while the distant strains of *Happy Days are Here Again* drifted up from the kitchen. He understood that the things he longed for must be earned, so he spent his confinement scribbling out the promises that would earn his release. But, even his best intentions would go awry sometimes. Then there would be spontaneous punishments and deprivations, thoughtfully designed to fit the crime. Worst of all were the delayed interventions following the dreaded "wait until your father gets home" exhortation. Yet, even the harshest penalties, like a good thrashing, turned out to be valuable lessons in teaching Bronco Billy how to ride high in the saddle, become a credit to his family and an upstanding servant of the community. So, in the end, it was all good.

Of course these are only glimpses of the traditional family values our eminent editor would like to bring back into circulation but I'm sure you get the point. You may consider his cherished reflections to be worn out relics of a bye-gone age, which of course they are. But take a closer look. Much of what Billy is advocating can still be found in residential care programs for wayward kids from Athabasca to Alabama. The prescriptions may be more 'professional', but the intentions and practices are essentially the same as those espoused by none other than Big Willy himself. Ah yes, the good old lever has

many disguises.

My point is that what Billy proposes is not the solution but the root of the problem. What he learned from his own parents he passed on to his three kids – one sports reporter, one alcoholic and one corporate lawyer (make that two alcoholics). Papa was never fully satisfied with how his protégées turned out, but the wheels really fell off when they tried to dish out the same crap to their own disenchanted offspring. Times had changed and families were no longer tightly knit arrangements in which Daddy knows best, Mommy does the cooking and the kids fall obediently into line. One by one, the grandchildren challenged the rules with their attachment disorders, oppositional defiance, hyperactivity, adolescent adjustment reactions, clinical depression and just plain belligerence. The exception was dear little Millie who tried so hard to please everybody until she presented a classic case of anorexia nervosa at the age of fourteen. By that time the sports reporter and the lawyer had given up on family life in favor of more meaningful relationships and Billy was left to account for the shambles.

Poor old Billy, the patriarch of the Bombasts. No wonder he took to his desk to carve out his tirades against entitled kids, gutless parents and impotent teachers. Given what he'd been taught, no wonder he screamed out for the good old days of Family Values when discipline, respect and obedience were the order of the day. If only he could get his hands on that well trusted lever, he would pull it until his eyes boggled and his long johns vanished up his ass.

But let's not be too hard on the old goat pounding out his exasperation on his beloved Underwood. At least he has a cause to feel passionate about; which is more than

you can say about the spineless, wishy-washy, brigade that buy off their kids with Nikes under the guise of progressive and permissive parenting. Not to mention the misdirected martyrs who are prepared to sacrifice their own lives in the service of their entitled little psychos. These are the folks that really piss Billy off, and for good reason. They're not trying out new levers, they're simply pulling his old one in the opposite direction. Either way, the outcomes are identical. What Billy has to offer may be classified as child abuse but this feeble alternative is nothing short of child neglect. And, therein lies the crux of the problem.

At the heart of the matter, children don't come into this world as monsters that need to be tamed and battered into submission. Nor do they expect to be the smothered by doting adults who have no lives of their own. Sure kids have needs – they want to be loved, fed and cared for, but this is no sacrifice – it's simply a case of being human.

But these are not the most critical areas of neglect. What Billy and his liberal antagonists have in common is they don't know how to live together as caring and compassionate human beings. They either live off each other, or for each other, hiding behind their cocked-up roles and phony identities. So how the hell can they be expected to relate to children who want to be seen, heard and cared for as they struggle to create lives of their own? What they don't want is to be shackled and coerced into living through the Gospel according to King Billy or eternally indebted to parents who have given up their own lives for the sake of their kids. And, as sure as God made little scorpions, they don't want to be abandoned to watch T.V. , play video games, smoke weed and have sex in the name of fun or freedom.



So what do kids really, really want? Well, notwithstanding Billy's rants and the festering mounds of psychological bullshit, let me offer some suggestions from a professional idiot:

They want parents who will sing and dance with them, without demanding a performance.

They want teachers who will respond to their curiosity, without telling them what to think.

They want counselors who will encourage them to create possibilities, without telling them what to do.

They want guides who will help them find their way, without expecting them to become mindless disciples.

They want coaches who will teach them the skills they need for the choices they want to make.

And they want to know that, whatever is going on in this crazy world, they have the right and the resources to live in harmony with others and with the planet that cries out for their attention.

These simple notions may never find their way into the parenting manuals, psychology texts or Billy's perennial rants but, in the mind of a fool, they offer a few alternative levers that might be worth the odd pull. Meanwhile, what's wrong with having a generation of kids who are "undisciplined, disrespectful, demanding, lazy uncommitted, resistant and aggressively entitled"?



Would you rather have a pathetic bunch of passive pat-sies who shit their pants and sink into 'learned helplessness'? Carry on I say.

# Chapter 3

## Children and the Hidden Manifesto

As a professional crackpot, unfettered by morality or social conscience, almost anything can be a cause for celebration. So I don't mind whooping it up with anyone offering a few free scoops, whatever their reason. For example, I think football (i.e. soccer) was designed to bore the balls off buffalos but, as an unemployed Aroma Therapist living on Merseyside, I was always ready to join the lads in the Alehouse whenever Liverpool F. C. won another trophy. For them it was a moment to be cherished – a fleeting opportunity to sing their beloved anthems and brag about something in their otherwise repressed and depressing lives. For me it was simply an excuse for a skin full of ale and a chance to be slightly obnoxious.

And so it was a month or so ago when I hooked up with a group of delirious Democrats bent on celebrating another season of Obamarama. Now politics isn't really my poke either, but even I can see the stupidity of giving more power to the financial and corporate warthogs, so I was ready for the big shindig at Bubba Dumbowski's place.

The inauguration ceremony was unabashed theatre crammed with patriotic anthems and, despite being an "alien," I raised my voice with the best of them. There were cheers all round when the re-elected President spoke about the need for environmental management,

healthcare, gun control and inviting our gay brothers and sisters back into the dysfunctional human family. Sure this was all about the mighty U. S. of A, but when I led the group in a rousing rendition of “You’ll Never Walk Alone” (The revered anthem of Liverpool F. C. ) we, the people, became as one.

But, a week or so later, when we resumed our festivities at Bubba’s to watch the State of the Union address, my enthusiasm waned. All that crap about the middle class began to stick in my craw. Then, when El Presidento went on about education, it dawned on me that, behind the rhetoric of human values, we are still stuck with that insidious cliché, “It’s the economy, stupid.”

This triggered the only legitimate cause I fess up to – attacking the repressive agenda we are urged to impose on our kids in maintaining the status quo. Even with a rejuvenated bunch of mindless middle class consumers and jobs for all, the status quo sucks and our primary agenda should be to use our educational resources to liberate our kids from its clutches. As it is, we’ve been conned into believing that education should be a nationwide system of job training designed to serve the needs of the self-serving corporate leaches and their mindless political toadies. From their perspective, law enforcement, prisons, insane asylums, ‘re-education’ institutions and workhouses are all potential job-creation options. A pox on them all, I say.

As my fellow revellers continued to celebrate the beginning of a new era, my own spirit sank into a bottomless bog. On the Greyhound Limo back to the Ruby Dubb Doss House, I amused myself by scribbling the hidden manifesto that had taken me from frivolity to foreboding after only one mug of Dumbowski’s best

domestic champagne. Having been informed by reliable White House sources that Mr. Obama likes to read this column in the Oval Office Bog (Rest Room), I would like to share with you, the dedicated readers of CYC On-Line, the document that will never be, and never should be, made public.

### **Bringing the class back into the classroom**

Let it be known that, in accordance with the Presidential State of the (Trade) Union address, *we the people* will take immediate steps to re-establish our rightful place as the world leader in Industry & Commerce, and all other matters deemed to be capitalistic, competitive or just plain cool.

Let it be known that, to this end, *we the people* will create a new and prosperous middle class capable of driving our internal economy to infinite levels of expansion through ever-increasing levels of consumerism in the pursuit of individual happiness and corporate wealth. We'll deal with the lower class next time around.



Let it be known that the old conservative ‘Trickle-Down’ economic dogma of the Reagan/Thatcher era has been officially replaced by the new liberal “Make it Pour-Down” philosophy of the current administration. May it pour down on those most in need – *we the people*. Let us not forget that most children will become *people* some day.

Let it be known that the new spirit of scientific, technological and entrepreneurial advancement will inspire our children to find jobs commensurate with their scientific and managerial talents and aspirations. For children who are prepared to work hard, the ultimate reward will be jobs, jobs and more jobs. Then they will have the bucks to send their own kids to college.

Let it be known that, wherever possible, children will be enrolled in state monitored pre-school programs as soon as they have moved through that awkward infantile stage of wanting everything their own way. The emphasis will be upon individual goals and measurable levels of achievement. State funded residential treatment programs for adolescent adjustment reactions will be established in every State.

Let it be known that, given the above, the following principles and practices shall be adopted by all who raise, teach or otherwise influence the children of this diminishingly green and potentially prosperous land:

1. Couples planning to have children must be gainfully employed and committed to family values. They should have either achieved, or be in the process of achieving, middle-class status at the time of application.

2. *Research shows* that children who experience the struggle of birth without assistance become the most highly motivated achievers. For this reason, medical inductions and C-Section deliveries will only be performed for middle and upper class mothers at the request of their lawyers.

3. *Research shows* that children begin learning immediately after conception. For this reason, state-assisted

early childhood education programs will train expectant parents in the latest data-input techniques. All prospective parents will be provided with the manual “Learning in the Classwomb” free of charge. Increased family allowances will be made available where newborns are able to recite the two-times table within three days following birth (n. b. 421 Chinese babies have already demonstrated this potential on the abacus).

4. *Research shows* that the first three years of life are critical in the development of a child’s sense of self and future aspirations. For this reason, parents will be encouraged to focus upon rewarding all the good stuff and ignoring (or punishing) all that childish nonsense kids get into when their real education is neglected. Self esteem that isn’t based on accomplishment is no more than self-deception.

5. *Research shows* that children who have been adequately prepared for pre-school will have abandoned childish fantasies and refuse to waste time messing around with the other kids. Early achievers who have mastered their number facts and are thinking in a logical and scientific manner are ready to engage in play activities that emphasize discipline and healthy competition.

6. *Research shows* that pre-schooled kids enter grade school with a distinct advantage. They know how to sit in rows and repeat in unison whatever they’ve just been told. This makes it possible for teachers to control educational inputs, sort out the stars from the stragglers and establish differentiated levels of competition. The sooner children know whether they are going to become scientists, administrators, accountants, entrepreneurs or

security guards, the more they can become focussed on the job at hand and look forward to the job ahead. In this way, every child can experience success and feel good about himself (or even herself). Even a delivery boy (no girls here) can find his way into the middle class by hiring other delivery boys when the time comes.

7. Teachers are there to teach the curriculum approved by the state authorities and selected corporate sponsors. Their remuneration and status will be based upon measurable educational outcomes. Those mush-peddlers who think of themselves as ‘facilitators’ will be redirected into other more suitable work in Government Service or on the Corporate parking lots. This is compatible with our motto – “Jobs for all, regardless of race, competence and sexual orientation.”

8. The afore-mentioned curricula should be geared to the philosophy and objectives stated in the New Manifesto. To this end, the following practices shall apply:

1. Pre-schoolers should not be distracted from reality with fairy tales and sandboxes. These archaic forms will be replaced by stories of real-life heroes (e.g. Bill Gates, Lee Iacocca and Donald Trump) and pre-designed learning kits (e. g. Mattel’s *Magic Micro-Lab*, Playtime’s *Build Your Own Drone* and Tinkertoy’s *How to Catheterize Your Teddy*).

2. Science, mathematics, technology and business administration are what real education is about. Creative teachers will know how to incorporate all the other stuff into the prescribed curriculum. For example, drafting and technical drawing are the purest form

of artistic design. In music, computers can crank out sound variations that Mozart could never have imagined. And, when it comes to drama, acting out the roles being played out in the theatre of corporate life contains unlimited learning and diagnostic potentials.

3. There shall be no school drop-outs or kick-outs. Teachers of 'Special Needs' students will be trained to prescribe and dispense psychotropic medication as appropriate, thereby reducing the staggering costs of our healthcare system. Special Needs kids who want to waste their lives dancing, painting pictures or playing with words will be removed from the mainstream and taught how to market their products without state assistance. Statutory rewards such as pocket-money and trips to Disneyland will not be made available for recalcitrant offspring who refuse to participate in creating the new tomorrow. Children who persistently fail to meet the grade will be grouped according to their particular disability and given the benefit of differential treatment administered by duly qualified remedial practitioners.

4. Parents with middle-class status, or above, will be permitted to enrol their children in state-licensed private schools (see section 47.1). These institutions will be required to comply with all of the above with special dispensations for those paying an annual licence fee in excess of twelve million dollars.





*(At this point in my scribbling, I was distracted by two adolescent pillocks sitting on the other side of the bus. Obviously bored and incapable of creating their own entertainment, they decided that I should be the object of their amusement. It took the rest of journey for me to put them in their place. "Good luck Mr. Obama" I said as they sank silently back into their own stupidity. )*

Don't get me wrong, I think the current President of the United States is a class act. I can't imagine what it must be like to juggle such an array of conflicting interests in presiding over the most powerful and forward-looking nation on the planet. But, for my money, education and compromise don't mix. If we still have a chance to reclaim our collective relationship with Grandmother Earth, this is the arena in which we, *the people*, can create a future based upon the human values that Mr. Obama so passionately and eloquently articulates. For me this means that the overriding educational goal should be to provide children with opportunities to explore and express their own innate humanity; to create relationships that have meaning and substance and to learn how to collaborate with others in meeting the greatest challenges we have ever faced.

Such principles call for a very different manifesto from the one I scribbled on my fifty-two minute bus ride. The challenge does not begin with our kids. Whether they are born in Chicago or Beijing, they already possess the basic ingredients to change the world. It is we, *the people*, who must change, not so much in our thinking but in our way of being with ourselves, each other and ultimately, our children. In other words, we need to re-educate ourselves before we can invite our kids to join the party.

As for me, I'm fully recovered from my Cynical Depression and ready for the next festive occasion (telephone number on request).



# Chapter 4

## **This Be the “F” Word**

When it comes to getting kiddy-poops to go beddy-byes, you can forget all that mush about ‘Brahms Lullaby’ and “Rock-a-Bye Baby”. Now the top selling parenting book in North America has turned Wee Willy Winkie into Attila the Hun with its catchy child-centered title, “Go the Fuck to Sleep.” Despite the questionable grammar, we finally have a clear and direct message that even the most manipulative bedtime malingerer can be taught to understand. So, let’s hear it for Mom and Dad who can now look forward to undisrupted evenings lost in conjugal bliss or watching “Dancing With the Stars”.

According to the cooing reviews, the brilliance of this literary gem is that it removes the guilt from all those repressed parents who have secretly harbored the unthinkable thought that their kids can be a pain in the ass. Now you might think this an ambitious claim for such a piddling little publication, but I believe it strikes an even deeper and more resonant chord. My own extensive research suggests that the message offers respite for all the downtrodden victims of western morality who remain convinced that parents who don’t like their kids will be condemned to an eternity washing shitty diapers in the River Styx.

Admittedly, my participant-observer methodology and anecdotal data may not suit the statistical brigade, but my findings are nonetheless compelling. For example,

consider the following exchange (*and my insightful interpretations*) recorded in our local bookstore. “Oh look at this filth Elmer. Isn’t it disgusting?” (*Oh dear Lord, do they speaketh the truth in the language of Satan?*).

“Disgraceful Eleanor. This place should be closed down for peddling obscenity.” (*I’ll pick up a copy tomorrow and give it to Miss Fanny after Sunday School. I can’t wait to see that sweet blush of innocence*).

Empirical validity aside, you may be asking yourself how such a corny little picture book with its silly little verses has managed to hit the jackpot? Well, the answer is quite simple. Take out the word “fuck” and this spoof of a parenting manual becomes just another feeble attempt to insinuate a spot of levity into the miserable lives of confused, over-stressed, disillusioned and generally incompetent parents. Ah yes folks, there are many out there, but without the magic word, this piece of heresy would be left to languish on the ‘would-be humor’ shelves of struggling bookstores everywhere. Isn’t it incredible how one of the most commonly used words in the English language still has the power to attract such attention, while taking yet another swipe at the prattling purists and their tedious “family values”?

At this point, we can only speculate about the long-term effects of liberating parents from their repressive obligations, but you can be sure the mental health industry will be carefully monitoring the situation. Chronic depression, bi-polarity, acute stress, generalized anxiety etc., etc., may well lose their market value necessitating a frantically compiled DSM VI along with a new smorgasbord of chemical products for mindless consumers. For mindful researchers, like myself, it’s a fascinating prospect.

For the more sociologically minded, wouldn't it be ironic if this dramatized version of 'tough love' triggered a return to the "because I say so" style of parenting. So it's back to the good old days when kids were accountable to their parents, rather than the other way around. No more searching for underlying developmental traumas or attachment disorders. To hell with the experts and their psychological codswallop – kids need to be taught to respect and obey the voices of authority without question or complaint.

Could it be that the word that shocked Elmer and Eleanor could actually help to free these impoverished souls from repression and breathe new life into their revered traditional family values? Perhaps they could exercise this newfound freedom by telling their offspring to "get with the program or face the fucking consequences." Yea! Tell is like is Elmo old boy. And what if the same freedom was granted to those of you who choose to work with the really rotten kids? You know the ones I'm talking about. Wouldn't you just love to drop the manipulative claptrap and let the little shits know what you really think and how you intend to deal with their devious shenanigans.

Of course this is all fantasy. We're far too entrenched in Freudian obfuscations and humanistic twaddle to retrieve the native wisdom of yesteryear. The good news is that we can surely expect more from the creators of this notable best seller. Personally, I can't wait for the sequels – "Shut the Fuck Up", "Get the Fuck Out of Here" and "Get Your Own Fucking Breakfast". Then comes the poetic training manual for the most chronically repressed parents, "If You Can't Say Fuck, You're Out of Luck." All these delightful offerings may not change the world but at least they'd be good for a laugh.

So, carry on as you are, shipmates – it may not be long before we hit the iceberg but, at least, can we'll all go down giggling.

p.s. If you have negative feelings about this review, I recommend you read “The Children’s Story” by James Clavell, published in 1981. Now that really is a shocker.



# Chapter 5

## Straight Talk

### *An Address Given by Rev. Haroun (Dick) Entwistle MD at Some Conference*

Today, I want to talk about punishment. That's right, good old fashioned, down-to-earth, get-what-you-deserve punishment. Oh I know you pathetic purveyors of permissive psycho-trash have been led to believe that punishment is cruel, that it inhibits self-expression, lowers self-esteem and, according to the experts, simply doesn't work. But I want to talk about what I call "humane" punishment – a form of intervention that



builds character, teaches fair play, distinguishes between right and wrong, upholds justice and eradicates anti-social behavior. Now this, you must admit, is in the best interest of the child.

You don't need a Ph.D. in psychopathology to know that kids who've never been punished are a pain; they begin by

being naughty and finish up as terrorists. Unable to respect or accept authority, they can never find contentment in their lives. So do you really want these young punks to feel good about themselves? Give me a break.

Kids *should* feel badly about themselves when they've done something wrong. To feel guilt and remorse is to have a conscience and this is all that separates us from maniacs and monkeys. But the conscience is not created by soft words and gentle persuasion, it comes from the experience of knowing exactly what happens when you step over the line. Some of you might feel more "comfortable" with the word "consequences" but let's not beat about the George W. Bush here. We're talking about punishment, pain and simple.

Just for a moment, forget all the ethical and theoretical stuff and look at the importance of punishment in your own life. If you're honest, you'll admit that your nastiest urges and naughtiest thoughts are contained by your fear of the consequences. What happens when you imagine cheating on your unsuspecting spouse, taking that wallet left in the locker room, peeking through that bedroom window, or driving through that red light? If you have a conscience, simply by thinking about such things, you will experience an immediate sense of discomfort – what psychologists refer to as the "classically conditioned anxiety response." Now consider the bad things you've actually done and check in again with your feelings. If you've been humanely punished, you will feel guilt and remorse and this is what restrains you from future transgressions. If you have no such feelings, you're probably a psychopath in need of a lobotomy.

Humane punishment allows us contain the Devil's badness in children and focus on their God-given goodness. By making a clear distinction between right and wrong, we teach the values of respecting property and authority so kids can live with a sense of safety in a civilized and predictable world. But humane punishment isn't like throwing a brick at a chicken; it's actually a



highly sensitive process that systematically quashes evil and reinforces goodness. And this principle is the glue that holds our most revered institutions together, from the Family to the Ministry of Defense. As the philosopher Thomas Hobbes so eloquently reminds us, without such restraints, our lives on this planet would be “nasty, brutish and short.”

Why is it then that so many parents and professionals seem to lack the necessary commitment to punish willful wickedness? Well, the answer is simple – in most cases these pathetic weasels have never been punished themselves. It’s the old story that you can’t give to others what you yourself don’t have.

I’m fortunate to have had a father that cared enough to punish me royally whenever the need arose. Of course, I didn’t like it at the time, and I sometimes rebelled, but he was always there for me, turning the caring screw of parenthood until it finally sunk in that his authority was not something to be messed with. He knew instinctively that the pain should be sharp, immediate and certain. Yet, he was a sensitive man who would often take the time to explain his actions, even though I needed no explanation. On one occasion he said, “Son, this is going to hurt me more that it’s going to hurt you,” and, with that, he slapped himself across the face. He was just that kind of guy. But I always knew exactly what I’d done and, deep down, I understood that he was only trying to help me. On another occasion, I remember seeing tears in his eyes as he let me out of the tool shed and, in that moment, I realized that my pain was also his pain. Later, when I told him that I had fully deserved the discipline, he took me in his arms and we wept together. He knew, as I did, that I had learned to take my punishment like a man and that I was ready to take full responsibility for my own

wickedness. It was a moment when that magical bond between a father and his son was consummated. Thanks to him, I have become the person I am today. Furthermore, I am now able to punish others, though always in their best interests.

But what about those adults, who never had the benefit of such a caring parent? Well the good news is that it's never too late to make up for the deficiencies of a deprived childhood. Adults who wish to rectify this developmental defect within themselves have two possible options.

The most effective method is to find a partner who is competent in the art of humane punishment and negotiate a suitable contract. Marriage is an ideal arrangement, since most of us instinctively go off in search of spouses who can give us what our parents failed to give, whether that be punishment or a trip to Disneyland. Being locked into a life-long commitment means that virtually every aspect of marriage, from sex to painting the guest-room, can become an arena in which punishment can be lovingly given and gratefully received.

But, for those not yet ready to take the vows of Holy Matrimony, there are other possibilities. There may well be a friend, a colleague or, better still, a boss who can be knowingly or unwittingly co-opted into the project. If money is not an issue, there is also wide variety of professional services, many of which will offer money-back



guarantees. But, whatever the choice, the most critical factor is that the punishee must not be allowed to head for the hills when the punisher swings into action – this will simply intensify the problem.

If a suitable relational arrangement cannot be established, the other option is self-punishment. I realize this might conjure up all kinds of repulsive fantasies in your minds but, as a therapeutic strategy, systematic self-punishment is actually a highly disciplined learning process that can be incredibly effective in enhancing guilt and modifying anti-social behavior. However strange it might seem to the uninitiated, those who practice self-punishment generally draw high levels of satisfaction, and even pleasure, from the experience. This is neither the time nor the place to discuss the specific techniques of self-punishment, although most of you will already be familiar with some of the more common methods. Anyone interested in learning more about this therapeutic strategy can give me a call at 666-7777 after 6 p. m. (except on Sundays or during ‘Hockey Night in Canada’).

Returning to the problems of today’s youth, one of the main reasons why parents and professionals have turned away from punishment is because they’ve been bamboozled into thinking of kids as innocent ‘creatures of the universe’ that need to be ‘honored,’ ‘validated,’ ‘resonated with’ ... or whatever.

According to this New Age garbage, childhood wickedness and adolescent terrorism are the result of developmental “injuries” (Oh that word! ) inflicted by poor or abusive parenting. Oh, so it’s the *parents* who are supposed to feel guilty? –how cute! In this inversion of logic and common-sense, many professionals have come to regard even the most obnoxious kids as innocent victims who need ‘healing’ rather than discipline, training

and correction. I've even heard some Child and Youth Care Workers referring to themselves as "healers." Whatever you might think about this distorted ideology, there can be no doubt that adults have handed their power over to their kids and, all across the Western world, we see entitled brats getting everything they want and demanding more.

But we are entering another Age – an age of moral reasoning and justice. Finally some of our world leaders are declaring war on the forces of evil that surround us. We can support these visionaries in many ways but none better than finding the courage to intervene in the eternal battle between good and evil that rages in our children. Our children are our future. But first we must dismiss the romantic nonsense of the mush peddlers who like to talk about childhood innocence. Children are sinners, just like the rest of us. When it comes down to it, they don't give a badger's bottom for anybody but themselves. In psychiatric terms they are all psychopaths from the moment of conception until they learn that there is more to life than self-gratification.

The human fetus has absolutely no regard for the father whose seed gave it life and the mother whose body it consumes. Don't get me wrong. I'm not blaming the fetus because, at this stage, it doesn't know any better and that's my very point. At the earliest possible moment in its development, the would-be human should come to know about the parental sacrifices and learn ways to show its gratitude and respect. And we don't have to wait for the development of the neo-cortex. Guilt is first and foremost a somatic, or bodily experience and, according to recent developments in pre and peri-natal psychology, we can now intervene much earlier than we ever thought possible. Who knows, with the development of new

child-rearing technologies, the day may well come when children are born into this world as pro-social beings that have already learned to control their primitive urges and know what they must do to please their parents. Meanwhile, we who work as professionals must continue our efforts to clean up the mess. And if you think you can do this without punishment, go smoke *another* joint – pot head.

Let us pray.



# Chapter 6

## Celebrating Perversity

I've never thought of myself as a nice person – I don't even like nice people. Much as I like to play the clown, I no longer doubt, or even disguise, the blackness behind the motley, for I am both. Within every comedy lurks a tragedy and every dose of horror contains an equal serving of hilarity. While we may choose to focus on one or the other, it's in the union of these elements that both the despair and the delight of our lives become defined.

This is easy to grasp from the middle, but the further we push into one sphere or the other, the more lopsided the equation appears. In the extreme, it's no easier to draw the humor from our suffering than it is to recognize the pain within our ecstasy. Yet, paradoxical as it might seem, it is only by experiencing the extremities that we see their connection and come to know what it means to be fully who you are.

This is not the preferred option of nice people seeking to lead nice lives in the middle of the road. Nor does it suit the moralists who create and impose the rules intended to keep us there. Behind their religious, ethical and humanistic exhortations they live in fear of their own humanity, and their righteousness stems from a distorted belief that to be fully who we are is to be a danger to self and others. The cure for their malady is simple – to laugh at themselves; but God and Goodness, like good old Queen Victoria, are not easily amused. But, enough of

the philosophy, let me illustrate my thesis with a story.

Once upon a whim, I turned up at a “Celebrating Human Diversity” seminar, believing this to be one event in which a visible minority person such as myself would find complete and unquestioning acceptance. Strolling carelessly by the registration desk, I was hauled in by a very fat woman wearing a “Save the Whales” T shirt. As always, there was humor to be had, but this was to be a day of reflection.

“Are you registered in this seminar?” she asked in a manner reminiscent of the school nurse who once examined me in my under-pants and demanded to know if I’d been touching myself.

“No my Lady, I was invited by a friend. My name is Cedrick and my friend’s name is ....”

“It doesn’t matter who your friends are. If you’re not on the list, you’re not in the seminar.” She was now a sizeable obstacle between me and my intended destination.

I was considering my options when a man dressed as a woman came over from the registration desk. His outfit – peroxide blonde wig, completely overdone mascara, gaudy blue silk blouse and black leather skirt – was not only unconvincing; it was a tasteless mockery of fashion. He looked me over with the disdain I felt for him.

“O. K, what are you trying to pull.” His manner was decidedly testosteronic.

“Well usually I’m ready to pull whatever hangs out but I’m taking the day off”

His sneer crept up the side of his face. “So what’s with the ridiculous outfit?”

Fighting the obvious temptation, I opted for the simple truth. “It gives me a persona,” I said. “It’s like a uniform only more personal”

“Bully bullshit,” the man said. “You’ve come to take the piss.”

I was about to offer a diagnosis of his apparent obsession with eliminatory bodily functions when good old Ponsford Sanganiaka, my Nigerian friend and one of the seminar organizers, boogied over. Now Ponsford is a big man (in all respects they say) and the sheer power of his presence is enough to send a charging rhino into retreat. “Hey Cedrick, you made it man,” he cried, throwing out his arms and enveloping me in the voluminous folds of his tribal regalia. “Come on, I’ve saved a seat for you.” Completely ignoring my two assailants, he gestured toward door of the auditorium. The blonde bombshell shook his head and sighed. “Big mistake,” he whispered loudly and prophetically.

Once inside the hall, Ponsford whisked me through the hundred or so people already assembled, sat me down in the front row and, without warning, deposited his enormous corpus onto my lap. “This is a virgin on the ridiculous,” I gasped. Ponsford, who is easily amused, guffawed, rolled off onto the adjacent chair, crashed to the floor, picked himself up and, still laughing like a maniac, made his exit. Being professionally attuned to the sensitivities of an audience, I knew immediately that this little episode of Ponfoolery had not been well received by the gallery behind and I was relieved when the seminar leader, a renowned Diva of Diversity, took the stage to deliver his opening remarks.

He was an appealing fellow, in a pie and pudding sort of way, and his message about human rights, dignity and tolerance was accompanied by many head nods, assorted grunts of agreement and sporadic bursts of applause.

After his short presentation, our facilitator, a bouncy young buck, entered stage right and asked us to move our



chairs to the wall and “mingle”. I’ve always liked that word “mingle” and I played with it as I strolled around. In the spirit of the occasion I approached a few stragglers and told them I thought “mungle” or “mangle” were probably better words for what we were doing, but these engagements were brief and boring. My interest was revived when our friendly facilitator told us to stop and notice where we were standing in relation to the other group members. Some folks stood in little clumps, others on their own. Some were hovering around the edges while others had taken up places smack in the middle. Despite my intention of getting involved I had become ‘jingled’ (i.e. alone in a corner, watching it all unfold).

We were then asked to think about a group or affiliation that was significant for us – race, country of birth, sexual preference, political belief, professional role, primary value, or whatever. After a few moments for thought, the facilitator began to ask a few people to make their selection known and all who shared that particular affiliation were invited to join together. This was a lengthy process of deliberation and negotiation but, eventually everybody was attached to one group or another, except one – me.

Now you might think this was a deliberate ploy on my part but I had no such intention in mind. In fact I stretched myself to the point of incredulity to find some sense of connection with one group or another. I was actually prepared to join any group that seemed remotely hospitable, but found none. Given my well-manicured place in the tapestry of diversity, however, it would be a lie to say I felt, lonely, rejected or victimized. Certainly I wanted to participate, but even a pined plonker like me must hang onto some sense of

integrity and dignity.

Our tenacious facilitator was obviously less comfortable with my isolation. "Isn't there any group you identify with?" he asked, while the others watched from afar.

"No."

"Not even remotely?"

"No"

"So how would you describe yourself? There may be others like you here."

"I'm a fool."

"That's not really you, this is a role you like to play, for whatever reason."

"No, it's much more than that. This is my identity: it contains my thoughts and feelings, just like being a black man, a white woman, a Catholic, a humanist, a liberal or a lesbian. It just so happens that I'm the only one of my kind in the room

"So you feel no sense of affiliation with one single person here. Is that right?"

"Not unless I can call them 'crackpots' and they feel happy to be recognized."

"You must be a very lonely person."

"Not at all, my relationships are infinite.

"With whom?"

"With everybody." I opened my arms to embrace the distant gathering.

Again, my senses told me this was enough. The friendly facilitator was becoming frustrated and the audience restless. But the script was flowing in my favor and the Diversity Diva Himself entered from the wings and took centre stage. "Is there any group that would like to offer this man a place?" he asked. Much mumbling followed until a lone voice rose above the rest. "Yes, we

will, if he agrees to take this thing seriously.” The Diva looked at me. “Sorry,” I said, “but I don’t even take myself seriously.” The mumbling was becoming cankerous. “Is there a group willing to accept this man *without* conditions?” Silence. The neighborhood facilitator stepped back into the spotlight. “We can’t spend any longer on this,” he ruled. “If you’re not willing to go along with the rest, then perhaps you don’t belong here. The Diva raised his hands above his head, as Divas are inclined to do. “Why not get on with the business of the day and let this man simply roam around in whatever way he sees fit? If his presence is in some way disruptive to your group, then you can take whatever steps you deem necessary to pursue your own interests. I’m sure he’s not going to invade or hurt anybody.” The facilitator shook his head but seized the chance to get his agenda back on track. “Okay, will each group find a place for themselves somewhere in the hall and .... .”

The Diva came over and rested a hand on my shoulder. “You’re a free man,” he said with a smile. “Not really,” I told him, “but this is where I belong. I’m not looking for acceptance, I’m looking for fun and there’s lots out there don’t you think?” He grinned and withdrew graciously.



## Chapter 7



### **A Child's Christmas not far from Wales**

One Christmas was so much like another in Lil's Group Home for Bad Boys on Bucky Street. I can still hear the distant vomiting of drunks rolling out of the ale-houses as I tried to get some sleep. I can't remember whether it pissed down with rain for six days and six nights when I was fifteen or whether it rained for fifteen days and fifteen nights when I was pissed. All the Christ-mases roll down toward the tough-tongued tarts that lived in the knock-shop by the carol-singing dock yards. And then, out come Ronnie Babcock and the Lowry boys.

It was on the afternoon of Christmas Eve, and I was smoking a ciggy in the back alley, waiting for rats, with my pal Jack. It was always pissing down at Christmas. December, in my memory, is wet as Sevvie Park pond, though there were no ducks. But there were rats.

Patient, drenched and determined, our hands clasped around our fish-fried sticks, we waited to club the rats. Slinky-eyed monsters, sneaking and squealing, sliming out of the sewer vents and the lynx-eyed hunters, Jack and I, wellie-booted clubbers from Newfoundland, off High Park Street, would bring our deadly clubs down on their silver-slathered backs. At the end of the hunt, we would bundle their beaten corpses into a plassy bag and take them to the rat-catcher for tuppence a kick.

We were so still. Newfie-footed clubbers in the sodden silence of the eternal rain — eternal ever since last Friday — that we never noticed Ronnie and the Lowry boys oozing out of the Black Swan onto a passing iceberg by Rosamond Terrace. Then we heard the bombilating voice of Mr. O'Reilly, the landlord, from within. "Fuck off and don't come back you bunch of gobshites," he yelled. "And a Merry Crimbo to you," shouted Babcock. "We'll give yer a Kirby Kiss if yer come over 'ere'," shouted one of the Lowry boys. Then the scuffle started as Mr. O'Reilly and three or four bouncers bounced out of the door to mingle with the ejected rabble. I think it was Ronnie who threw the first punch but it all happened in the flash of a jigger-rabbit's eye. Fists flying in all directions, heads knocking on heads, knees crunching into crotches and white knuckles throttling gasping throats. Then the Bizzies arrived and stuffed them all in a van — all except Mr. O'Reilly who had mysteriously evaporated back into the Woodbined haze of the Swan.

This was better than all the rats in all the alleys in all the Dingle. We legged it over to the other side of the road, our sticks under our arms, and we sang “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen,” our wellies keeping tempo on the dumpling cobbled street. “Merry Christmas Lads,” came a voice from the darkness. It was an old dosser, his crumpled image brought back to life by the lights of a wooden Christmas tree in Starkey’s shop window. “A tanner for a glass of wine and God will fill yer stockings for life.” “Well it’s Crimbo,” I said, so we tossed our rat-bag into his doorway and headed for home. Lil would be there, waiting to welcome back her bold intrepid hunters. “Just like King Wenchlessness,” said Jack.

Years and years ago, when I was a boy, when there were Liver Birds in Liverpool, and dogs the color of cow shit whisked past the rusted dust-bins, when we sang and wallowed all night in basements that smelled like public carzies, when we chased manky moggies down dung-bricked alleyways, it rained and rained. But here a small sprog says, “It rained last year too. I pissed into a puddle and my brother did the same. So I pushed my brother’s ugly mug into the puddle and then we went home for bacon butties.”

“But that was not the same rain,” I say. “Our rain not only poured from black coal buckets down the sky, it came bubbling up from the gutters and sloshed around the back yards swilling over our boots on the way to the crapper like rats running over a dead pigeon.

“Where there pigeons then, too?”

“Lil kept pigeons in her attic. Grey masked marauders with pinky-parking eyes and beaks that pecked at your fingers when you stuck them in the cage. One Christmas morning, Jack and I sprayed them with cake frosting so they looked like doves and sent them off when the

church bells rang out across the stubborn stones and tar-licked tiles of Merseyside. We sang "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas" and then went downstairs for dinner.

"Did Lil cook you Christmas dinner then?"

"There were seven of us at the trough, all Dingle Scallies dolled-up in our bezzies with pointed hats made from wrapping paper. Lil sat at the kitchen end wearing a Father Christmas cap with snow-white rim and half a bobble." "Merry Christmas to all," she said, holding up a glass of her special Yuletide fruit juice and the scoff began. We pigged-out with cheeks bursting goose that fell off the back of a lorry in Parliament Street. And roasted tatties, hunch-backed hippos lurking in the mud of liver gravy oozing around an isle of suet-stuffing. Then we all belched and Jack said, "I'm Tiny Tim and I can hear the pudding sing." "Gob it, you fat wap," said Jim Casey.

"You gob it Casey," said Kenny Spalding.

"It's fucking Christmas." "You can all gob it," said Lil, "or there'll be no pudding for any of yews." Then we all sang Jingle Bells, except Jim who blew a snarling kiss at my pal Jack.

After dinner we all sat around the gas fire to open our prezzies. Everybody got a jig saw puzzle from the Sally Ann and a bag of goodies from Mrs. Roger's Sweet Shop. Then Lil came in with another bottle of her fruit juice and a laundry bag stuffed with brown parcels. We all got three, each with our name written on holly edged labels. I got a pen knife with a curved blade for taking stones out of horse's hoofs, a rubber flash-light for hunting rats and a book about Eskimos. There was a prezzie for Lil too – yet another bottle of her favourite fruit juice, this one wrapped in crumpled tissue paper with a red bow around its neck. She smiled, nodded and took it back into the kitchen

Always on Christmas night there was music. Lil sang a song called “Dangling in the Dingle” and Kenny Spalding played four chords on his guitar. Barry Jenkins recited his favourite poem:

*There’s a girl down our road they call Mary  
She sells goossegoggs outside the dairy  
I said, what are the Wack? and she answers me back  
They’re like gear little plums but all hairy*

Jim said, “That’s got bugger all to do with Christmas.” “Give yer chin a rest” said Kenny and we all applauded.

When Lil went out to give her glass another dousing, Ricky Hodgson sang his Christmas ditty about Santa Claus and Woolyback Wankers but she came back before he could finish the last verse and we all sniggered.

Then we played records and I went to bed. Looking through the bedroom window, out into the pouring darkness, I could see the drifting silhouettes of the black-laced castles and gilt-crusted palaces high above Sugden’s Warehouse and hear the liquored Yuletide voices rising from belly of The Black Swan. I sat on the bed. I said some words to the distant and unholy darkness, and then I threw-up my dinner.

Merry Christmas & God help us ... everyone,

Your Yuletide pal,

Cedrick

p.s. Dylan Thomas has written a similar piece and that is certainly worth reading.



## PART TWO

# Medical Myopia

### EDITOR'S NOTE

If you managed to make your way through the previous section you probably picked up the 'writer's' somewhat negative opinion on the current fashion of treating problem kids as medical patients. Whether you agree with him or not I want you to know that I still have great respect for my family doctor and the staff at my local hospital. Personally, I do not believe that such a noble profession should be subjected to the kind of ridicule you will find in the following pages. One day the 'writer' may find himself having a much needed lobotomy and be forced to change his tune. Until then, the following few pages reflect his unfortunate condition.

GDF



# Chapter 8

## Up and Down on the Pharm

### **A Verbatim Transcript of Dr. Ritalinovich's Welcome to the Fun Pharm Camp**

Good morning boys and girls and welcome to Fun Pharm's Summer Camp for Dubious Disorders and Suspicious Syndromes, or DDSS for short. We like to shorten long names, it makes life so much easier doesn't it? Like, my name is really Doctor Richard Ritalinovich but everyone calls me Doc. Please don't call me Dick. Only my mother can call me Dick because she's very old and sometimes calls me Gloria. And don't call me Doc Dick or Dick Doc because that would be silly, and we don't want any silly people here do we?

When Fun Pharm – or Club Meds as it used to be called – opened four years ago we only had fifteen kids and two teams to work with. Today we have over seventy of you in this hall and, thanks to modern medical science, we have six nifty classifications to help us understand and treat you better. Well, the more the merrier we always say or, in the words of our corporate sponsors, "Medication for the nation, there's no such thing as satiation." So let's begin with a rousing cheer for all those dedicated and medicated doctors, teachers and counselors who filled in the applications and disclaimer forms and all those good old moms and dads who want

you to be just as happy as they are. Yeah! ...

Well that wasn't really much of a cheer was it? Never mind, you'll be pleased to know that every one of these good people will be receiving a prize from our sponsors anyway. Your parents will be getting a free package of goodies, including some magic pills for Dad. All teachers will get an "Instant Diagnostic and Removal Kit" (IDRK), your counselors will be receiving copies of our new book "Curing Childhood and Adolescence" and a few lucky doctors will win a new car or a trip to the Cannes Film Festival. How about that? But, unlucky for them, only YOU get to spend three mind-boggling weeks with us at Fun Pharm on the Marshes. Yea!

My goodness what a quiet bunch you are, but not to worry, we'll get you in the mood later. Meanwhile, I want to introduce some of the great folks who know all about changing moods and stuff like that. Sitting on the stage just behind me are the team leaders. Your own special leader is wearing a shirt the same color as the cap you were given on the bus. 'So if your cap is green you'll be with Bill in the green shirt and if your cap is blue, then your captain will be Maggie down at the end there. They are all nurses so you can trust them to know what's best for you. The people standing behind them in the white coveralls are our child and youth care staff. Their job will be to get to know everything about you over the next three weeks so let's have all those dirty little secrets out in the open. They are also responsible for supervising chores, cooking the meals and making sure the biffies are clean at all times. And last, but not least, the hairy monster chained to the back wall wearing the black hood and studded boots, is our resident psychopath Clarence. You'll only get to meet Clarence if you've done something really naughty like killing a fellow camper or not taking

your meds. So let's hear it for the Fun Pharm staff. Yeah!

Okay a few shouts for Clarence – that should save us the cost of an injection. Now let's begin by getting you into your teams so please put on your special cap, with the peak forward please, and I'll ask the leaders to leave the stage and take up their positions around the hall.

To avoid confusion perhaps the child and youth staff can start by rounding up the kids with yellow caps, the ADHD Devils, and escorting them over to Carla in the restraining zone. You'll have to be quick to catch the floor-crawlers and you'll need a ladder to get those two down from the ceiling joists. Let the skinny one go Mario and grab the fat one heading for the trampoline with a fire-extinguisher. Oh by God, will somebody please arrest that little charmer who threw the baseball at Clarence. We always have trouble with the Devils on the first day but they can be lots of fun once we've got them turned down a notch or two. Meanwhile, just ignore them.

Now, those of you with red caps, the ADD Drifters, please join Darryl in the pointless activity area for a few minutes of meaningless classroom stimulation while the rest of us get organized. I said those of you with red caps, please go over to Darryl. No, I said go to Darryl over there ... no not over here ...over THERE. Listen, the big kid with the nose ring, what color's your cap? Well take the damned thing off and look at it. I said TAKE IT OFF ...no not HER cap, YOUR cap. Oh, for crying out loud, could somebody please redirect the bunch of red caps drifting toward the washroom. God only knows what they'll get up to in there.

OK, those of you with green caps, the Oppositional Defiance Demons, please don't move, don't go over to Bill and please create as much pandemonium as you can in not doing these things. When you don't get over there, Bill will

tell what not to do next. Yes, my dear, I know your green cap is really pink, but don't move anyway. Bingo!

Okay, what do we have left? Ah yes, blue caps, the Depressive Doldrums team. Bad news for you I'm afraid. Unfortunately your hut is right in the middle of Mosquito Swamp so if you shuffle over to Maggie, you can pick up your nets and waders. It's going to be a rough trip but Maggie will give you something to make you feel better on the journey. Oh, and watch out for all those alligators, ha! ha!

And now for our last group, the Bi-Polar Bears. My goodness, we've never had so many Bears before. Must be the flavor of the month. Well you lucky campers have two leaders to choose from. If you're feeling frisky, trot over to join Manic Marvin wearing the clown suit and, if you're feeling down in the mouth, drag your butts over to Mary Maudlin in the shredded raincoat. If you feel somewhere in the middle you can go to the back of the hall and face the wall until you make your damned minds up. We don't want anyone here who refuses to get with the program.

Who's that little girl hovering around the emergency exit? Oh of course, thank you, I completely forgot about our one and only Attachment Disorder Deserter. I don't know why they keep sending these kids here. Listen sweetheart, I'm sorry but it's just not economical to provide a leader and an entire hut for one little insignificant person. If you wander off down the hallway to your right, you'll see a room with "Transitional Objects" written on the door. You can play with anything you find in there for as long as you like. Please close the door behind you and someone will be along to lock it when we have a moment.

Well that just about takes care of all the formalities. When I blow this whistle your leaders will take you to

your huts and you can yourselves be settled. Don't forget to under your pillow look to see if the pill fairy's paid for a visit. But, before you go I just want to wish you all a wonderful time stands still there's nothing much to worry about is there a doctor in the house that for starters you mean to go on and on and on just like those child and youth care workers of the world unite as well be sitting on your spotty bums the word and the word is ....

Oh dear it's time for my auntie psychotic psychotropic of cancer can be beaten to a pulp fiction fantasy of nurse Margaret in her underwear the hell did I put that whistle? Stop laughing or I'll tell my Mommy you called me Sick-Dicky you perverse bunch of pediatric piss-pots. I'll have you all banned from the DSM Fourever. Oh no, you'll get no whistle from me, you pathetic pack of Pavlovian perverts, so you can't salivate all over nurse Margaret like I can do whatever I want because I'm in charge here. Now, off to your huts while I get ready, steady go get Margaret .... Please ...



# Chapter 9

## Oh Lord. A Manual

### A CHRISTMAS BOOK REVIEW by Cedrick of Toxteth

If you want to inject a good belly laugh into to your Yuletide festivities, be sure to ask Santa for a copy of “The DSM V”. Sometimes referred to as “Doctors Selling Medication” or “The Dictionary of Scientific Misinformation,” this latest version spins more hysterical gobbledegook than George W. managed throughout his entire presidency. Sure a lot of the old stuff is regurgitated, but that irrepressible comedy team “Pharmers & Shrinks” has conjured up a devilish selection of new gems from their own inimitable brand of madness. Those of you who work with kids will be particularly delighted with the their hilarious deliberations on the ‘diagnosis and treat-



ment of Childhood’.

If you’re already a DSM fan you’ll realize the new edition is no one-shot read. Like its predecessors, it’s something you can keep beside your potty to facilitate, or enhance, the simple pleasures of bodily elimination. I always think laughter is the most pleasing of all lavatorial noises and, with P&S for company, you can piss yourself laughing without any embarrassment or inconvenience.

Rather than spoil your anticipation with snippets of the new material, let me whet your appetite with a few of my favorite standards from previous versions. For me they have the same enduring quality as the Pythonic Dead Parrot sketch and Abbot & Costello’s “Who’s on First” dialogue.

Even if you’ve never read the original texts, you have to be familiar with the ADHD gag. The idea that kids who aren’t interested in the bullshit being dished out by parents and teachers should be medicated out of their distractions is a brilliant parody on cognitive fixation by the cognitively fixated. Add to this the “hyperactivity” tag that turns childhood vitality into an oxymoron (accent on the moron) and you have an undisputed classic.

And what about the old “Attachment Disorder” routine? All seasoned comedians know how to milk a theme, but few can match the creativity of P&S in taking a simple nonsensical proposition to higher and higher levels of absurdity. Of course, we all know that newborn babies don’t willfully snub their mothers – it’s a survival thing. Yet, with subtle sleight of tongue and a bunch of pseudo-scientific twaddle, P&S convince us that many infants are hell bent on depriving Momma of a rich and satisfying maternal relationship. Once we’ve swallowed this deception, the notion of treating kids for their obsti-



nacy opens the door to a blistering array of bizarre treatment options designed to coerce the selfish little buggers into giving Mom and Dad the unconditional love they so richly deserve.

And then there's my favorite – "Oppositional Defiance Disorder". Who else but P&S could come up with such a thigh-slapping catch phrase for kids who try to ward off invaders and abusers by telling them to go fuck themselves? Once again their comedic brilliance turns the real into the surreal as they don the medical mantle to convince us that temper tantrums and passive resistance are actually symptoms of a medical condition that requires behavioral, cognitive and, if necessary, chemical intervention. If you happen to like a dash of subtlety in your humor, you'll love the ironic twist that this phony 'disorder' conveniently removes all responsibility from even the most obnoxious patient. Great stuff for anyone who has harbored a secret urge to stick a boiling test-tube where the teacher would least appreciate it.

But comedy and tragedy are inextricably contained within the same pair of underpants (a dubious metaphor drawn from my personal life). When it comes to the work of P&S there are many folks who fail to see (or choose to ignore) the underlying psychotic irony. Sadly, this includes the creators themselves. And herein lies the tragedy.

There's no doubt that the creators of the DSM Five-Alive are oblivious to their own comedic brilliance ... and why not? In the twisted world of consensual insanity, this ridiculous tome confirms their status as experts while promoting the most profitable corporate empire in the western world. On the receiving end, the consumers of their products are only too willing to buy into the delusion in the forlorn hope that someone 'out

there' will come along to fix their lives, courtesy of over-taxed and equally deluded health care systems. In their own way, they are all tragic figures in the cosmic comedy.

But the greatest tragedy of all is how this self-serving dogma is imposed on the most vulnerable non-participants – the kids. Here, even my own life-long belief in humor as the ultimate reality is stretched to the limits. I don't find anything remotely amusing about pathologizing, labeling and medicalizing children for adult gratification. The common rationalization that this is all in the best interest of kids is 'adulterated' bollocks. One of the most insidious examples of this deceptive travesty appeared in a recent UK study. Purporting to address the concerns of the skeptics by assuming a child-centered perspective, these corporately-funded researchers went around asking kids in the mental health systems what they think about their 'diagnoses' and 'treatment'. True to the cause, these investigators conclude that the majority of their subjects actually like the idea of being victims of a mental disorder, rather than be tagged as willful perpetrators of madness and mayhem. As a final blow to the doubters, they also reported that, for the most part, the kids believe that their medication is helping them to cope with their assigned afflictions. Case closed.

Now I could find some comic relief in knowing how many of these young consumers were skillfully deceiving the deceivers – content to play the victim role and flogging their surplus chemical substances in the schoolyard. I could name a couple of dozen who would be prepared to fess up for a few extra bucks but research funding remains a problem. Meanwhile, I'm quite prepared to accept that a significant proportion of diagnosed and

drugged-up kids have bought into the medical model hook, line and sinker. And that just ain't funny folks.

But, if Santa brings you a copy of The DSM V, don't tuck it away with Aunt Mabel's perennial jigsaw puzzle. If you can't appreciate the humor, read it as a reflection of our cultural illusions and social values. Whatever your chosen perspective, please understand that, unless the proverbial pyramid crumbles, this misdirected manual of mental health madness will continue to strengthen its influence on how services to the most vulnerable members of society are delivered and funded. When push comes to Prozac, it isn't about the well-being of people that matters. "It's the economy stupid."

Merry Christmas,

Cedrick



# Chapter 10

## **Deferential Diagnosis: The Key to Mental Health Services**

### **Session One**

Good morning Doctor.

Good Morning, er, let me see now ... ah yes, Mrs. Huddlewick. And what we can we do for you?

Well it's my son Frank, doctor. He just won't do as he's told.

Ah yes, the old ODD. There's lots of it going around these days. How can I help?

Well the people at the Mental Health Centre said they can't do anything until they have a diagnosis.

Quite right too. Nobody's going to pay professionals for just hanging around with naughty boys are they? They can't do treatment if there's nothing to treat? They're not child and youth care workers you know ... they're real para-professionals. Is that all?

Well I was hoping you might give me a diagnosis?

Oh very well. So how long have you been feeling this way?

What way?

Whatever way you've been feeling. I can't give you a diagnosis until I know the symptoms. I'm a psychiatrist not a magician Mrs. er ... what was your name again?

Huddlewick. Gladys Huddlewick

Ah yes. Well Mrs. Muddlewick let's get down to brass

tacks, cut to the chase, as they say. You're not a private patient so the government is paying twenty dollars a minute for this little chat. So what do *you* think your problem is?

It's about my son Frank.

Ah yes. And how long have you had these negative feelings toward ... what's his name again.

Frank.

Yes. How long have you had this urge to kill Frank?

I don't want to kill him, I just want him to do as he's told.

Yes, of course you do, of course you do. It must be a terrible strain to be the mother of a monster like Hank.

His name is Frank and he's not really a monster. It's just that he makes me angry sometimes

Angry eh, well that's a start. How about confused? ... depressed? ... suicidal? ... homicidal maybe? Come on Mrs. Cuddledick. You'll have to give me more to work on if you want a diagnosis. We don't just hand them out to anybody who walks in here you know. This is a clinic, not a soup kitchen.

But it's not about me doctor, it's about Frank.

Yes, that's what they all say ... a typical avoidance reaction ... but unfortunately that's not a serviceable diagnosis. Come on, we have six minutes left. Cooperate and maybe I can cobble together a tentative diagnosis of PMS to get things rolling.

But I've never suffered from PMS

It's a psychiatric condition. It stands for Pervasive Maternal Psychosis.

But psychosis is spelt with a 'P', not at 'S'.

Is it? Well we can look into that later. Tell me about your mother.

Please leave my mother out of this.

Ah, so you have some feelings about this. Seems like early attachment problems. Were you breast fed? Oh, sorry, I'm afraid we're out of time.

But that wasn't six minutes.

Sorry, my watch must have stopped. See my nurse for another appointment.

This is nuts. The Mental Health Centre sent me here to get a diagnosis for Frank, not for me. They can't see him until he has one.

Who's Frank?

He's my son.

But he's not here. I can't diagnose somebody I've never even seen. It's against the rules, strictly unethical.

He's in the waiting room. You're receptionist said she'd send him in when you were ready.

Ready? Of course I'm ready. We psychiatrists are always ready for whatever wretched disordered soul happens to walk through that door. I'll just ring this bell.

Can I stay with him? He's very uncomfortable with strangers.

Well you'll have to go out and come back in again. Then it would be a follow up consultation. Even psychiatrists have to make a living you know.

## Session Two

You must be ... er let me see now ... Brenda.

No. My name's Frank.

Are you sure? It says "Brenda" here.

It's Frank

My mistake. Well Frank, your mother tells me you're a bit of a monster, is that right?

*I didn't say he was a monster. You said that.*

Now Mrs Shuttlewick. Please don't interfere. I'm trying to conduct a diagnostic interview. My questions are psychiatrically formulated. Any more interruptions and I'll have to ask you to leave. So Frank, what do you have to say for yourself?

Nothin'

Well saying nothing means something to me. In fact, it means a lot to me. Do you want to know what it means.

No thanks.

Well, it means you're angry on the inside. Tell me what you're angry about and I'll understand ... I'm a psychiatrist. Do I remind you of your father?

Yes.

Good. Just think of me as you father.

No problem. He's dead.

Did you kill him Hank. Was it your fault he died?

Oh for sure. He fell off a bike and got smoked by a Semi.

And you feel a deep sense of grief and loss.

You bet. It was my fucking bike that got crushed.

Do you miss him Hank?

No, he never lived at our house. He just broke into our shed one night and stole my bike.

Ah, so you never really had a father like me. Someone you could talk to and rely on.

You've gotta be kidding.

It must be hard for a smart young lad like you not to have a Dad like me to talk to.

No, I'd sooner talk to a donkey's ass.

Hmm, a mixed metaphor. Could be Expressive Language Disorder. Tell me more about your dad. He really let you down didn't he? Tell me, do you sometimes have feelings of being alone, not seen or heard by adults?

Yes. I feel that right now

Would you like to punch me in the face Roger?

Okay

Well I won't let you, so there. Make one move and I'll call the cops. Now what do you feel?

Hungry, it's lunch time.

Oh my God, so it is. One more question, on the house. What's the square root of sixty nine?

Er ... 8. 30662386922

No, you're wrong there smart ass. Run along now and I'll meet with your mother again after lunch. We'll see if we can get you some help.

### **Session Three. The Diagnosis**

Come in and sit down Mrs. Fuddlewick. No not there, over here. There's nothing to be afraid of, just relax. Now, how have things been going since our last session? Have you been taking your medication?

It's only been two hours and I'm not taking any medication.

I didn't give you a prescription? Oh dear. What was your diagnosis?

I don't have a diagnosis doctor, I came to get one for my son. The people at the Mental Health Clinic told me ...

Oh yes, I remember now. It was Frank wasn't it?

Yes, Hank ... er ... Frank

Very good. Well I made a few notes over lunch. Your son is a difficult case but I think we might have something to work with. He is suffering from a complex form of Conduct Disorder, with elements of Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder, Oppositional Defiance Disorder and Mathematics Disorder.



Mathematics Disorder?

Yes, you remember I asked him a simple mathematical question and he got it wrong.

No, he was absolutely right. I checked.

Well, it could have been a lucky guess, now couldn't it? Never mind, we'll drop that and substitute Autistic Disorder. This is one of the most popular diagnoses these days – impaired development in social interaction and markedly restricted repertoire of activities and interests. Yes, that should be enough to get him into treatment.

But that doesn't sound a bit like my Frank.

Listen Mrs. Butterwick, do you want to get him some treatment or not? If you continue to question my diagnostic skills I'll be very upset and that won't help you or your daughter, now will it? Without a diagnosis you might well end up at Social Services. They'll say that you're to blame and there's a good chance they'll put her in a group home somewhere. With a solid mental health diagnosis nobody is to blame. Now doesn't that sound better?

Oh I don't know what to do. I feel so helpless.

Yes, I understand. Now just sit back, relax and tell me how long you've been feeling this way.



## PART THREE

# The Child & Youth Care Experience

### EDITOR'S NOTE

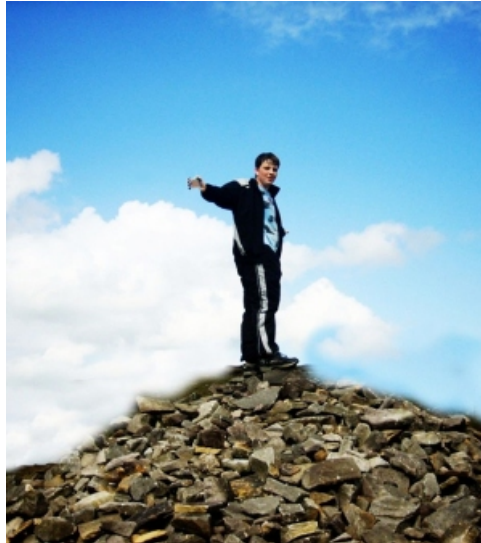
Believe it or not, the 'author' once eked out a living as a child & youth care worker. In an uncharacteristic gesture of self-awareness, he signed off when standards of professional practice and accountability were introduced. In this section he shares some of his CYC experiences for reasons only he can explain. Please take them for what they are – the reflections of a very unsettled mind.

GDF



# Chapter 11

## Freddie and the Green Rock



### Preamble

While considering my next brilliant contribution to CYC-Online, I came across a letter posted on the Net by Rianna Awan, a student at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. She was asking CYC folks to share their most “intense” moments in the trenches and how they had dealt with, or diffused, the situation. This brought to mind a personal saga that was more intense than a ten-day trip through the birth canal. It took place a long time ago, but I’ll do my best to recall the events as they happened. Please note that all names have been changed to protect the guilty.

## **The Story**

Bored with city life and in need of a few sheckles, I signed on with a group of CYC types intent on taking a dozen urban male adolescent dissidents on a two-week wilderness experience. Apparently, some bright spark had suggested this would expand their horizons and teach them something about “personal initiative,” “self-reliance” and “collaboration.” When I enquired if anyone had read “The Lord of the Flies,” our appointed leader brusquely informed me that his name was Jim, not Gandalf, and they were planning a trip to the Shuswap Lakes, not a journey through Mordor. He also made it clear that, as a non-professional ‘extra’, my responsibilities would be appropriately limited. I was appropriately relieved and decided against pointing out his limited knowledge of contemporary literature.

The day before departure, Jim took me aside to outline the nature of my limited responsibilities. Apart from assisting and taking direction from the pros, I was to pay special attention to Freddie, a nine-year old Tasmanian Devil who had been drafted into the brigade at the eleventh hour because there was insufficient staff coverage back at the Group Home. Being four years younger than the other boys, Freddie would not be involved in the more challenging aspects of the program and would require some serious individual supervision. OK, so I’d been hired as a babysitter. Great, I had no primal urge to climb rock faces or shoot rapids anyway. Freddie and I could spend quality time together, a couple of extras enjoying the gentle touch of Mother Nature.

Sitting together at the back of the van, it was clear from the outset that we were outsiders – a familiar role that has become my specialty. He turned out to be a delightful little deviant, grabbing my arm to draw atten-

tion to whatever took his fancy through the window. Ignored by our fellow travelers, the spirit of togetherness blossomed between us as we munched on the corned-beef sandwiches while our resolute leader gave the others a three-hour briefing on what to expect and what was expected. We were happy campers savoring our own expectations.

After a death-defying voyage on a gradually sinking barge, we came to our retreat at the tip of a remote promontory. Without any signs of the anticipated initiative or collaboration, we unloaded the boxes of supplies, rigged up our tents and set about constructing a communal Biffy. This pleased me enormously. I don't mind taking a leak in the bushes but when it comes to the delights of the dump, I like to sit down in comfort and privacy. Having demonstrated his pitiful ineptitude with a shovel, Freddie was released from digging duties and dispatched to collect sticks for the inevitable campfire. I dutifully followed him into the woods to make sure he didn't fall into the hands of marauding savages. Oh the sacrifices one has to make when the chips are down.

That evening we sat around a crackling fire while a no-nonsense 'Jungle' Jim (JJ in Freddie-speak) outlined the plans for the following day – a three hour march to Black Mountain followed by drown-proofing practice in the lake. Freddie and I would stay behind to defend the camp from the aforementioned savages and organize the food supplies in the designated kitchen area, conveniently located next to the Biffy.

When the briefing was over, Big Bill (BB), Jim's more amiable assistant, offered some relief by suggesting it was time for a sing-a-long. As I'd brought along my ukelele, BB announced that I would be the coordinator of camp entertainment and would get the ball rolling with a few

traditional airs. At last I had a legitimate and familiar place in the scheme of things and a chance to show my stuff.

Lively renditions of “Coombya” and “Marching to Pretoria” did little to raise the sullen spirits of our worn out tribe and my customized version of “Home on the Range” brought only moans from the otherwise silent audience. With no vocal support from the *real* professionals, I decided to try one of my favorite ice-breakers, “If I Push You Through the Mattress, I’ll See You in the Spring” and the circle sprang to life. It’s amazing what a spot of raunchy humor will do for frozen adolescent minds. Acknowledging the well-deserved applause, I launched into the classic “If I Had the Balls of a Bullfrog,” inviting group participation in the suggestive body motions and lusty chorus.

The party was well underway, with delightfully discordant harmonies and raucous group bonding. But when I delivered the opening stanzas to “I Once Had a Girl in the Bike Shed,” the focus of attention suddenly shifted and the energy dissipated as dramatically as it had arisen. In my trivial world, losing an audience is a devastating experience but I was at a loss to account for my unexpected plunge into isolation. Glancing over my shoulder I caught sight of JJ glaring in my direction and drawing an imaginary dagger across his throat. In deference to his authority, I strummed my last C7th and waited for the next instruction. “Bedtime everybody. An early start in the morning,” he announced as he turned away and headed for the tents. There could be no doubt in anybody’s mind that my responsibilities as entertainment coordinator had been unilaterally suspended *sine die*. On the way back to our quarters, my friend Freddie put his arm around me and whispered, “Somebody

should fix that prick”.

In the days that followed, life in the Gulag settled into a pleasant routine, at least for Freddie and me. The adventurers shuffled off early each morning for their daily recreation while we stayed behind to clean up the mess, prepare the evening meal and rebuild the campfire. The menu was simple – canned stew, boiled tatties and mixed veggies followed by one of three dubious dessert options. When they dragged their battered bodies back in the evening they gobbled it all down like pigs at the trough, washed their dishes in the lake and trudged off to the campfire ritual – a debriefing on the events of the day, followed by roasted marshmallows and an mandatory skinny dip. With no entertainment duties, I volunteered Freddie and myself to clean up the kitchen; a gesture I’m sure they appreciated. I was still looking for signs of initiative, self-reliance and collaboration but could only conclude that these qualities must have been exhausted on the barren rocks of the Black Mountain.

As far as I was concerned, my primary responsibility was the welfare of my junior assistant, and to this I was completely dedicated. Before getting into the grizzly circumstances that arose on the fifth day, I want my diligence to be recognized by all who read my personal account. Freddie and I relished each other’s company and a close bond had grown between us. We played together, created our own adventures and let our spirits stir our imaginations. We were comrades, a tightly knit inseparable team. But, on that fateful day, without any warning, or reason, my little confederate simply vanished – like poof – nowhere to be seen.

I had left him opening cans of stew for an essential trip to the Biffy and returned to find the kitchen deserted. At first I thought he was playing a spontaneous version of

hide and seek so I pretended to be nonchalant about it all by opening the remaining cans and pouring the contents into the pot. Still playing it cool, I went down to the beach, sat on a log and began singing “I’ll See You in My Dreams” with a plaintive uke accompaniment. I thought the sneaky little bugger would get a kick out of that.

Such was my faith in our connection that I didn’t start to worry about his absence for an hour or so. Then, when my mind began to invent stories, I decided it was time to play the game by conducting an obvious search of the area. Even so, I was relatively at ease until I heard some crashing in the woods and caught sight of the back end of a bear (a grizzly no less) barreling up the trail used by the adventurers on their morning excursions to unknown destinations. With no thought for my own well-being, I tore after the galloping beast until I reached the edge of the woods and I found myself running across an open meadow. Pausing to catch my breath, I gazed across the tree-less expanse but there was no sign of either the hulking bear or the diminutive Freddie.

Hanging on the fading belief that this was harmless prank, I made my way back to the camp, hoping to find my quarry calmly going about his kitchen duties with that mischievous shit-eating grin on his face. Even if that had been so, which it wasn’t, my playmate would still have broken one of the most sacred unwritten rules of our special relationship – to stick together through thick and thin. I was angry and made up my mind to murder the little sod once I got my hands on him.

Then came the self-doubts and recriminations. If only I hadn’t left him in the kitchen – albeit for a worthy cause. Marauding savages aside, I was well aware that there were inherent dangers lurking in the woods for unsuspecting inner-city nine-year-olds. And then there



was the bloody Ritalin. Why had we decided on the second day that, out here, in the middle of nowhere, hyper activities and attention deficits were no threat to anybody? Stupid, stupid, stupid – I had no right to pocket his pills without carefully considering the consequences. Unless he re-appeared before the tribe returned I would be facing a lifetime of condemnation, if not litigation.

I had to do something, but all the options seemed pointless. Finally I decided upon a strategy of walking around the campsite in ever-increasing circles searching for any clues I might have overlooked. After a futile hour or so, my feelings of hopelessness turned into a profound sense of sadness and remorse. What if he had been dragged off by the bear and torn to shreds? What if he had fallen over a cliff or drowned in the lake? How could I ever live with the knowledge that I was responsible for the death of a wide-eyed little guy with whom I felt so close and connected?

When I reached the edge of the meadow, my mind severed its connection with my body at the sight of the tribe meandering back along the trail. There was nothing left for me to do, other than to fess up and let the chips fall where they may. And they fell like a ton of pig shit.

JJ's voice dominated the encounter. "You left him without supervision?" he screamed. "That was you're only fucking job. You useless asshole." Then came the predictable kicker. "You did WHAT? You took him off his goddamned medication? Are you joking? You gotta be fucking joking". The others glared at me in silence. I had no defence to offer.

Still in a volcanic rage, JJ sent tribe members and staff in all directions with instructions to "search every nook and cranny" leaving me to "wallow in my own shit" – an insightful turn of phrase for a thicko like JJ. I was

exhausted from the inside out and wandered back to my tent, still hoping for a miracle.

I don't know whether I actually fell asleep or simply drifted into a coma, but it was late in the afternoon when I crawled out of my sleeping bag. Only then did I notice a folded slip of paper wedged between my pillow and the air mattress. It was a note from Freddie. *I gotta plan to get JJ. Just tell him I went AWOL and leve the rest to me. If you gotta problem, come out to the green rock and wissle that song about the bullfrog real lowed. No problem – I'll tell them I took off wile you were in the can. Fred*

Within a matter of minutes I was beside the moss covered rock we'd enjoyed peeing on during our first exclusive field trip together. Never one to follow instructions, I stood there and hollered, "Come out you little shit, I've been getting crucified because you." The response was immediate; the sound of twigs cracking underfoot, the parting of undergrowth and there he was, all in one piece and all smiles. "Didn't you get my note?" he asked politely as though he was late for a lunch appointment.

"Oh sure I got your note, after searching for you all day and getting the works from the tribal chief," I shrieked. "What made you think I'd go looking in my tent for a fucking piece of paper?"

"You always go to your tent after taking a dump."

"Well I didn't, and now we're both up to our frigging necks."

"Yeh, but I bet JJ's shitting himself eh."

"You devious little bastard. You dreamt all this up to put the blocks to JJ."

"He deserves it. He's a prick."

By this time I was turning into a babbling idiot. My relief at finding him alive and kicking was at war with an

immediate urge to kill him on the spot.

For better or worse, my struggle with this decision was made redundant by the sight of JJ and two adjuncts bearing down on us with serious intent. Turning my attention back to Freddie was also redundant since he was no longer there, vanished again without a trace.

“What the hell’s the game?” screamed JJ from thirty feet. “What the fuck are you two playing at?” – yelled from ten feet. Then he was in my face. “You think you can make a fool out of me. Well you’re the fool ... you’re the fucking fool”

“I know that.” The truth, as they say, will out.

Now I’m no stranger to hostility, but a mad man will overpower a babbling idiot any day of the week. If there was going to be a homicide, I was now the more likely victim. Stepping back to avoid an immediate assassination, I did a little dance, hoping to catch him off guard while confirming his diagnosis. It didn’t work. He lunged at me and would have inflicting lasting damage if one of the adjuncts hadn’t yelled “STOP, look up there ... he’s up there.” JJ froze with his arm poised for the kill and all eyes followed the pointed finger of divine intervention to the top of the green rock. There, some forty feet above, stood the unmistakable figure of the boy wonder, feet apart and arms akimbo.

Diverted from his current project, JJ turned his attention to more immediate matters. “Get down from there right now. I said RIGHT NOW.” The response was calm, clear and, to my mind, perfectly reasonable. “No chance. I’m safer up here.” JJ’s next line was anything but calm, clear and reasonable. “Get down here or else ...” he belted, clenching his fists and waving his arms in what could reasonably be described as a tantrum.

By this time, alerted by the racket, BB had arrived with

his own weary search-and-rescue contingent. Like a troupe of well-trained supporting actors, the swollen group silently pulled back, leaving space for the two antagonists to play out their scene in the spotlights. As an extra, I dutifully took up my rightful place in the back row.

Following a sublimely timed pause in the action, and with everything hanging in the balance, JJ made his fatal move. With the blind determination of a suicidal warrior, he charged forward and began scrambling up the mossy rocks. At this point I was completely convinced that poor old JJ had taken leave of whatever senses he might have been born with. Had it never occurred to him that fearless Freddie (later to be designated FF) had taken the much more convenient route along the gentle slope on the other side?

Slipping on the moss and sending flurries of earth and stones tumbling in his wake, the demented JJ managed to make it to the first ledge, about twenty feet above ground. Only then did he seem to realize that the remainder of the ascent was simply impossible. Clinging to the rocks above his head, he looked down at his gaping tribe as if considering his options. Nobody offered advice. At the top, Freddie chose this pregnant moment of hesitation to take a leak, projecting a shimmering arc into the evening sky and onto the rocks below.

The spell of the escalating drama was broken as Freddie's urinary spectacular claimed the attention, if not the admiration, of the onlookers. Gasps, giggles and even applause came as a welcomed relief from the shackles of insanity that had enveloped us. From his precarious perch, JJ also looked skyward, and for this, he paid a heavy price. In a desperate attempt to avoid being pissed upon from a dizzy height, he made a quick move to the right only to lose his footing and return to the ground in

a fraction of the time it took him reach the ledge.

It was a horrifying descent and whatever humor might have been lingering within the gathering was quickly replaced by a stunned silence. BB was the first to rush forward when JJ hit the deck, followed immediately by other elders as they scrimmaged around their fallen leader. For the rest of us, the curtain closed.

Unnoticed, I resumed my scripted role as an extra and wandered back stage in search of the elusive FF. It had occurred to me that, in his twisted little mind, his performance was dedicated to me but I was not about to express my gratitude or compliment him on his virtuosity. Crazy as it might seem, I just wanted to give him a hug. But, as any sane person might have anticipated, the little sod had flown the coup – again.

### **Postscript**

So that's my story Rianna. I realize I haven't delved into the murky depths of the CYC experience but for me, a non-professional extra, this was an "intense" experience. I don't think my ways of dealing with, or "diffusing" the situation will impress your teachers but some learning might be gleaned from my incompetence. For readers who like to have sense of closure, I offer the following:

JJ was picked up by helicopter the following day and transported to hospital. There were no fractures, only bruised ribs and a badly sprained ankle. BB took over the expedition and there was a noticeable shift towards the self-reliance, initiative and collaboration identified as the initial program objectives. Freddie remained AWOL but left another note on my pillow to say that he was fine and would return voluntarily given the assurance that I wasn't going to be punished for his behavior.

With BB's support, I left a message at the green rock containing this assurance. The following day he strolled nonchalantly back into the camp and we all upheld the demand of the elders that we shouldn't do or say anything that might reinforce his pathological intransigence. After careful consideration, BB decided it would be in everybody's best interest for Freddie and I to leave the camp and return to our roots in the city. I agreed. Lounging on the still afloat barge on a beautifully summer's afternoon, my little buddy and I took great delight in tossing his remaining pills into the lake, followed by a rousing rendition of "If I Had the Balls of a Bullfrog."

### **Post-Postscript**

In case you're interested, I still hear from Freddie occasionally. He lives with his wife and Freddie junior (FJ) in New York where he practices law and, of course, the ukulele.

The End.



# Chapter 12

## A Less than Divine Intervention

*In general, we child and youth care types are quite happy to leave research to those professionals who aren't quite sure what they should be doing, or how they should be doing it. But we do get the odd moment to sit around and mentally doodle so why not turn these into research opportunities? What follows is one dedicated practitioner's attempt to turn a few idle thoughts into an empirical examination of the inner life of adolescent males hanging out in a group care facility. The focus of this study applies to the general field of 'social labelling theory.' The purpose of this study has yet to be determined.*

My project actually began when Brad Carlton called Rudy Marchant a "psycho" for grabbing the remote. "Wrestling's for retards" Carlton declared, flopping down on the sofa, switching over to the hockey game and digging into a carton of oven-baked French fries. "Hey, let's watch the Sex Show on channel twelve," Ronnie Burgess suggested as he scanned the listings of the TV. Times. "Shut up you Perve," said Ralph Critchley, squeezing himself between Marchant's feet and the arm of the sofa. "You don't wanna watch it 'caus you're a faggot," Burgess shot back, blowing a derisive kiss in Critchley's direction.

It was a typical exchange in the "Rainbow Room," a place where the presence of staff was grudgingly toler-

ated on the understanding that intervention would only occur if there was some immediate risk to life or limb. Otherwise, the shallow veneer of civilized life was temporarily suspended and the reptilian order allowed to prevail. Here was living testimony to the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, who argued that, without external constraints and moral reasoning, all television programs were destined to be nasty, brutish and short. On this occasion, Rudy Marchant, the undisputed Lord of the Fries (who actually had no interest in hockey) held onto his tenuous power while the rest maneuvered themselves into their rightful place in the pecking order.

Relieved of my obligation to grasp what we professionals like to call ‘the teachable moment,’ I sat back and watched with amused fascination, much as Jane Goodall might watch a group of primates preparing for a punch-up. I could have taken a clip-board to list and catalogue the variety of crude gestures and antagonistic postures but I was more interested in the rudimentary language forms that seemed to add meaning to each stimulus and response. In particular, I was struck by the words they used to define each other. On the surface they were common insults, yet I had the distinct impression that, in some way, they revealed and affirmed the underlying structure of their primitive culture. As a humanist, I was acutely aware of the obvious lack of empathy and sensitivity but, when it comes to understanding the subjective worlds of our clients, we child and youth care types can still learn much from such disciplines as anthropology and zoology.

That evening I decided to insinuate my empirical project into our “talk-back” (i.e. back-talk) session in the “Bored Room”. The “talk-back” was a daily ritual in which a staff ‘facilitator’ was assigned to invite or coerce



the residents into exploring the more commonly accepted standards of human social interaction. This program was mandatory, but we all knew that the order imposed in the Bored Room was a tacit trade-off for the disorder permitted in the Rainbow Room – it was probably our only enduring behavior modification strategy.

Once gathered at the table (a round one to convey the Arthurian principle of equality among peers) I asked the reluctant knights to write down one or two words to describe each person in the circle. At first nobody made a move but when I explained that spelling was not important, they set about the task with sinister dedication. I then asked each person to read out the words one at a time, using the actual name of the recipient. As expected, the first round contained the conventional array of slurs and insults, marginally modified in deference to Bored Room etiquette: “Critchley is a faggot;” “Jenson is a piss-pot;” “Dawson is a brown-noser;” “Millar is an asshole” etc. etc. etc. There were a few notable exceptions: “Hoffman is my buddy;” “Marchant is a leader;” and “Richards is smart,” were seriously intended contributions but they were dismissed with gestures of disbelief and derision by all but the recipients. It was time for my experimental intervention.

First I pointed out that by describing someone in one or two words, we ignore all their other personal qualities. Critchely cottoned onto this right away. “Yea, kinda like calling Michael Jackson a perve and not seeing him as a pop star.” “Yes, but even though it’s positive, the term ‘pop star’ is just another label,” I explained. “It doesn’t tell you who Michael Jackson really is. “I know who he really is,” Jensen interjected. “Okay, smart-ass, who is he really then?” asked Critchley. “He really is a perve.” “Oh yea, and you’re a dick-head.” It wasn’t a great start but I

felt some progress was being made.

I then told them how we use labels to turn people into objects and how this makes it possible for us to abuse them. “They call Britney Spears a sex object but I think she gets off on it,” said Burgess. “I get off on it too,” said Marchant with a leer. “Yea, and you’d like to abuse her, you psycho,” Burgess told him. Marchant stared menacingly at his accuser. “I’d like to abuse you, you little fudge-packer.” On reflection, I realize that everything I was trying to get across was actually taking place around the table but, doubting their capacity for self-reflection and not wanting to deal with the fallout, I opted to keep the discourse academic. I’m such a chickenshit, really.

“Okay, I now want you to split up into pairs and find a place in the room where you can talk without being overheard. Then I want you to tell the other person the word you used to describe them and what that word actually means to you. After that, I want each of you to ‘talk-back’ to what your partner had to say – not only about what you think but how you really feel. And there’s no point in just picking someone you like because, before we finish tonight, you’ll have met with every other person in the room. At the end of each meeting, I want you to make whatever changes you wish to the word or words you first wrote down before moving on to the next person. I’ll give you five minutes for each pairing. When I tell you to change partners, finish the sentence and move on.”

To me the instructions were clear and simple but my befuddled subjects responded as if they were being told to circulate at a High School Prom and ask the wallflowers for a dance. “What if we have nothing to say?” asked Burgess. “Then just look into each others eyes,” I suggested facetiously “This is sicko stuff,” Marchant rasped, his eyes still fixed on Burgess. “I’m only asking you to be

honest, just for tonight,” I said. “I am being honest,” Marchant insisted. “This is pukey.” “So you can always throw up and you can’t get more honest than that,” I assured him. He switched his stare to me. “Not me man, we don’t have to do this.” The others nodded.

Now I don’t care how long you’ve been in the residential care business, there are no circumstances more hairy than those moments when your ‘clients’ (oh I love that word) openly raise their collective finger to your singular authority. In this terrifying place, where the delicate balance of power shifts from the righteous to the rebellious, options melt down like a lump of lard on a trucker’s tailpipe. Hovering on the brink of their own annihilation, residential workers have been known to consider homicide or suicide as possible adaptive responses. Psychotic breaks are more common. I well remember the time when Clinton Jarvis, a night supervisor, chose to become catatonic in the middle of an uprising, and the evening when Maggie Norton had to be restrained and medicated after three residents refused to serve their curfews.

I knew better than to take Marchant’s resistance as a personal challenge. Authority lies in the system and we must never lose faith in the subtle mechanisms through which its power becomes manifest – in this case, the delicate juxtaposition of the Bored Room and the Rainbow Room. “Well you certainly do have a choice gentlemen,” I told them, “but here in Camelot, as in life itself, every decision we make carries consequences, some known, some unknown. You see, I also have choices to make, one of which is to unlock the door to the pig-pen tomorrow night when the big game is on ... *or not*. Like you, I must consider my options very carefully.”

“That’s fucking blackmail,” Marchant growled.

“I call it *quid pro quo*.”

“What the hell’s that.”

“That’s Latin for ‘fucking blackmail.’ ”

It took a few disgruntled moments for the balance to shift back in my favor but even the most repressive systems can tolerate a modicum of patience. Eventually, Burgess and Critchley stood up and shuffled their chairs to one corner of the room. “There they go, the brown-nose brigade,” sneered Marchant, but it was a statement clearly designed to save face before acknowledging defeat and submitting to the power of the system.

When, finally, I was alone at the table I began to scribble out my observations, pausing every five minutes to give the instruction to “move on.” On several occasions I stepped in to confront outbreaks of stupidity and when I noticed participants sneaking back to a former partner, but for the most part, they complied with the rules – overtly at least. Although I couldn’t hear what was being said, it was interesting to note that each pairing seemed to have its own distinctive energy. Some encounters were highly charged and animated while others were more like a couple corpses stuck in the same casket. But, overall, I was pleased with how my experiment was progressing and quite excited about reviewing the outcomes.

When the hour was up, we took a short break before returning to the table for ‘de-briefing’. On a large white-board, I made a list of all the words presented at the beginning of the exercise and compared these to the words used following the intervention. As you probably know, this comparative method incorporates the principles of experimental design used by all famous researchers, with the exception of Sigmund Freud and the Pharmaceutical Industry. In order to move beyond the raw data and into the more phenomenological aspects of the human condition, I then invited each of

my subjects to talk about their personal experience with each group member. Now a serious researcher might argue that I should have used a tape recorder for this phase of data collection but any serious researcher would be well advised to keep such devices well away from the likes of Rudy Marchant, Brad Carlton and Ronnie Burgess. As it was, I made brief notes but stored most of the information in my head. At precisely 10. pm a strangely subdued group of warriors trundled off for their customary bed-time snacks. As I walked toward the staff room, I did manage to overhear one revealing comment emanating from the kitchen. "Forget it Jensen, as far as I'm concerned you're still a dick-head."

If you have read this far, you are probably wondering what my study can now contribute to the exciting field of adolescent peer group labeling processes. Well, obviously, the meat of this experiment is to be found within each interaction and outcomes determined by the attitudinal shifts presented by each subject following intervention. It is equally obvious that I can't possibly document all this detail within the scope of this article. Hopefully this will appear in some prestigious scientific publication, like *The Journal of Adolescent Evil*. Meanwhile, rather than leave you completely in the dark, I will use my remaining space to provide you with some of my most critical observations and conclusions.

1. In social and task groups, adolescent males use generalized and specific attributional labels to establish and maintain the structure and hierarchy within the group.

2. The particular labels employed reveal the inherent nature of the group (e. g. the more derogative or demeaning the label, the more repressive the regime. )

3. In repressive regimes, the higher an individual's status in the power structure, the less likely he is to modify his perception of others through personal contact. (e. g. Rudy Marchant made no adjustments to his initial labels and summed up every encounter in one word – “bullshit.”

4. Individuals in the middle of the status hierarchy were the most likely to discard or modify existing labels through personal contact.

5. Encounters between high and low status members were more likely to reinforce existing labels and perceptions.

6. In residential settings for adolescent males, labels with sexual connotations are used to promote a rigid and narrow perspective on masculine identity. To reinforce this ideal, labels are used to attribute stereotypical feminine characteristics to certain group members – usually in the form of homosexual attributions.

7. The power of the system is greater than the authority bestowed on particular individuals (eg. when Marchant was transferred to another program, five days after the ‘experiment’, Carlton immediately assumed the C. E. O. position by taking on the same attitudes and behaviors). This would support a ‘systems theory’ perspective.

8. The lower individuals are on the totem, the less likely they are to challenge or question the label (Critchely, for example, made no bones about deliberately acting like a “dipsy-chicklet” despite the scorn heaped upon him by the others. ) By the same token they, like the high status leaders, are the least willing to relinquish the labels applied to them by others.

Well you can draw whatever conclusions you wish from all of this – or maybe you don't need research to tell you what you already know. When I shared my findings with my supervisor, Len, he summed it all up with the observation “So, I guess that makes these kids just like the rest of us eh? The powerful hang onto power, the peons remain stuck in their own crap and those of us in the middle are ready to change our minds about pretty well everything.” Looking for more specific feedback, I drew his attention to the subtle ways the labels used by the kids became self-fulfilling realities. “This could be the adolescent version of the DSM IV,” I suggested. “Of course,” he replied, “it was created in exactly the same way for exactly the same reasons.” Len can be a little pedantic at times. Actually, he's a bit of a pillock.



# Chapter 13

## For Whom the Bell Tolls

### *The Art of Reflective Practice in Child & Youth Care*

When Eddie Turnbull told me to “fuck off and die,” my first inclination was to grab him by the ears and turn his baseball cap the right way round, using his neck as the pivot. But, being a self-aware child and youth care practitioner, I quickly realized that my desire to punish came from the sense of powerlessness I experienced in early childhood. As a professional, I understood how his hostility toward me was actually a projection drawn from his unexpressed anger toward his father. So, thanks to my knowledge and training, I was able to avoid jumping straight into the old counter-transference trap (Bush, 2001).



Frustrated by his inability to draw me into his pathological relational system, Eddie let fly with a stream of well-worn obscenities and stormed off to his room, slamming the door for good measure. This behavior was



clearly symptomatic of his A. D. (Attachment Disorder) that had given rise to his A. D. D. (Attention Deficit Disorder) and, subsequently, his C. D. D. (Chronic Defiance Disorder). For Eddie, this episode was just another crisis; for me it was an opportunity for intervention.

Stepping deftly out of the energetic flow (an ancient Buddhist technique) I took a breath and calmly considered my options. An immediate confrontation would probably set off a power struggle in which his negative behavior would be reinforced by my negative attention, and this was the pattern that needed to be changed. Taking a behavioral stance, the most appropriate decision would be to withhold reinforcement and wait for a more pro-social response. But such disturbed behavior usually stems from more deeply rooted problems and the most obvious behavioral solutions are not always the most effective in the long run. Eddie was very adept at setting up snot-fights and each confrontation served to reaffirm a negative self-image developed over years of rejection and abandonment. Cognitively, this was all held together by Eddie's pervasive belief that he was unlovable and that nobody would be there for him when the chips were down. So here was an opportunity to let him know that I would not abandon him while helping him to reframe his self-defeating beliefs. But I would need to choose my moment carefully – it was all about timing.

As I waited patiently for the window of opportunity, Brenda Parkinson emerged from her room at the end of the hallway and shuffled toward me. She was obviously distressed and crying. As she approached our contact boundary, her whimpers turned into sobs – huge gulping, tear-pumping sobs. I noticed she'd been picking at her scabs again and a trickle of fresh blood ran down her forearm. My savior syndrome was immediately triggered

but, once again, my self-awareness came to the fore. I am a middle child and my compulsive need to assuage the distress of others was a matter of survival in my family. Stepping out of the flow again (such a good technique) my mind was able to focus on Brenda's treatment plan. "I see you've been picking again," I said, assuming the prescribed neutral stance. "I want you to wash the wound and then apply the peroxide as usual." Her sobbing stopped immediately. "You don't give a shit about me," she said, wiping her tears with her arm and smearing the blood across her cheek. "We'll talk later," I told her. "Go talk to your ass," she suggested unkindly and shuffled off in the direction of the bathroom. But my mind had already returned to the problem of Eddie – it was all about differential treatment.

As luck would have it, this untimely little episode with Brenda completely scuttled my timely intervention with Eddie. He must have heard our discussion and, realizing that my attention had been stolen, proceeded to launch a violent assault upon his immediate surroundings. Intervention was now more about de-escalation and I was moving swiftly in the direction of his room when the damned bell went off. Someone was leaving by the emergency exit. It could only have been Billy Maccleswaith who had sworn on his mother's chainsaw that he would take off before their next family therapy session. The thought of 'Bonehead' Billy riding rough-shod around the local community caused me to do a quick about-turn, at which point I charged straight into the bedraggled Brenda who had chosen this precise moment to shuffle out of the bathroom with her bottle of hydrogen peroxide.

I could certainly appreciate that she was surprised by this sudden breach of etiquette but her reaction was wor-

thy of an Oscar. First she hurled herself against the wall with a scream that completely overpowered the infernal bell. Then, after a dramatic pause, she slid slowly to the floor with a pitiful moan and proceeded to empty the entire contents of the bottle all over the new hallway carpet. At this point Jim Holden, our Executive Director made his entry, stage left. As an administrator, Jim was big on accountability and, with a body slumped on the floor, a maniac destroying a room at the end of the hallway, our new carpet slowly changing colour and a bell from Hell clanging in the background, there was much to account for.

Being self-aware I realized that I was slipping out of presence and entering the state known as “fragmentation” ( *I Fall to Pieces*, Cline, 1960) that terrifying melt-down of the self that completely obliterates all sense of worthiness and competence. My only option was to bracket off all that was happening around me (a useful cognitive technique) and access my deepest inner resources. In this altered state of consciousness, Eddie, Brenda and Billy were systematically erased (temporarily of course) and even Jim, who was screaming something about the cost of carpets, was rendered silent and impotent as I struggled to reassemble the pieces of my fractured self. Somewhere on the periphery of my awareness, I did get a glimpse of Billy Maccleswaith leaving the TV room to join the party but it was irrelevant information.

During the subsequent impromptu supervision session in the staff office, Jim was able to deal with his frustrations through a moderately contained catharsis and I could certainly appreciate where he was coming from. Jim came from a devoutly Catholic family in which authority was a primary theme and his obsession with

the hallway carpet clearly revealed his parents' preoccupation with materialistic values. During his review of the current circumstances I detected a linear and dichotomized cognitive style characteristic of a failure to achieve "object constancy" at the critical developmental stage. His attitude toward me clearly lacked accurate empathy and non-conditional positive regard and I could only assume that Jim had problems with intimacy. Yet, as my employer, he did not have to explain to me why he had decided to test the emergency door on that particular afternoon and he had every right to suggest that I might benefit from additional training and supervision.

But that's all about Jim. For me it was a useful learning experience and I thanked Jim for his insights and suggestions. When he finally left, I went back upstairs to inspect the damage and had to admit that his concern for the carpet was not entirely spurious. As I pondered on the juxtaposition of human and material values, Eddie Turnbull. poked his head from his bedroom door and grinned. "You got some shit eh?" he asked rhetorically. I turned away and walked slowly back to the staff office. "Fuck off and die Eddie Turnbull," I whispered once the door was closed, of course.

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# Chapter 14



## The Magic of Tommy Watts

I started kicking a soccer ball about during my lunch break as a way of preserving my sanity. I'd been working as a counselor at a large residential treatment center for 'emotionally disturbed' kids for a couple of years when the Executive Director suddenly jumped ship and the Board Chairman asked me to "take the helm" for a while (*his* metaphor and his only coherent instruction). Once anointed, I spent most of my time cooped up in the administration building reviewing budgets, evaluating programs and deflecting the incessant demands of those who believed it was now my job to protect their right to life, liberty and happiness. Chasing a soccer ball around a deserted field with only the wind in my face and the ground firmly beneath my feet, I could briefly reclaim the freedom that my new powers had taken away. But, at

the heart of my discontent, was a numbing sense of aloneness.

Over the first few weeks, I tried to stay in touch with my familiar world by wandering through the residential units in the evening, but the ubiquitous mantle of authority cannot be conveniently donned and discarded at the whim of the wearer. My very presence was enough to stem the flow of life I so sorely missed and, despite all my efforts, my encounters with residents and ex-colleagues grew increasingly distant and strategic. It was as if everyone wanted to either look good or get something. In their eyes, it seemed, I was no longer who I used to be.

Convinced that I would never be accepted back into the fold, I decided to use my power on my own behalf. With little regard for existing programs and routines, I announced that there would be noon hour soccer on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for male residents considered to be ambulatory (females just didn't play soccer in those days). At my direction, it was officially entered in the master schedule as "supervised outdoor recreation" (a term generally used to describe the popular diversion of standing around, rolling smokes and plotting revenge). To ensure that my former colleagues wouldn't show up to put a damper on things, I identified myself as the sole program leader.

Only one kid actually signed up but, through the blatant abuse of my position, I was able to drag fourteen residents out for the first session. I use the term "drag" as a verb (to coerce) but, to them, it was a noun (a pain in the ass). Corralled on the weed-infested field, with traffic cones substituting for goal posts, they shuffled around aimlessly taking a perfunctory kick at the ball only if it happened to roll in their direction. My attempts to spur them on with shouts of "Good pass Ralph" or "Great

tackle Frank” were met with blank indifference so I took whatever pleasure I could in beating them to the ball, dribbling around them, knocking them over with perfectly legal shoulder charges and scoring at will. For dramatic effect, I celebrated each goal by throwing my arms in the air while simulating the roar of an imaginary crowd with an ingenious piece of ventriloquism.

After only one week, the sentiment that midday soccer was something to be avoided at all costs became firmly entrenched within the resident sub-culture. With chores, confinements, psychotic episodes, seizures, amnesia, physical ailments, court appearances and even community service as possible options, the numbers began to dwindle to the point where even five-a-side “competition” required intensive dragging. And so it would have remained had a court order not placed Tommy Watts in our care.

Watts had spent the first fourteen years of his life in Sheffield, England where he distinguished himself in such noble pursuits as robbery, aggravated assault, gang warfare and ... soccer. When the family moved to Canada, his parents insisted that he change his ways and he obliged by giving up soccer. The rules dictated that all new admissions must be under constant supervision for the first two weeks for assessment purposes so he was personally escorted to the playing field by the Acting Executive Director.

I did everything possible to lure Watts into showing his stuff but, being a seasoned trouper, he opted for the group norm and ambled around with the others. Then, with time running out and making my final charge toward goal, I made a sudden detour and ran straight into him – torso to torso, man to man. Though he was my equal in size and weight, he was not ready for the impact

and by the time his butt finally hit the deck, he had performed an almost perfect triple sow-cow. As the hapless goalie trudged off to retrieve the ball for the eighth time I went into to my self-congratulatory routine, but before the crowd had time to roar, the lights went out. According to those who witnessed the event, Watts had sprung up from the ground, pursued me with lightening speed and, with the agility of a panther, launched himself head-first into the middle of my back.

On the second day of his sentence for assaulting a member of staff, I paid a visit to Watts and made a fateful deal. All would be forgiven if he would assist me in encouraging the others to acquire some appreciation for the game we both loved.



The impact of this agreement was immediate. The following day, he unleashed his dormant talents, finishing up with the same number of goals as myself (6 each in a 6-6 tie). But, more importantly, he managed to spark some life in the others. Not that they raised their standard of play, they simply moved a little faster and complained with more intensity. It was hardly soccer but, at least, I was no longer completely alone out there.



Then I made the mistake of lacing my newfound enthusiasm with alcohol. I was sharing a bottle of *Glenfiddich* with a friend who taught English at Caldwell High. By his own admission, Phil was something of a snob who believed the kids I worked with were a lost cause. When I told him about this young fellow who, with support and encouragement, might have been an international soccer star, he dismissed the whole idea as a romantic fantasy. As he rambled on about how the senior team at Caldwell had made it to the Provincial finals and were odds-on favorites to win the championship, my mind slipped easily from fantasy into ambition.

I've always been a sucker for stories and movies in which the deprived and downtrodden rise up to defeat the privileged and elite in some form of dramatic showdown. Sure it's a worn out cliché but idealism blended with scotch can dismantle any version of reality. So, by the time we parted, a deal had been struck and money was on the table. A team from my "institution" would play a third-string outfit from Caldwell on Saturday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, a mere three weeks away. Since their first team would be out of town for the Provincial finals, the Caldwell facilities would be available and, there would be nobody around to witness our ill-begotten contest.

In the sober light of day I found myself agreeing with Tommy Watts. Why would anybody want to "take a band of club-footed pillocks to be slaughtered by a bunch of wankers from some snot-nosed high school?" But there could be no backing down and without Watts to lead the troops the prospects were even more dismal. "Sport is ninety percent emotion," I told him. "We'll focus on teaching the basics and I'll get a stack of motivation movies, 'Rocky,' 'Karate Kid', 'The Longest Yard' and stuff like that. We'll practice every day right after school and pick

the best players we have.” There was no doubt in my mind that, had I made the slightest shift from totalitarianism to democracy, Watts would have told me where to shove the whole idea. But this was no time for egalitarian gestures.

In the days that followed I took some solace in knowing that the game itself could not be worse than the nightmare of the preparations, the details of which I choose to omit here. Suffice to say that it took all my power and creativity to keep things from falling apart. In the final week we began making our selections. Since skill was not an issue, we decided upon a strategy of confusion and intimidation. Tommy Watts and Jock Henderson (an illegal import from a community team) would be the two strikers, while Mad Dog Harris, Dumpster Delany, Curly Maccleswaith, Enrico Southerington and Bomber Brumholdstein would be there to strike fear in the hearts of the enemy. Bellamy would be in goal and the rest would be “rovers” with no other purpose than to get in the way as much as possible. Given our resources, it was best we could do.

June 6<sup>th</sup> was a perfect day for soccer – sunny with a light breeze to stir the spirits. But as our bus trundled across the parking lot and came to a stop beside the Caldwell playing field, my own spirit froze. Contrary to all expectations, the pitch was lined with Caldwell supporters. It was Phil’s doing for sure. “Hey look at all those chicks,” screamed Harris, banging on the window and making obscene gestures with his tongue. “And look at the three old farts in black shorts,” Maccleswaith shouted. “Is that their team?” “Those are the officials you asshole,” sneered Henderson. In the seat next to me, Watts sat with his head bowed. “Oh shit,” he mumbled. “Oh shit.”

Being the team manager, I rose to deliver a rousing sermon on my belief in them as individuals and as a team. "Remember Rocky," I said. "Remember the Karate Kid and remember Bert Reynolds." "Remember the fucking Alamo," added Watts, his head now between his knees.

"Here they come," yelled Maccleswaith, peering through the window as a line of immaculately outfitted young athletes trotted by the bus and onto the field. "Jesus, what a bunch of fudge packers." "That's enough," I hollered. "Remember, this is an official program and the regular rules apply." "Too much to remember," Watts muttered. "Too much to remember."

Once on the field, Watts and Henderson did their best to get the others positioned in a way that approximated a soccer line-up but it was frustrating work. Then I noticed Southerington standing at the far side of the field with his back toward the playing area and his shorts suspended suspiciously low across his buttocks. Three young girls were gazing at the frontal view in disbelief. I would have intervened had the referee not blown his whistle to start the game and since the incident was not picked up by either of the other officials, I decided to consider the consequences later.

It was only a matter of minutes before Caldwell scored the first goal. Three nifty runs, two precise passes and their golden haired striker hammered the ball into the back of the net. "Nice save Bellamy," shouted Brumholstein who had casually watched the whole event from only a few feet away. Knowing that Bellamy had a fragile sense of esteem and was inclined to overreact to criticism, I worried about how he might be feeling, but this was soccer, not group therapy.

From the ensuing kick-off, Henderson and Watts made a promising incursion into Caldwell territory but it was

snuffed out when the referee blew his whistle for no apparent reason. He then turned away from the play and began to march toward our goal where Bellamy was attempting a hand-over-hand traverse along the crossbar, cheered on by two spotty-faced youths of obscure origin and affiliation. The referee paused outside the penalty area and pointed at the figure now suspended midway between the goal posts. "You're off," he bellowed, waving his hand toward nothing in particular. Bellamy continued to hold his precarious position as Henderson arrived on the scene. "What's he been sent off for," he demanded to know. "Aping around," announced the official. There's no such fucking rule as "aping around," Henderson protested. "There is now, and I'm giving you a yellow card for swearing at an official." "But we can't play without a goalie." "That's your problem," declared the referee trotting back up field and pointing to the spot from which Caldwell should take their free kick.



There was a short delay while I talked Bellamy down from his work on the high bar and Watts gave one of the rovers a crash course on the basics of goal keeping. There's an old soccer saying about how, sometimes, ten men can play better than eleven, but two against eleven are odds that even Walt Disney would balk at. To their credit, Watts and Henderson remained true to the cause, showing flashes of brilliance that even the partisan crowd was compelled to acknowledge. But when Henderson was sent off for a questionable tackle on the golden haired striker, the last vestiges of fantasy died. Just before

half-time I was mortified by the sight of Harris (“Mad Dog” they called him) profusely apologizing to a Caldwell defender who had made the mistake of running into him. A psychopath indeed. Who are these kids society deems to be a danger to self and others? When the half-time whistle blew, Caldwell had scored five ‘unanswered’ goals. It could easily have been ten.

After delivering a brief monologue on winning as a state of mind I left Watts to handle the fall out. My sights were set on Phil, who could be seen chatting with the Caldwell players at the other end of the pitch. He greeted me warmly but I was not about to be mollified.

“Third-string players and no spectators eh? So what happened to our agreement Phil old pal?” Sensing my intention to seek a dual at dawn or a punch-up after the game, he made no attempt to disguise his complicity. “Yea, I made a mistake. The Provincial finals are next week and the coach pressured me into using a couple of first stringers to assess their fitness. The crowd came out to see them.” Even this was bullshit but it was enough for me to state my case. “Then the deal’s off,” I proclaimed, “and, just to make your day, I’m sending my team out in the second half with instructions to break as many bones as possible, starting with that blond- haired prima-donna with the silk shorts.” His smile faded and his expression became serious. “Okay, this isn’t what we planned, so let’s forget about the score. If you get one goal in the second half, you win – double or nothing, what do you say?” He held out his hand.

The script was no longer the stuff of Hollywood. There would be no dramatic transformation, no divine intervention, no magical substance slipped into water bottles and no sudden arrival of a Brazilian international admitted to the closed unit ten minutes after the rest of us left

for the game. But miracles are always possible if you lower your expectations and Watts had already come close on two or three occasions. I gave Phil the stare of defiance and shook his clammy hand.

I arrived back just in time to grab Watts as his teammates were traipsing back onto the pitch. "Forget about the others," I told him. "Just get out there and score a goal – one bloody goal, that's all I ask. Remember the Alamo." He gave me a 'you mean nothing to me' look. "And remember me to your mother," he said before slouching off to join the others. So much for emotional intensity.

The second half was much like the first, with the Caldwell players playing to the gallery and scoring whenever the urge took them. Without Henderson to work with, Watts sank into the inertia of his teammates and, by three-quarter time, the spectators began to lose interest and drift away.

Then the miracle happened, just as the old story-line predicts. Watts had the ball just inside our half of the field and was about to pass it to a sleeping Harris when the blonde bombshell, who was now in the habit of running all over the place, hit him shoulder-to-shoulder and sped off with the ball. Just as he had in our first kick about session, Watts sprang up from the ground and tore off in pursuit. He caught up with the silken striker just outside the penalty area, deftly took the ball off his feet, circled around him and set off on a dazzling run up-field reminiscent of George Best in his heyday with Manchester United. He was a man possessed. By the time he was within shooting range, he had out paced and out maneuvered almost every player in the Caldwell team. The few remaining spectators, stunned by this scintillating display of talent began to cheer wildly as our star striker moved in on the last Caldwell defender and angled him-

self for his shot.

But, even in its final stretches, the course of destiny is seldom linear. As Watts sped by, the desperate defender stuck out a leg and sent him sprawling headlong into the goal mouth where he hit the goalie with a chilling crunch. Even the partisan spectators were appalled by the travesty and the cry of “PENALTY” was unanimous. The referee, still out of breath from trying to keep up with play, went over to the defender and dispatched him from the game. He then pointed to the spot to indicate that it was, indeed, to be a penalty kick.

Of course I would have preferred to win in classical style but a goal is a goal and I knew Watts would have no trouble consummating his objective from the penalty spot. But the irrepressible Tommy Watts, my hero and savior, was still rolling around between the goal posts clapping his right ankle and moaning obscenities. I ran onto the pitch to join the referee who was crouching over the body and inspecting the injury. “I don’t think it’s broken,” he said, “just a bad sprain.” The diagnosis was intended to be assuring but, either way, the black clouds of uncertainty were hovering again. As I watched Watts leaving the field suspended between Bumholdstein and The Dumpster, it was clear that there would be one more roll of the dice before the agony was over.

I called upon Southerington to take the penalty, instructing him to aim to the left as this seemed to be the keepers’ weakest side. There was no time for any more since the referee was already blasting impatiently on his whistle for the game to recommence. It wasn’t that Southerington had proven himself to be an effective striker of the ball but he was the one less likely to feel the pressure (or feel anything else for that matter). Taking a ridiculously long run up, he swung wildly at the ball and

drilled his foot into ground. The ball shot off his ankle to the right – so far to the right that almost struck the corner flag. “Fucking brilliant,” shouted Harris. I couldn’t have agreed more.

In the movie version, a sudden gust of wind turns Southerington’s shot 47 degrees, floating the ball over the goalkeeper’s head just as the final whistle blows, sending the audience home with a warm sense of something or other. But in the real life version there was none of this. In fact, those of us condemned to see it through had to endure another sixteen minutes in which Caldwell slot-  
ted in four more goals – just for the sheer hell of it.

There is no moral to this story – or none intended. On the way home Harris continued to make lewd comments about the chicks on the sidelines, Bumholdstein berated Maccleswaith for not “slugging that blonde prick” when he had the chance and Southerington talked about how he should probably have aimed to the left. Altogether, they were a pretty happy bunch. Only Watts, who was still in considerable pain and Henderson who cursed his decision to participate in the “fiasco,” seemed the least bit down. And with the emotions of battle already sub-  
sided, I relaxed into my seat and dreamt of the day when I could have my old job back.





# Chapter 15

## The Home Visit

I like bad kids. I don't mean the witless wombats who trip over themselves to get in your face; I'm talking about the serious performers who know how to piss you off with purpose and panache. Any kid can fart or tell you to "go fuck yourself," but to do so at precisely the right moment, with just the right tone and amplitude, calls for a fortuitous combination of intuition, desire and discipline that belongs to the precious few. At this level it is an art form, a creative expression that deserves to be appreciated and nurtured like any other.

The trouble is that most adults feel threatened by such artistry. Blinded by the fear of losing their illusionary authority, they are completely incapable of distinguishing between the goons and the gifted. So, they lash out indiscriminately. God only knows how many potentially brilliant careers have been destroyed by their moralistic pig ignorance. I, on the other hand, have become something of a connoisseur. I love to study the masters at work and watch their apprentices acquire the fundamentals of the craft.

The first thing you have to realize is that this is essentially an *interactional* art form. As a participating adult, your outrage is a critical element in the performance. Consider a Costello without an Abbot, a Laurel without a Hardy or a Bush without a Saddam. What defines the form and impacts the audience is not so much the stimu-

lus as the response, the effect of the actor upon the observer, and vice-versa. Excellence is achieved when the responder is induced to match his or her reaction perfectly to the original creative act. In the theatrical world, this is a conscious collaboration involving natural intuition, acute sensitivity and, above all, exquisite timing. But in the combat zone where ruling adults do daily battle with unruly kids, such collaboration would destroy the integrity of the exercise. Here the skilled performer must rely upon his or her ability to predict or elicit the response of the unsuspecting stooge—a daring proposition that even the most competent and courageous professionals would think twice about.

And this is where the witless wonders fall flat on their stupid faces, right at the first hurdle. Unable to read the target and the audience, they blunder on, never knowing quite what to do, how far to go, or what buttons to press, until somebody blows the whistle. They are clowns, more likely to be ridiculed than revered. What they lack is ‘role-taking ability,’ the capacity to see and judge the world through the eyes of others. On the surface this may look like raw intuition but it isn’t. Accurate role-taking involves using all of the senses in a thoughtful and disciplined way. It also demands a clear sense of personal boundaries—being able to separate one’s own experience from the imagined experience of the other. So if you find yourself around kids who have that uncanny ability to get you going, you can confidently assume that their role-taking ability is more developed than yours. In this area at least, they are more personally aware and interpersonally adept. And if this recognition pisses you off even more, your troubles are just going to get worse. Your only salvation is to accept your relative inadequacy with grace and follow in their footsteps in a dignified and

adult manner of course. There is much to be learned.

Talented kids learn how to choose their unwitting collaborators carefully early in their career. For practice purposes, the ideal candidate is someone who is uptight enough to ensure a response but is unlikely to be provoked into creating some life-threatening retaliation (these maniacs are best left to the most skilled and seasoned practitioners). For similar reasons, the astute rookie will select targets located somewhere in the middle of the power hierarchy. The lowly and humble offer little satisfaction while the powerful and mighty can extinguish the creative flame with the stroke of a pen. Resisting the temptation to aim too high is a fundamental aspect of the practitioner's discipline.

I entered the arena as a mid-range target working in a closed institution for evil boys. As a rookie front-liner with a university degree, a new bicycle, and a misdirected inclination to make a difference in other people's lives, I was an ideal mark.

Contrary to all expectations, my first week on the job went like a dream. I couldn't believe how well I was received by the residents — neat kids really. Even the "ones to watch" seemed to acknowledge my legitimate place in the scheme of things. Some even took the time to inquire about my well-being and ask the odd question about my life on the outside. What I didn't realize was that the "ones to watch" were carefully watching me.

By comparison, my new colleagues were distant and impersonal. They talked about the pragmatics of institutional life, ate meals at their own separate table (the only one with a cloth) and warned me about the dangers of becoming personally involved with the "inmates." At my first staff meeting I alienated myself further by suggesting that 'Flash' Flannigan's preoccupation with his

prize-winning genitals might not be resolved by forcing him to wear boxing gloves to bed.

Between meetings, the only friendly gesture I can recall came from a deputy warden named Drew ("Drew the Screw" the inmates called him) when he walked in and caught me lending a book to a kid doing solitary. "We don't do that," he said, grabbing the book from the prisoner and ushering me out into the walkway. "We put them in there to think, not to be entertained. A book today, God knows what tomorrow." He bolted the door from the outside. Then, without warning, he shook my hand. "You'll learn," he said, patting my shoulder with his other hand. "These things take time." Then he took off with my "Wankers World" stuffed in his jacket pocket. "Screw you Drew," I said, after he had disappeared into the labyrinth. "Sooner you than me," said a voice from one of the cubicles.

If my colleagues seemed distant from me, they were even more remote from the "inmates". Even the Staff Psychologist, who spent most of his time preparing reports, rarely left his office and could be seen only by appointment. So, whenever my custodial and program responsibilities allowed, I chose to hang out wherever the kids happened to be. I wanted to be available without being intrusive, to listen rather than talk. Of course there was the usual testing-out — the breaking of minor rules, unacceptable language and "ungentlemanly conduct," but it was all fairly benign and, for the most part, I managed to hang in without having to call upon the power invested in me. When push came to shove, I was usually able to support my non-interventionist stance with the belief that this was all part of changing the institutional ethos. On the odd occasion when I did bring out the rule book, there was never any major challenge to my author-

ity and I really appreciated the guys for this. Most of the time I actually enjoyed the banter, even the goading, that went back and forth, and participated to the extent that my role and dignity would allow. It was during this time that I began to notice how some kids were particularly adept at crossing the line without hanging themselves out to dry on the other side. It didn't occur to me then that this had always been central to my own ambitions and that I was responding to my own institutionalization in precisely the same way – hence my fascination.

“The guys really like you,” Jimmy McLintock told me one day. “They trust you more than the other goons around here.” Ignoring the implication that I was also a “goon,” I took some satisfaction from the sentiment. But that wasn't what I was really looking for. It's true that I wanted to be accepted but this wasn't simply about ego. I wanted them to trust me, confide in me, tell me about their lives, their hopes and their fears. I wanted them to know that someone in that institutional backwater cared about them as unique human beings and not simply as inmates with a sentence to be served. I wanted them to see themselves as worthwhile individuals with real potential to go on and make something of their lives. I wanted to make a difference, to do the work I'd come to do.

So, when inmate Harry Hassleback, the Kipling House captain, told me in confidence that young Brendan O'Leary had a “personal problem” and wanted to talk to me about it, I disguised my delight with a perfunctory nod. Brendan was a morose kind of kid who never had much to say for himself and I was really quite shocked that he would choose me to be his counsellor. Harry said he would arrange for us to meet privately in the dorm during study hour.

O'Leary was indeed a very unhappy fellow. He sat on the corner of his bed with his head bowed and mumbled his discontent to some indistinguishable spot on the floor. Only through my constant requests for clarity and clarification was I able to pick up the gist of his story. He had lost contact with his mother, the only person who meant anything to him. Apparently she was suffering from some debilitating illness and had been forced to leave her apartment for reasons unknown. She had given her son her new address but no phone number and his letters, three in all, had been returned unopened. When I suggested he might phone his probation officer and ask him to look into the situation, Brendan shook his head. He was due to be released in a few weeks and if mother was nowhere to be found, or was living in circumstances deemed to be undesirable, he would have to be transferred to another correctional facility. But news about his mother's location was much more important than his own freedom. He just wanted to know that she was okay. No probation officer or social worker would ever give him the straight goods. Brendan needed to hear from someone he could trust but there was no one on the outside, friend or family, who could be relied upon. Contrary to all the rules of the system and the institution, I told him I would drop by on my day off and check things out. Given the circumstances, it was the least I could do, a simple act of humanity.

The address he gave me turned out to be a run down Victorian apartment house on the East Side. I climbed the stairs and rang the bell of Suite 304. The woman who invited me in was probably in her mid-twenties; a peroxide blonde with crimson lips, blue frosted eyelids and a perfume that smelled like mixture of grenadine and Nil-Odor. She had on a short floral kimono, fish-net

stockings and precariously high heeled shoes that left small indentations in the linoleum. The 'suite' was actually a 'bed-sitter' *one* room, curtains closed, *one* bed, poorly made-up, and *one* chair draped in an assortment of female undergarments. Having determined that my hostess was, in fact, the sole occupant, I turned to leave but she moved quickly to position herself between me and the door, now firmly closed. I sensed I might be losing control of the agenda. "I'm looking for Mrs. O'Leary," I said.

"Well here I am," she replied, opening her arms and, thereby, the front of her kimono. "Please call me Claudia. It's a pretty name, don't you think? I chose it myself."

"Yes, yes I do, very pretty. But I'm in the wrong place."

She moved a step closer. "Maybe you are, maybe you're not. At least have a drink while you make up your mind". She glided past me, reached under the bed and pulled out a cardboard box stuffed with bottles. "Scotch, Gin, Rum or Beer, what's your fancy Ced?" She sat down on the bed and carefully adjusted her position until the hem of her Kimo was a good four inches above the top of her fish-nets. "Don't worry," she said, the booze is included."

The design of O'Leary's conspiracy was obvious. What I needed now were the details, the evidence that would establish guilt beyond any reasonable doubt. Details of the hearing and punishment could be left for future consideration. "How do you know my name?" I demanded to know?"

"Relax. I have friends everywhere." She tapped the side of her nose with her finger and a frosted blue eyelid dropped into the wink position.

Even then, I would have continued my interrogation had it not been for the racket that suddenly erupted in

the suite next door. At least two men and at least one woman were screaming and howling while someone, or something, pounded out a rhythmic accompaniment on the adjoining wall. As the cacophony was obviously escalating toward an ear-splitting crescendo, I decided to move out before the authorities had a chance to move in. Anticipating my departure, my hostess got up from the bed and spat on the floor in contempt. "Goddamned chickenshit," she said, pushing the box back under the bed with her foot. On the way out, I passed a slovenly young buck lurking about in the front hallway. "Everything to your satisfaction Sir?" he asked politely above the din. "Oh yes," I assured him. "You should try it sometime."

The following day I barreled into the Kipling Dormitory just as the wake-up bell sounded and made straight for O'Leary's bunk. "Okay, where is he?" I hollered on discovering that his bed was *sans corpus*. Moans, grunts and an exquisitely timed fart greeted my inquiry.

"Come on, where is the little shit?" House Captain Hassleback finally retrieved the basics of verbal communication. "He's visiting his Mom," he said wearily, sitting up in bed and stretching his arms above his head. "He gets an overnighter twice a month. Is there a problem?" He was yawning and blinking his eyes like a startled choirboy. I could have saved the world from immeasurable grief by ending his wretched career on the spot but self-interest prevailed. The events leading up to his grisly demise might have livened up the Correctional Archives and made good copy for the Tabloids but my mother would have been devastated by the publicity. Anyway, O'Leary would never have had to face the consequences of his own treachery. So, being a rational being and an aspiring professional, I kicked the leg of the



vacant bed and departed, slamming the door on the way out.

Still committed to my quest, I did a quick about-turn at the Gym, doubled back to the dorm and put my ear to the door. All was silent. But it wasn't the gentle silence of a world in harmony, it was the sinister uneasy silence that wraps itself around otherwise unbridled malevolence. I knew instinctively that my conveniently absent 'friend' had spilled the beans to the degenerates of Kipling House, a den of deviance tragically named after the poet who had so eloquently articulated the most noble aspects of manhood. "Hitler House" would have been a far more appropriate designation.

When I returned to the staff office my fears rose to another level. Everyone was just too anxious to know about how I spent my day off. Even Drew, who had dropped in to read the night reports, seemed to be peering at me with uncharacteristic interest. "Oh I had all kinds of stuff to do at home," I told them and, for whatever reason, they let me get away with it. I was tempted to blow away the whole charade with a full confession and a plea for mercy but revenge was still my primary preoccupation.

For the rest of the day, I shied away from human contact and restricted my activities to the confines of the Policy and Procedure manual. In the afternoon, as I was checking the dorms for illicit objects, materials and substances, and my mind continued on its course of retaliation my brain decided to release a critical item from the vaults. It was a revelation that called for a major shift in strategy. I went down to the Records Office, signed out three files and checked the Duty Officer's reports. Having substantiated my suspicions, I then slithered into the metal shop, by way of the furnace room,

and told Hassleback I wanted to see him in the Surgery immediately after dinner.

He arrived thirteen minutes late. Rather than apologize or question the reason for our meeting, he immediately launched off into a stream of trivia about life in the institution. I simply stared at him until he chose to acknowledge that I was not on board. He stopped in mid sentence. "What?" he asked, as if he he'd just noticed my non-participation.

"What, what?"

"What are you looking at me like that for?"

I went directly to the heart of the matter. "You set the whole thing up didn't you? Your evil little mind planned the whole thing."

"Set it up ... set what up? What am I being accused of?"

"Oh, you want me to read you your rights eh? One phone call to a lawyer and all that bullshit. Forget it lad, you're already in the Nick and it's just you and me."

Then he tried to turn the tables by interrogating me. "You and me talking about what?"

I decided to demolish his game plan on the first play. "Okay, let me go through the tedious exercise of telling you what you already know. I'll talk, you listen. Without giving him the satisfaction of letting him in on my personal disarray, I coldly recounted the facts: the contrived session with O'Leary; the case of the disappearing mother; the phony address; the collusion with Claudia — the works.

He listened attentively but with no hint of empathy or culpability. "Sounds like fun, but why are you pointing the finger at me?" He looked nonchalantly around the room.

"One, because O'Leary could not have dreamed this

thing up, he doesn't have that kind of twisted mind. Two, O'Leary doesn't, and never did, live on the East Side. Three, your father, God have mercy on his Soul, lives three doors down from the Knocking Shop on Roberts. Four, your friend was on location to monitor the proceedings. I presume he filed a full report to your satisfaction."

Point four was his only hope. "Friend? What friend? What are you talking about?"

"The kid who visited you at 3.15 p.m. on September 26<sup>th</sup>. I saw him in the waiting room. He was hanging around in the door when I left the scene of the crime. Frank Blundle it was. Surely you remember good old Frank."

Hassleback nodded thoughtfully. "Are you going to hand in a report on this?"

"You know damned well I'm not ... and you know damned well why."

He gave me a wide-eyed look and shrugged his shoulders.

My inner turmoil began to ooze out. "Okay so you conned me big guy. I hope it was worth it. I broke the rules to help out a kid who seemed to be in trouble. I put myself out on a limb for you and O'Leary. The staff are right, you guys are a bunch of juvenile psycho's. You don't give a shit about anybody. Well, lesson learned. From now on I go by the book. So you can tell all of your pals out there to watch their scabby asses at every turn."

He thought for a moment, looked up and smiled. "Well it really was a family visit you know."

"Don't give me that shit."

"No really. Claudia's my half-sister. Her real name's Crystal ... you can check it out."

"And I suppose Crystal was just playing a role in your perverted little plot?"

“Hell no. I told her you were looking for services. It was all yours for the taking.”

“You scumbag. And what did you tell your friend Blundle?”

“I just asked him to make sure you didn’t get into any trouble ... real trouble I mean.”

“You bloody liar. I’m in trouble up to my neck. Everyone in this pigpen knows about it. Even if I manage to hold onto my job, my life around here isn’t worth a toss.

Hassleback looked deadly serious. “That’s a pile of crap. The only ones who know are the guys in Kipling.”

“Oh sure. And they’ve all kept their dirty little traps shut, right?”

“They’d better.”

“Oh yeah, so why is that?”

“Because anyone who breaks the Kipling Code of Brotherhood wouldn’t have much left to live for. And because I’m the House Captain, unless you or the goons decide to fire me for some reason. Then, of course, the reasons would have to be considered in detail at a disciplinary tribunal.”

The implications of his last remark did not escape me. “So the Kipling Code of Brotherhood is it? Well the only code you’ll ever know is the Criminal Code and your brotherhood is no more than a clump of maggots hanging from a camel’s ass.”

“Oh charming.”

“Oh no, Mr. House Captain, you’re the charmer. First you stick the boot in from behind. Then you try to con your way out of it. And now you’re offering me protection by promising to keep your trap shut. Now *that’s* charming. Even if you kept your word, which is unlikely without a lobotomy, you’ll always have your little package of blackmail to fall back on whenever the need arises.

Well screw that Mr. Hassleback, Captain, Sir. Let's get this thing out of the way once and for all.

Whatever was going on in his poisonous little mind, he looked genuinely distraught. "That won't happen. Trust me."

"TRUST YOU." Give me one good reason why I should trust you, or any of your squirming band of toadies.

"Because *we* trust you."

"Balls."

"I mean it man. This won't go any further ... you can count it."

"Get out of here". Go on, piss-off."

"What?"

"I said get out of here. Go on, Piss-off. NOW"



He left me alone to consider his proposition and my future. I have no idea what strange cognitive contortion persuaded me to believe him, but I did. And I remained in the job until long after Hassleback and his cronies had been discharged to continue their felonious careers elsewhere. It was a good decision.

# Postscript

Some years after I had shaken Hassleback's hand on the occasion of his release from our correctional care, I decided to sacrifice my own freedom to the institution of Holy Matrimony. As I stood beside the woman I loved on the church steps, smiling at friends and relatives, my bleary eyes picked out the unmistakable form of Hassleback leaning on the stone gates. That evening, when my blushing bride and I finally made it to our secret rendezvous, we discovered yet another gift-wrapped parcel sitting on the bedside table. It contained a bottle of the finest single malt scotch with a card attached. It read; "Don't worry, the booze is included. Cheers, Captain Harry H. Hassleback."



## PART FOUR

# Some Unprofessional Ideas for Child & Youth Care

### EDITOR'S NOTE

You will be pleased to know that this is the last section. If you have made it this far, you might as well go on to enjoy a well-deserved sense of closure. After all you have suffered through, it should come as no surprise to learn that this 'writer' has the unmitigated audacity to offer his perverse perspective on the profession that he has never really understood. If nothing else, I hope you now have some empathy for the poor wretch who was bribed into editing this scurrilous 'masterpiece'. We will all recover in time – all things being equal and the Good Lord willing.

GDF



# Chapter 16

## **When the Cocks Crow the Chicks Get Laid**

If sex is such a big deal, how come the CYC scribes don't write about it? Perhaps it's because they might be accused of being sexist, perverted, amoral, homosexual, homophobic, Muslim, pedophilic, or any of the other nasty little barbs that get tossed about in our sexually liberated world. Personally, I think it's more likely because they're scared their own fantasies, fears and failures might leak out and show them to be as screwed up as the rest of us. Oh what a cynic I am.

And what about all you worker bees meddling in kids' lives? Is sex a hot item in your little chats, or do you hide behind the old "that's private and personal" barrier to avoid the same complications? And what about the lingo? I know some seasoned campaigners who can wax knowingly about oral sex but shudder when it comes to "blow-jobs" and "eating-out". I'm not talking about using naughty words and sharing dirty stories, I'm asking if you're willing and able to get down to the nitty-gritty? If not, why not? Where else are kids going to learn about life's most precious jewels?

Now I don't claim to be an expert on this topic but not having parents to stuff me down the straight and narrow made it possible for me to amble through the land of erotica without the usual moralistic bullshit scrambling



my senses. At an early age, my fledgling brain carved out a direct connection to my willy (or, perhaps it was vice-versa) and by the time I was placed in the Reform School for *Enfant Incorrigibles* there was a bond that even the ever-vigilant Jesuit Brotherhood couldn't put asunder. There was nothing exclusive about this life-affirming relationship. In fact, I was quite keen to share my delights with my school chums, but there were few takers. The break-through came when Millie the Matron's Daughter wandered into my laboratory in the 'detention room' and joined me in a series of tantalizing experiments. I've been replicating and refining these designs ever since, but poor little Millie was subjected to an *ex post facto* inquisition and inducted into the Sisters of Chastity at the devastatingly ripe age of thirteen. Yet, even now, the old bod still shivers when I think about her sitting in that barren cell with her protective habits draped around the most delicious pair of thighs I've ever cast my reverent eyes upon.

Someday I'll write a book about my amazing adventures and discoveries but today I want to focus on one disturbing aspect of the so-called 'sexual revolution'— the denial and desecration of the noble willy as a conscious and creative element within the unexplored potential of life. If this sounds like a pretentious proposition, let me assure you that it wasn't conjured up by the word-warped hunk of meat between my ears. I'm no philosopher, but this body/mind stuff makes sense to me, even if I don't always understand what it's all about. Anyway, enough of this ... back to my crusade for phallic freedom.

When you started asking questions about where babies come from, chances are nobody mentioned your dad's willy. Perhaps you were handed the old crap about storks dropping packages down chimney pots or, if your parents

were *progressive*, they might have told you how you were tucked away in Mom's belly like a lump of undigested hamburger. But did they say you only got there because your dad poked his willy in first? I doubt it. If you happen to be a girl, there's a good chance you didn't even know he had one. My aunt Mabel, who saw one sticking through the window of her potting shed, still believes only bad men have such "thingies".

If you weighed-in as a boy, you knew a lot about willies from the get-go. Long before you took yours in hand to wee-wee on the neighbor's cat, you already knew how much fun it was to play with. Your parents may have tried to distract you with useless rattles and plastic chain saws, but when you're a little nipper, nothing beats a good willy-twiddle in the bathtub. Did you know there are movies of babies playing with their willies right in Mom's belly? And would you believe that Daddy spent years playing with his long before Mommy came along to join in the fun? Oh yes he did! He was practicing to bring you into the game. Let's hear it for daddy.

I know some kids who don't like to talk about their willies because they're ashamed. My friend Roger was playing around with his in bed one night when it suddenly sprang up like a jack-in-the-box. Bubbling with excitement, he ran downstairs where his mom and dad were playing cards with the Fotheringtons and presented it for them to take a look at. What a bummer that turned out to be. All he got were cold stares and a nervous giggle from Mrs. Fotherington, before he was unceremoniously dragged back upstairs and told to go to sleep or be disemboweled by the monsters under the bed. He was twenty-three at the time. You might not believe this, but Roger, who is now forty-eight, will never show his wonderful willy to anyone. He won't even go for a medical



check-up in case it turns into a stiffy. His wife Martha, who likes to take a peek when he's not looking, calls it "Mr. Mushroom." In my comprehensive classification of nonsensical disorders, Roger is suffering from DWS (Disconnected Willy Syndrome). The irony is that some twisted medical misfit gave him a prescription for Viagra. You can imagine the trauma that caused.

I'm not suggesting you should become obsessed with your willy and flash it around at bus stops. If you do, you'll probably be arrested and called a 'pervert'. All I'm saying is that being ashamed of the best thing in your toy box is just plain silly. Ducks and trucks may come and go, but a well cared for willy will keep you happily engaged for a lifetime. The important thing is to be careful who you decide to share your treasure with. You don't want to end up like poor old Roger.

If you stay in touch with your willy, it grows up with you? As time goes on you begin to see that it's not just a plaything but a very important and sensitive part of you – just like your belly button, only much more fun. It doesn't have to end up like the hooded monster Dicky Dewitt likes to whip out in the bike shed. Nobody in his right mind would want to trade-in a cool corvette for a beaten-up old dump-truck. Remember, your willy is just like you – one of a kind. It was custom made and you won't find another one quite like it however long you spend hanging around school

showers and public washrooms.

When you're ready to drop all the kiddy stuff, your little sensor begins to tune into your thoughts and respond to things that never occurred to you in the bath-tub. You can test this out by stroking it gently while thinking about the time Aunt Fifi dried you off after your swim in Eagle Lake. Don't worry about what auntie might think (she probably cherishes the memory herself), just enjoy the wonderful way your thoughts and your feelings intermingle. I think this is what wise men mean when they say, "Now, at last, I am One." Oh, and don't forget to send a message of appreciation to dear old Fifi.

If it happens that your memories are more about Uncle Charles or one of the lads in the choir – no problem. Wherever you want to go, your willy will go with you. The choice is yours. Just make sure the other person shares your enthusiasm and leave the others to be strangled by their own hang-ups.

Now all this is pretty neat stuff but the best is yet to come, so to speak. I'm talking about the magical moment when your willy brings you a present that Santa could never deliver. You might be just playing around, or even asleep, when it happens but you'll know immediately that the most precious gifts don't come from Mommy and Daddy but from the inside. It's called an 'orgasm' – but that's just an empty word. Many writers have tried to describe what an "orgasm" feels like but when your willy sets your body trembling with excitement and your head spinning with delight, words are useless. All you have to do is to take a deep breath and go with the flow – you'll never look back.

Poor old Roger, who suffers from DWS, still hasn't managed to go with the flow. Somewhere deep down he still believes that his willy can't be trusted so he clamps

down on his orgasms, keeps his body stiff and tries to think about the baseball scores when his head is gets too excited. I've been trying to teach him how to wank and breathe at the same time but the old crap about being dirty and sinful keeps cropping up. The lad will never be in control of his willy until he comes to know and appreciate that this is a sensitive and loving part of who he is and not a demon driving him toward Hell and damnation. What in God's name were his parents thinking about?

If you think Roger's problem is out of place in today's sexually liberated world, think again. We might have moved beyond the time when the almighty phallus was a symbol of masculine power but, with a little help from the feminist movement, the moral code now proclaims that any flagrant display of a human cock is obscene, and a 'stiffy' is disgustingly pornographic. What kind of liberation is this?

As for me, I love my willy as I love myself and I refuse to keep it a secret from those who consider it to be an offensive pornographic object. It doesn't dictate my behavior any more than my hands instruct me to steal canned fish from the supermarket. It's a highly sensitive part of my body that responds to my feelings without bending to the judgments of the moral muckrakers. Call it a Dick, Prick or Mr. Mushroom, wherever my willy goes, I go also. And whatever my willie does, I take full responsibility.

So, let's hear it for willies everywhere. May they rise above repression and take their place as one of nature's most beautiful and useful creations. They certainly have the balls to do it.

# Chapter 17

## Monkey Mountain Revisited

*Oh what manner of fool is me  
A drifter of noble intention  
I'm a CYC with a college degree  
And skills I'm obliged not to mention*

You don't have to hang out with CYC types for very long before some disenchanted misfit (who really wanted to be a dentist) starts whining about not being recognized and respected as a "professional". Such is the extent of this obsession with professional status that entire conferences and publications have been devoured in its service. Apart from being a tedious waste of potentially creative energy, the last thing kids need is another self-serving gaggle of deluded experts protecting their coveted theories and peddling their practices according to rules and regulations imposed by their professional Junta.

Worry not my young friends, *real* child and youth care workers will never trade their freedom for the illusions of legitimacy and authority. On your behalf, they refuse to be drawn into the 'fix it' mentality and the mindless pursuit of measurable outcomes. Their focus is upon what's happening in the real lives of real kids, whoever and wherever they happen to be. They understand that our future on this planet now depends upon opening the human heart to connection rather than manipulating the brain into behavioural conformity.

So let the professional patsies pursue their petty pretensions. Let them have their lowly place as the pee-ons in an anachronistic class system that sucks the life out of service-providers and recipients at all levels. Then, perhaps, the rest of us can get on with what we really want to do – support kids in becoming who they are rather than what ‘the system’ declares they should be. As any systems theorist will tell you, when it comes to survival, the remedial programs need kids more than the kids need the remedial programs.

So, if you want to negotiate your way into the remedial network, go right ahead. But first, why not take a look at what you might learn from the following brief overview of its history and current organizational structure. I realize that nothing I have to say will deter the devoted, but this column is dedicated to the idle thoughts of an idle fool so I’ll take it from the top.

*I don't diagnose and I don't do drugs  
Well ... at least I don't give them to kids  
But everyone knows that I sometimes give hugs  
And that's something the whole world forbids*

On occasion, I’ve been known to take a perfunctory poke at the upper class elite of the mental health business, sometimes resorting to language unbecoming of a CYC upstart. I try to resist this temptation, but the mannequins of medical science are such worthy and easy targets for my disdain. In a way, they’re like Anderson’s emperor who walked around stark bollock naked while deluding the mindless hordes into admiring his new outfit. And, like the ingenuous little boy in the adoring crowd, I want others to see their ridiculous displays of narcissism.

The sad part is that there was a time when the good doctors of psychiatry, like Freud, Jung and Wilhelm Reich, were exploring what it means to be human, from the inside out. Their information was drawn from the lived-in experiences of their patients – physical, thinking, feeling, sexual, social and spiritual beings, like you and me.

Whether you agree with what they had to say or not isn't the issue – when animus turned into ego they couldn't even agree with each other. What does matter is that they stirred our curiosity and urged us to look into our own lives for questions and answers we never wanted to consider. For those with time on their hands, and a few bucks to throw on the couch, they created something called 'psychotherapy' and the rest, as they say, is mystery.

Even if you have no interest in delving into the quagmire of your own libido (after all, a cigar really is just a cigar) the fact remains that the stuff these guys came up with is now embedded in the way we think about ourselves and relate to each other.

Now compare this rich legacy with what currently passes as standard psychiatric theory and practice. To Dr. Synapsus we are treatable objects. Our feelings are simply reactive biological impulses and our minds no more than functions, or dysfunctions, of our brain chemistry. Wouldn't you just love to have a therapeutic relationship with Dr. Synapsis?

Citing inconclusive empirical findings, the American Psychiatric Association abandoned interactive psychotherapy in the 1970's in favour of standardized treatment protocols, including ECT and Psycho-surgery. These techniques have now been expanded to include multifarious diagnostic labels followed by medicinal



manipulation and a hit of cognitive-behaviour therapy to put the system back in order.

I've used the word "bullshit" before and, chances are, I'll use it again. Personally, I'd rather spend an hour sucking a penile stogie on Siggy's couch than be treated as a biosocial object by some emotionally constipated tekkie who hasn't got two clues how to relate with another human being.

And don't talk to me about all those successful outcomes reported in studies sponsored by the pharmaceutical companies. What they choose to measure is whatever sells the most 'junk' – it has nothing to do with enhancing your well-being through the integration of body, mind and spirit.

But it's what they *don't* choose to measure that sticks in my craw. Let's take a look at the number of patients, adults and kids, who have been tagged, treated and rendered drug dependent. Let's examine the long-term effects of meddling with the chemical functioning of the brain at critical stages of development – from infancy onwards. And let's take a long hard look at how the medicalization of the Mind has become a legitimate practice in the "fix it" mentality of western cultures.

So, why has it come to this? The answer is threefold, and painfully simple – money, status and power.

*I don't know psychometrics, I can't measure your I. Q.  
Twixt neurotics and dyslexics, I can't tell you who is who  
But I'll listen to your story, and when you say you're through  
I'll take what you told me, in the hope of knowing you.*

Well so much for the elite of the mental health system – may Freud have mercy on their wretched holes. Let's

take a look at how the middle classes fit into the schema. In the upper realm we find the lofty (some might say “Fawltly”) towers and gated communities of Clinical Psychology. Oh doesn’t that word ‘clinical’ tell it all?

But long before those who now call themselves clinical psychologists began meddling in people’s lives, their academic predecessors were kicked out of the think tank of philosophy because of their narrow-minded voyeuristic obsession with what Billy Bugdale in Burlington, Ontario was doing when nobody was looking.

Abandoned and homeless, they carved out a convenient little niche for themselves somewhere between the camps of anthropology and sociology before setting off in search of identity, fame, fortune – and a few unsuspecting subjects. And the Good Lord did smile upon them, as Good Lords often do.

Accountable to nobody, the philosophical outcasts were free to lobby for membership within the most exclusive academic Cartel of them all – the Union of Scientific Study and Research (USSR). And, since they had no traditions to uphold or practices to protect, they were ready to accept whatever admission requirements the physicists and biologists deemed appropriate.

As a final dash of irony, or revenge, their status as probationary associate members placed them in an ideal position to scientifically observe, analyze and ultimately vilify, the behaviour of those who drop-kicked them out of the nest of life – the pompous, prattling pricks of posterity – the philosophers.

That they failed on all counts is water under the fridge. The more pertinent issue is, after a century of prolific speculation and research, how much has this pseudo-scientific mishmash of conflicting ideologies, ideas and practices contributed to our understanding of

you, me and dear old Billy Bugdale? I'll let you fill in the blank, but first, allow me to offer a brief historical perspective for your consideration.

First came the behaviourists – legendary figures from the salivating Pavlov to the elementary Dr. (JB) Watson and the fixatedly operant B. F. Skinner. The culmination of their work was the world-shattering pronouncement that we humans tend to do what we find rewarding and avoid what we find irrelevant or painful. Well done lads, somebody had to say it with a straight face.

Then came the cognitive brigade. With a token nod to their old philosophical Godfather Rene Descarts ('I stink therefore I am') cerebralists like George Miller and Albert Bandura threw us all into a tizzy by suggesting there might be some connection between the way we behave and the way we think.

This brilliant hypothesis created a timely opportunity for them to impress the real scientists by constructing complex mathematical models of thinking that only they (and Uncle Albert Einstein) could understand. But however rewarding these designs were to the creators, they were monumentally irrelevant to Billy Bugdale ... and anyone else who was saving up for a new dishwasher.

Back in the Ivory (many would say "Fawlty") Tower another group of researchers had noticed that teenagers do better than infants on college entrance exams. Known as the 'developmentalists,' they concluded that thinking is rather like sex – it gets better up to a certain age and then ... well, who cares? Using their new empirical tools, they measured everything considered to be developmental, including perception, cognition, empathy, morality and becoming a Republican. Led by their formal operations manager Jean Piaget, their common quest was to create a definitive and predictable model for what takes

place between our ears before we start thinking about sex and dishwashers (not necessarily in that order).

Their 'observational' computer assisted research methods certainly caught the eye of the medical community and their developmental 'stage' theories offered academics a welcomed relief from all that anal, oral and oedipal stuff nobody ever really wanted to get into. Meanwhile, out in vacuum land, their nifty new theories were eagerly lapped up by theoretically bankrupt educators. Closer to home, enlightened parents (beyond stage three) diligently monitored their offspring to identify each developmental stage and select the appropriate stimulus inputs. Reveling in their newfound popularity, the guardians of the almost scientific profession sent even more clinical worker bees out into out into the suburbs to spread the word.

In Burlington, the developmentally delayed Billy Bugdale was oblivious to all this, as were his teachers at Hard Rock Elementry. Yet Billy has survived – which is more than you can say about developmental stage theories. There never was any consensus among the theorists and the research on practical applications is no more impressive than data used to killed psychotherapy. But don't give up, there's a ripple of something completely different stirring the languid waters of the theoretical pool.

With all the new toys at their disposal, it was only a matter of time before researchers began poking around in the period between conception and birth. But, under the auspices of pre and perinatal psychology, a group of radicals has thrown everything back into the pot by proposing that, at the centre of their concern, lives a unique and purposeful being capable of screwing up the neatest theories and predications.

OMG. No wonder these folks are not being invited to splash about in the mainstream. Suggesting to the scholars of psychology and psychiatry that that even Mr. Bugdale might make his own decisions is like flashing a crucifix in the face of Dracula. How could they possibly incorporate individual freedom into their deterministic doodles without completely severing their tenuous ties with the big boys and girls of science? And, if it should be so, would this throw much of what they've already produced into the 'delete' basket?

The answer is probably "yes" to both questions, but the mental health experts would be well advised to hang tough before breaking the ties that blind. In the inner sanctum, some physicists are already considering the possibility that human consciousness is *bona fide* component of the universal order.

Should they find support for this proposition, psychologists may actually find themselves ahead of the game thanks to the humanistic renegades of the 1950's and 60's. Just as psychiatry turned its back on interpersonal therapy, so psychology has kept its humanistic skeleton in the closet on the grounds that its propositions were un-scientific, its methods un-technological and its applications economically un-viable. I guess we're all waiting for that big quantum leap into the unbearable (and un-measurable) state of being human.

Meanwhile, back in the marginally bearable and measurable territory of the Mental Health System, the collaboration between the elite and upper-middle class has worked like a charm in maintaining the status quo and keeping would-be impostors at bay. The psychiatric dichotomy of mental health versus mental illness is neatly mirrored and supported by the arbitrary division between normal and abnormal psychology. In servicing

the medical cause, psychologists have done a wonderful job of making these categories and their subcategories look as though they really exist by throwing numbers at them. And, of course, the shrinks are masterful in the art of using labels in lieu of explanations.

As an academic discipline psychology continues to thrive with a never ending flow of irrelevant Ph.D. dissertations being compressed into databases all over the globe. In the applied field, practitioners calling themselves ‘clinicians’ (with the tacit permission of the medical community) continue to assess (only real medical personnel may use the term ‘diagnose’) their clients using standardized tests that measure imaginary concepts. This makes it possible for the person to be given a number and placed on a statistical device called a “normal distribution.” The clinician can then tell how much that person deviates from normal people, like them. If it’s more than the allowable margin, the data is sent off to the medical authorities and an appropriate label is allocated.

Since clinical psychologists don’t do counselling or psychotherapy either, their assessment role ensures that their place within the mental health system is firmly secured. Of course they will never achieve their scientific aspirations but, like the psychiatrists, they will continue to believe what they’ve been taught even in the face of blatant evidence to contrary – a psychotic state by their own definition.

*The kids I work with every day  
May get pissed-off with me  
It's not that they were born that way  
It's how they've learned to be*

*I don't want them to be like me  
Or be their guiding star  
My only goal is to let them be  
Who they really are*

Unless some unexpected upheaval occurs, those who fill the ranks of the lower middle class – your friendly neighbourhood social workers – are equally secure within the system, but for very different reasons.

Unlike the 'higher' disciplines, Social Work grew from humble beginnings as a response to the appalling conditions of deprivation and social injustice during the early days of industrialization. It was a response that embraced both help for the needy and advocacy for the downtrodden. In other words, Social Work came into this world with a mission and healthy dose of moral indignation, rather than intellectual superiority.

Social workers also take a different stance in relation to their 'clients' (the word 'patient' is patented). In its purest form, good social work is more about getting the system to respond to the individual rather than the other way around. In this regard they like to talk about 'case-work' rather than assessment and treatment. Essentially this means that they will use whatever is available to bring about a satisfactory integration of the individual and his or her environment – a worthy cause indeed.

Yet social work ideology also contains its own favourite dichotomy – victims and villains. This serves to justify both the help given to the needy and the perpetual battle against those considered responsible for the deprivation. In case you haven't noticed, this often gets social workers into a lot of trouble – particularly when those who hire them are identified as the villains.

Given all this, you may wonder how Social Work ever

became integral to the mental health system. Well the obvious answer is that social workers do what the others don't do – they actually go out into that big cruel world and help people. Without them, the whole shebang would come crashing down leaving only the pharmaceutical companies to clean up the mess. Having to put up with their self-righteous morality is a small price to pay for this essential service.

Internally, Social Work has become an incredibly flexible and adaptive animal. If you have an M. S. W. you can do most anything you want – so long as you don't step on the egos of the experts in their carpeted offices. If you want to call yourself a “counsellor”, “psychotherapist”, “family therapist”, “group therapist”, “personal coach”, “mediator” etc. etc. , all you have to do is take the odd course, tack it onto your M. S. W. and you're away to the races.

If all is working well, social workers are granted this freedom so that, collectively, they can mop up the mess created by the system as a whole. In a sense they're like plecostomi that are put into aquariums to clean all the crap off the bottom while everybody looks the other way. And, as we all know, a plecostomus will never be the star performer but its presence is essential to the functioning of the whole.

*So where does all of this leave me?  
Well, what you get is what you see  
If others tell me who I am,  
I'll always be an also-ran  
But if I want to ring my bell,  
I'll tell them all to go to Hell*



*A pox on what they have to say  
I'll work with kids my own sweet way  
In fact, I know a lot  
If I'm not sure who I really am,  
I sure know who I'm not.*

So now we're down to the working classes – the street workers, family support workers, community support workers and a host of other drifters. Personally I'm proud to take my place among them. I have no problem when they strive to enhance their skills, seek to raise their profile or draw attention to their work. This is where it all happens and the collective task is to gather the support of every caring human being in every community across the globe. At the risk of invoking an old political slogan, I say "Workers of the World Unite". And if Child & Youth Care Workers choose to lead the way, you can count me in. I would even invite the Social Workers to step off the Monkey Mountain and put their energy and resources where it really counts. Oh what a dreamer I am.



# Chapter 18

## What Do We Do after School?

True to form, I used the festive season as an excuse for two weeks of unbridled piggery and debauchery before settling into an acute case of the PITS (Post-Indulgence-Toilet Syndrome). Knowing that Garfat and Gannon would soon be on my back for another piece of offensive nonsense, I felt a desperate need for renewed energy, inspiration and, above all, humour.

So, with notebook in hand, I waddled down to our local factory of higher education to chat with some of the CYC fraternity entering their final semester of instructional fantasy. To my delight I found my quarry – a gaggle of enthusiastic and committed learners eagerly anticipating their contributions to this noble vocation. As you might expect, the topic of relationships was never far away but I managed to squeeze out a few other matters



totally unworthy of consideration.

Using mindless interview techniques, dubious recording methods and strategic editing, I cobbled together snippets of our dialogue for your consumption (that's a disease you know). It goes without saying that my trusting subjects gave their unqualified permission for publication. Hopefully, the following will encourage them to be more cautious in future. Only the names have been retained to protect the guilty.

### *Pissing-off Paula*

Cedrick: After almost three years of hanging around this joint, have you figured out what child and youth care is all about?

Paula: Oh there's no doubt, it's all about relationships.

C: Yea, that seems to be the flavour of the day, but what does it mean?

P: It means we need to create mutual trust, honesty and understanding with the kids we work with.

C: Why?

M: What do you mean, why?

C: Well, what good will that do?

M: You're joking, right?

C: No. So you have a trusting, honest and understanding relationship with a trainee terrorist with links to Al Qaida. What's the point?

M: The point is that this is what all kids need – even if you choose to call them terrorists.

C: Well, I'm just giving an example. Are you saying that once that need is met, it doesn't matter whether the kid decides to go into terrorism or tourism?

M: Now your pissing me off. Of course it matters. But kids who learn to trust don't make choices that hurt oth-

ers. They learn how to express themselves in more caring and positive ways.

C: And if they don't?

M: Well, they do, whether you believe it or not.

C: Sounds like a hypothesis based upon some kind of theory. Is this what you learned in school?

M: Yes. But it's also something I've learned from experience.

C: So they will make choices you approve of.

M: Stop twisting things around. They make better choices for themselves. What I want isn't the issue. My judgments are just my judgments and I have to own them. I might share them, but the final decisions belong to the kids themselves. It's called 'self-responsibility', in case you haven't heard.

C: So, as long as you have a caring, honest and trusting relationship, anything goes.

M: No, of course not. Healthy relationships are reciprocal. I have to trust my clients just as they have to trust me.

C: Trust them for what? Can you really come to trust someone who lies, cheats and farts at the dinner table?

M: That's disgusting ... no, you're disgusting. All kids must learn that some behaviours are simply unacceptable.

C: Unacceptable to whom?

M: To everyone around them.

C: Including you.

M: Yes that includes me. We all have to learn how to live together. Kids need feedback about how their choices affect others. Honest feedback is an important part of the CYC relationship. Like, right now I'm finding your behaviour offensive.

C: So what are you going to do about it?

M: Well I don't want a relationship with you, so you can crawl back into your hole.

C: But if I *was* your 'client' what would you do?

M: I'd give you honest feedback and help you to consider different choices.

C: But, if I consider the options but stick to my guns. What then?

M: Then you would face the consequences.

C: And would you impose them?

M: Yes, if I have to ... and in your case it would be a pleasure.

C: So what happens to our relationship?

M: I've already told you. I don't want a relationship with you

C: Yea, I get that. We seem to have come full cycle.

M: Yes. Haven't you anything better to do?

C: No, not really.

M: Well I have. (exits stage left)

### ***A Friendly Chat with Albert***

Cedrick: Well are you ready to step out into the big wide world of Child & Youth Care?

Albert: Yea, I can't wait to get into the action.

C: Have you got a job lined up?

A: Not exactly. I wanted to work at 'Woodmere' (local residential centre) but they started laying off two months ago.

C: Funding cut-backs?

A: Yea, it's happening everywhere. I'm on the wait-list for a school aid position.

C: You don't seem to be bubbling over about the prospect.

A: I'm not really. It's cost me a bundle to go back to school and I end up helping teachers who don't want to

deal with problem kids.

C: Oh come, come Albert old bean. That's pretty negative take on things.

A: Yea. I suppose I was hoping for more.

C: More of what?

A: More involvement with kids and more professional autonomy. The idea of hovering over kids who cause problems in schools, or can't keep up with their classmates, just doesn't turn my crank. I didn't make all this sacrifice just be a teacher's little helper.

C: Are you interested in getting some feedback Albert. Or are you content to go into a room full of kids as a useless pain in the ass?

A: Is that the feedback?

C: No. That's only an appetiser. There's more if you wanna hear it.

A: You mean you're going to tell me what you really think? Go ahead.

C: OK, you're acting like a disgruntled, entitled whimpering brat. If you expected to be handed a nice little niche customized to your personal requirements, you've chosen the wrong profession. Perhaps you should be an accountant.

A: All I'm saying is that, after three years of training, I expect to be able to practice child and youth care. Is that too much to ask for Godssake?

C: Get off the pot. Child and youth care belongs wherever there are kids in need of connection, support, understanding and guidance. Classrooms are places where many kids struggle to survive for six or seven hours, five days a week. If you don't want to be there, resent following instructions, feel diminished by authority and dissatisfied with your place in the scheme of things, then at least you have some idea of how these

kids feel.

A: Nice speech, perhaps you should have been a preacher. So I can understand how they feel but if I can't use my skills to do anything about it, then what's the fucking point?

C: I'll tell you what the fucking point is. If you have the guts to look into the mirror, the school classroom might offer what you most need – an opportunity to confront your own fears and narcissistic pretensions. Unlike the kids, you have the resources, knowledge and skills to create your own identity and carve out a role that meets your needs. Then, through your own struggle, you can help the kids to deal with their baggage and find their own way through the maze.

A: And that's what you call child and youth care.

C: You bet your little B. A. – or whatever they give you to stick on the wall. On the other hand, unlike the kids, you can choose to hang around the pool hall and wait for an opening at 'Woodmere'. Your choice.

A: I'll think about it.

C: Don't wait too long. You have to apply for the accountancy program by the end of February.

### ***Pete Ponders Professional Prospects***

Cedrick: You were working with kids for years before returning to school. How do you like the academic stuff?

Pete: I love it. Most of our faculty have worked on the front line, and I like that. I think you need to have both the experience and the theory to call yourself a 'professional'.

C: So now you'll be able to wear the elusive badge.

P: For me, being a professional isn't about having a badge – it's about the quality and effectiveness of your work.

C: Spot on lad. I couldn't agree more. But don't you want CYC to be recognized as a legitimate and respected profession in its own right?

P: Oh, absolutely, but that doesn't happen overnight eh?

C: You can say that again. I started marching with the CYC banner back in the 1970's but I'm still waiting for that big step up on ladder, to shake hands with the social workers and schoolteachers.

P: Well things have changed since then. Now we have local and national organizations, countless conferences, our own literature and university programs.

C: So, where do we go from here? What's the next step?

P: Well, we won't get respect from others until we believe in ourselves, value our work and begin to think of CYC as a life-long career. At this point I'm more interested in competence and commitment than competition.

C: Touché Pete. I sure get the commitment part, but what do you mean by competence?

P: All professions have their specific knowledge and skills.

C: Well that's what they want you to think. But isn't this just a way to claim territory, like dogs pissing around their own backyard? The people business is so crammed with self-styled experts, I wonder if there's anything left for child and youth care workers to claim as their own unique areas of knowledge and skill.

P: I don't think this is the issue. It's not about being unique – it's about where we direct our attention. No other profession is involved in the lives of kids to the same level of intensity. For us, experience is always the foundation – theory and techniques are secondary. Our interventions are essentially relational and this is what



makes us different.

C: That could be a hard sell Pete. People who buy services want clear explanations, replicable methods and measurable outcomes. They want someone to come along and fix the problem. They might be sucked in by the established experts but not by some upstart who says “just let me get involved with the little psycho and we’ll see what happens.”

P: I agree. We do need to be more specific about the principles and practices of our profession, particularly the relationship piece. This is the challenge we need to focus on. We have to prove ourselves before we can claim our place as professionals

C: Well, try as hard as you like but you’ll have hard time coming up with something the others haven’t already got under their belt. And don’t expect to get the support of the experts.

P: You’re making it sound like a competition again. Personally I believe in collaboration.

C: Oh you mean teamwork. From what I can see, this only reinforces the status quo. No psychologist is going to say, “hand this kid over to a CYC, they know more than I do and are a lot more effective. They are the relationship experts.”

P: Cynical stuff Cedrick. I know what you’re getting at but I think we’re making great strides in this area.

C: Yea, so do I. I’m with you all the way.

P: You have a strange way of showing it, but I believe you.

C: Thanks Pete.

# Chapter 19

## Incomes and Outcomes

People often ask why I'm always running off at the mouth about Child & Youth Care when I don't work with kids myself. No, that's a lie: only Buster Bradshaw B. A. , CYC. has actually asked me this question: and that was only last week after I caught him taking a leak in my piranha pond. Being Buster, it was more a reciprocal accusation than guileless curiosity. Nevertheless, it occurred to me that this question probably troubles my many silent readers (I know you're out there) so I decided to put your minds at rest with the following personal disclosure.

### **Why I Don't Work With Kids**

The truth is, I love being around kids. I just don't enjoy being told what to think and what to do by some free-loading authority demanding measurable outcomes in return for a pauper's handout. If that's what 'working with kids' means, they can stuff it in their policy manuals and feed it to the chickens. Now you might think this qualifies me for ODD certification but I believe I'm being reasonable, rational and responsible.

If you devoted the rest of your life to sifting through all the research on working with 'troubled' kids, you would *definitely* be certifiable, but you'd also be left in no doubt that the theories are arbitrary (i.e. junk), the techniques

are meddlesome (i.e. sneaky) and the outcomes are glaringly equivocal (i.e. pathetic). In other words, you'd spend your time flopping around in a sea of psychological sputum only to discover that, with the exception of drugging kids into submission, the only unequivocal finding is that none of this codswallop actually works.

And the closer you look, the worse it gets. Let's begin with those elusive measurable outcomes. When you cut through all that seductive mush about serving the "best interests of the child", the desired outcome is always about what adults really want – kids that do exactly what they're told and without complaint. Do you honestly believe a program dedicated to enhancing the self-esteem of kids who tell them to "fuck off" will be widely acclaimed and generously funded? And, whatever the sweetly packaged mission statements might say, about recognizing the "whole child" as "a unique human being," the elusive outcomes can always be boiled down to the same basic proposition – "do as we say and you're free to go."

In the old days, there were only two categories of problem kids – those who were "wilful" and needed consistent discipline, and those who were "impaired" and needed to be hidden away. With the growth of competitive professionalism, this target population (i.e. problem kids) was sub-divided into three serviceable categories – the bad little buggers, the sad little buggers and the mad little buggers. Educational and Correctional Institutions were charged with dishing out the discipline for the bad-dies, leaving the real professionals to practice their own magic with the demonic, the depressed and the deranged.

Depending on what certificate they happened to hang on the wall, the new breed of professionals peddled one

of two service options – the reward and punishment package designed by B. F. Skinner, or the oral and anal fixations relished by Sigmund Freud. Since psychoanalysis was far too expensive for the likes of a screwed-up kid with an Oedipus Complex, Skinner’s behavioural model of ‘operant conditioning’ was always going to be the preferred option.

Because kids, like donkeys and junior executives, are inclined to chase after carrots, impressive positive, observable and measurable outcomes were proudly demonstrated and recorded. The trouble was that, soon after the manipulators stopped manipulating, their ‘subjects’ either sank back into their old ways, or went off chasing totally inappropriate rewards of their own choosing. Somewhere along the line, Dr. Skinner had overlooked a critical element in his equation but, by that time, he had been rewarded to the point of satiation and he passed-on to seek new rewards from the Great Manipulator in the sky.

Meanwhile, unhappy with their second-class standing, psychologists set out to find the missing piece. After much academic deliberation, they came up with the radical notion that kids who smash shop windows, or behave in really weird ways, probably plan and justify their actions with improper thoughts. With this stunning insight, they opened the door to vast new opportunities for manipulating what goes on inside the human head, regardless of age, creed or culture. In the 1970’s and 80’s the cognitive theories and therapies of these thoughtful pioneers flourished and were handed over to the folks who actually work with kids. But once again, their efforts to convert these practices into sustainable and measurable outcomes failed to impress the judges.

Faced with the obvious conclusion that “nothing

works,” behavioral and cognitive manipulators reluctantly joined forces in an unprecedented gesture of collaboration. The result was the formulation of the classic intervention technique we now call Cognitive-Behavior Modification Therapy. Of course there was no guarantee that the whole would be any better than the sum of the parts but, when the medical manipulators joined in the fun, they tied up the package with a simple proposition – when the Cognitive-Behavior Model is judiciously lubricated with appropriate chemicals it would run like a charm and produce the measurable behavioral outcomes we’ve all been seeking. Eureka! !

But now the story becomes even more sinister. The historical evidence clearly shows that the men and women of medicine, whether psychiatrists or podiatrists, don’t work in collaboration with any other pretenders to the throne. As the only ‘true’ scientists in the barn yard they will always preserve their jurisdiction over life and death, health and happiness. Whether they happen to be working in a hospital, geriatric facility, group home or refugee camp, no self-respecting medical doctor will ever accept a subordinate status to non-medical meddlers – it’s just the way it is.

Over the last decade, we’ve been overwhelmed with reports about the ‘amazing’ discoveries in neuroscience. Of course, we don’t really understand what the boffins are talking about, but we can rest assured that Doctor Proctor, down the road, or an affiliated Specialist, can interpret the information and help put our brains in order. Please don’t get me wrong. I have every respect for the scientists that are using new technologies to understand the workings of the meat between our ears. It’s how we use, or misuse, this information that freezes my hypothalamus and rattles my frontal cortex. Above all, I fear

that once we come to believe that we are the servants of our brain, rather than the other way around, we become junkies to the most insidious forms of manipulation imaginable. In other words, we are well and truly fucked.

If you think my fears are those of a deranged idiot, take a look at the number of programs now claiming to remove the problem from the kid through ‘non-obtrusive’ brain centred interventions – free diagnosis included. If positive measurable outcomes remain elusive, I guess there’s always ECT, Psycho-Surgery and Remedial Education – as last resorts, of course. So if I really wanted to work with kids at the leading edge, I’d be adding a whole range of exciting new interventions to blend into my undoubted relational skills. With this stuff in the tool box, perhaps even a deranged idiot could become a professional.

### **Why I Hang Around Child & Youth Care**

When it comes to working with kids, CYC is my one and only hope. In my fibrillating heart, I know that kids need more than well-meaning manipulators bent on turning them into acceptable and successful participants in an insane world. They need to be nurtured by curious and caring adults who can see and hear them for who they really are. They need to know that the resources for growth and change are already within them, waiting to be recognized, expressed, and celebrated. They need to be assured that their own experiences are valid, whether we approve of them or not. And they need to laugh a lot. I don’t give a monkey’s toss what amuses them, as long it turns into full-blooded belly-pumping laughter.

Relationships that incorporate these qualities and understanding are not a means to an end – they are *both*

the means and the end. Over the years I've come to despise the prescriptive remedial crap. There's nothing wrong with the kids: the problem lies in our unwillingness to engage our own hearts in creating opportunities for personal and relational growth. However soppy it might sound, this is where we will find the unconditional love we need, not only for kids, but for ourselves.

In its purest form, Child and Youth Care is the only discipline committed to becoming unconditionally involved in the lives of young people. I've always hesitated to use the term 'professional' to define this role. I'm tired of listening to upwardly-mobile-morons seeking to carve out a niche for themselves in the pretentious pursuit of professional status. It pisses me off no end when I see these people clamouring to implement the latest theories and strategies devised by the remedial manipulators. And when I hear them spouting off at CYC conferences about their scientifically validated programs and peddling the products of their superiors my lower body craves for the nearest washroom. If this is the pathway to professionalism you will always find me on my bike, peddling in the opposite direction.

This doesn't mean science has nothing to offer child and youth care work. The problem is we become mindless peons when we rely on others who hand down interpretations and misinterpretations according to their own agenda. If we really want to make science work for us, then its time to come out of our mouse holes, ignore the crumbs and go find out what's coming out of the cheese factory. But first we need to realize that much of the research is funded by vested interests seeking positive measurable outcomes in their quest for more power and wealth. The second is to understand what the scientists are talking about, interpret their discoveries for

ourselves and incorporate only what fits into *relational* child and youth care. The third is to find sources of information that are reliable without being tied a particular agenda or distorted by somebody hoping for a place on the New York Bestseller list. \*

This is a formidable challenge but even a moronic wastrel like me can dig some morsels out of the scientific pot. Over the last few weeks, for example, I've been igniting unused synapses to understand what neurobiologists are now babbling about. \* While much went over my head (literally), I became fascinated with the idea that the human heart is actually more intelligent and responsive than the human brain. To take this one step further, it seems that when we tune into this storehouse of 'intuition,' the heart is more likely to inform the brain than the other way around. Now there's something for CYC folks to consider. You can bet your knotted knickers this research was not sponsored by Eli Lilly Pharmaceuticals. At this point, I've no idea how to incorporate this into working with kids but I know some smart and creative folks who could do just that. Meanwhile, I'm coddling some new insights about my 'jimmycoddling' heart.

So that's all folks. Rest assured I'll continue to spend my time messing about with kids and, who knows, someday I may even decide to "work" with them again.

Your old Pal, Cedrick

\* The book I found most useful was Joseph Chilton Pearce's latest work *The Heart-Mind Matrix*.



# Chapter 20

## **Letter of Resignation from *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice***

To: The Editorial Board,  
*Relational Child & Youth Care Practice*

March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2005

Dear Members of the Board,

I hereby resign from my tenuous post as a columnist with your publication. Given my life-long dedication to doing as little as possible, I now find myself overwhelmed by my obligations to my deceased dog-fish, Ralph, and the rash that has suddenly flared up along my perineum. Please don't ask to see the evidence.

I won't patronize you with all the usual sentimental clap-trap about how much I've enjoyed our association and how I'm going to miss you all. The truth is, that since you never paid me a single penny, never said thank-you, never remembered my birthday and never offered me any of that special malt scotch we all know Garfat keeps under his desk, there's not a hell of a lot to feel sentimental about, is there? I'm not saying you're not good God-fearing people; you're just not very relational.

When I first signed on with you lot, you told me your readers would really like my stuff. Well do they? Did

they? In two years all I got back was an indecent proposal from a weirdo in Flin Flon and an email from a woman who wanted to know if I was related to Michael Jackson. Playing to an unresponsive or hostile audience is one thing, but getting any kind of response from your mysterious readers is like asking Osama bin Laden for his mailing address. Have you ever checked your subscription list to make sure there are real live people “out there”? I know for a fact that Mildred Parkinson of 27 Butterfield Road, Halifax, N. S. passed away in 1927.

I haven't discussed this with your other columnists but my heart goes out to them. No wonder Goodwin is frozen to his chair, Gomph lives alone in a Caboose, Matthews hides herself away on some uncharted (undiscovered? ) island, Stuart spends her life looking for leaders and Phelan sticks to reviewing other people's stuff (sensible fellow). Well these people deserve better. Might I humbly suggest that your esteemed editors, Fewster, Garfat and Rose-Sladde be given a shot of intensive sensitivity training? I realize that they don't get a penny either but even volunteers should be held accountable.

It's all about relationships, isn't it?

Deliciously yours,

Cedrick.

p.s. Please tell Fewster to find another stooge.

# What the experts have to say about this book

**This is a real page-turner. It took me only seven minutes to turn all the pages.** — *Ed Turner, Author and Nobel Prize Candidate in Accountancy, New Jersey.*

**I haven't actually read this book but I did read another book once and quite liked it.** — *Michael Kloppe, Ph.D. , Professor of Contemporary Literature, University of East Grimstead.*

**Absolute Rubbish** — *His Holiness John Goodweather, Bishop of Wet Wang, East Yorkshire, UK*

**Every idiot should read this book, at least once backwards** — *Trilby Lunge, Saddlemaker's Bottom Klocker, Knotty Ash, Liverpool.*

**A royal achievement of profound epistemological relevance** — *Jimmy Swazzle, who once shook hands with H.R.H. Prince Charles*

**A very nice little book ... very nice indeed.** — *Alim Masih, Public Relations Officer, Al Qaeda Children's Services*

**If I'd read this book first, I never would have married Elmer.** — *June Dossage, author of "How to Raise Moral Kids" Houston, Texas*

**This Asshole Cedrick is a Plonker** — *Dr. N. D. Blinker, Professor of Psychiatric Diagnostics, Flin Flon, Sask.*



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