



Willamette Freethinker



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Corvallis Secular Society (CSS) is a Humanist and Freethought society for all nontheists of good will.

CSS is affiliated with the American Humanist Association (AHA) and the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH).

From the Editor

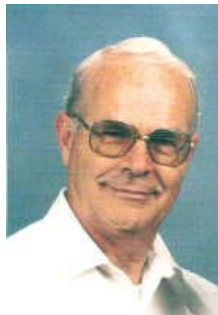
Getting old... and the alternative

Two more CSS members have died recently. (Yes, God apparently *DOES* hate us — this makes at least five CSS members in less than a year...)

First, was Mont Smith. From his obituary:

Mont Wayne Smith of Monroe died November 22 of a stroke at age 77. No service is planned

He was born March 11, 1930 in Broadus, Montana to Dewey Brian and Kathleen Clapsaddle Smith. He married Elaine Ewing June 20, 1950 in Nampa, Idaho.



He earned his BA at Northwest Christian College in Eugene, his MA at Butler University in Indianapolis and his Doctorate at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena.

He served as a minister, school teacher and administrator, missionary to Ethiopia and a professor at Hope University in Fullerton, California. He was in demand as a public speaker in the U.S. and internationally. He authored several books. One, widely used in colleges, is currently being translated into Arabic.

He retired to Monroe, Oregon in 2001. He enjoyed and rode horses all his adult life. He loved working and playing with his family, flying his Super Cub, sailing the "Lily Maid", travel, cruising, playing games with family and friends, entertaining guests at home, presiding at the Lions Club, belonging to the Secular Society and being a Free Thinker, blazing trails in the woods, farming, building, writing and using his computer and TV among other things.

Survivors include his wife, Elaine; his daughters: Annette, Kathy, Laura, Ellen and Hallie; and son Montwayne.

As a memorial, those who wish to do so may send a contribution to Doctors Without Borders or UNICEF.

The other CSS member to recently die... is a more personal story...

I turned 40 a couple of days ago, and in the weeks prior to the Big Day, I started to mope a bit. Forty is huge. Forty is the dividing line between having-a-sports-car-is-cool, and having-a-sports-car-is-sad-and-pathetic. Forty is officially No Longer Young.

I normally don't do birthday parties, but this time, I thought I might get together with some friends, and maybe go bowling or something.

I thought wrong.

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CSS Meetings and Events

This month, CSS member Michele Ulriksen will speak to us about her experiences in an evangelical "reform school". To prepare yourself for her presentation, she has written an article for our newsletter, starting on page 6.

Calendar:

Saturday, Jan 19 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Feb 16 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Mar 15 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting

Regular meeting time:

Third Saturday of each month, from 2:00-4:00 pm.

Regular meeting location:

Corl House (3975 NW Witham Hill Dr, Corvallis).

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From the President

Demonic Possession and Exorcism

Original sin. Substitutionary forgiveness. Eternal punishment. The trinity. Talking snakes, donkeys, and burning bushes. Miracles. To Humanists and other atheists, the list of the nonsensical beliefs of religion go on and on. But perhaps you think that the notions of demonic possession and exorcism, at least, died out long ago.

Think again.

Britain's *Daily Mail* reported recently that Pope Benedict XVI has directed all Roman Catholic bishops to have in their dioceses priests trained in fighting demonic possession.¹ They are to counteract the rise in Satanism, described irrationally as "the most extreme form of 'Godlessness'."

"The initiative was revealed by 82-year-old Father Gabriele Amorth, the Vatican 'exorcist-in-chief,' to the online Catholic news service *Petrus*. 'Thanks be to God, we have a Pope who has decided to fight the Devil head-on,' he said. 'Too many bishops are not taking this seriously and are not delegating their priests in the fight against the Devil. You have to hunt high and low for a properly trained exorcist. Thankfully, Benedict XVI believes in the existence and danger of evil – going back to the time he was in charge of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.'

The CDF is the oldest Vatican department and was headed by Benedict from 1982, when he was Cardinal Ratzinger, until he became Pope in 2005. Father Amorth said that during his time at the department Benedict had not lost the chance to warn humanity of the risk from the Devil. He said the Pope wants to restore a prayer seen as protection against evil that was traditionally recited at the end of Catholic Masses. The prayer, to St Michael the Archangel, was dropped in the 1960s by Pope John XXIII.

The article reports that "The Vatican is particularly concerned that young people are being exposed to the influence of Satanic sects through rock music and the Internet."

What do these terms mean? *Merriam-Webster* defines a *demon* as "an evil spirit; a source or agent of evil, harm, distress, or ruin." *Possession* in this context is "domination by something (as an evil spirit, a passion, or an idea)." *Exorcism* is "the act or practice of, [or] a spell or formula used in, *exorcising*, which in turn means "to free of an evil spirit; to expel (an evil spirit) by *adjuration* ("solemn oath; an earnest urging or advising"). A related term is *witch*: "one that is credited with usually malignant supernatural powers ... often with the aid of a devil."

Demonic possession is primarily a Christian belief, with support almost entirely in the New Testament. Jesus is described in several instances as driving out demons from people's bodies. For example, in *Matthew 17:14-21*,

presented with an epileptic boy, "Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly."

According to *Wikipedia*, demonic possession is "the control over a human form by the Devil himself or one of his assigned advocates." "Demon possession became a plague among Christians; exorcisms and executions were performed on persons allegedly possessed; many mentally ill people were accused of being demon-possessed and were killed. The *Malleus Maleficarum* speaks about some exorcisms that can be done in different cases. In Christianity, animals were also believed to be able of being possessed; during the Middle Ages, hundreds of cats, goats, and other animals were slain because of the idea that they were either an incarnation of a demon or possessed by one."

[The *Malleus Maleficarum* is a famous medieval treatise on witches, published in Germany in 1487. Its purpose was to refute all arguments against the reality of witchcraft. The authors, Sprenger and Kramer, were both members of the Dominican Order and were Inquisitors for the Catholic Church's inquisition against heretics. Pope Innocent VIII's "witch-bull," issued to Sprenger and Kramer, recognized the existence of witches, gave full papal approval for the Inquisition against witches, and gave permission to do whatever was necessary to get rid of them, thus opening the door for the bloody witch hunts that ensued for centuries.]

Exorcism, per *Wikipedia*, "is the practice of evicting demons or other evil spiritual entities from a person or place which they are believed to have possessed (taken control of). The person performing the exorcism, known as an *exorcist*, is often a member of the clergy, or an individual thought to be graced with special powers or skills. The exorcist may use prayers, and religious material, such as set formulas, gestures, symbols, icons, amulets, etc. The exorcist invokes God Jesus and /or several different angels and archangels to intervene with the exorcism.

The modern revival of interest in demonic possession has been fed by the movie industry. Think of *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Exorcism Of Emily Rose* (2005). Another such film is *The Amityville Horror* (1979; redone in 2005). The events in this latter film allegedly really happened, but in fact the whole affair was a hoax. See "Investigative Files – Amityville: The Horror of It All" by the *Committee for Skeptical Inquiry's* Joe Nickle at <http://csicop.org/si/2003-01/amityville.html> .

A Reaction

An early reaction to the Pope's "exorcist squads" announcement is "What the Pope and Linda Blair Have in Common," by Tommi Aviccolli-Mecca Jan. 3 2008. (It appeared in *BeyondChron*, San Francisco's Alternative Online Daily.²)

The author wrote, in part:

I have to admit it, Pope Benedict XVI is an atheist's dream come true. Not only is he a former member of Hitler's Nazi Youth, but he once headed up the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the modern-day version of the Inquisition (as in the mass slaughter of Jews and heretics.) He also used to lovingly refer to queers as 'intrinsically evil.'

Perhaps church leaders should simply explain to the faithful that demons don't possess people because they don't exist. If one of their kids is listening to heavy metal and acting all weird, maybe it's because he's a teenager and that's what they do. Forget the Medieval props and the Latin mumbo-jumbo. Give the kid a few years and before you know it, he'll be another corporate shill out to make as much as he can so that he can pay for the condo and the SUV. Now that's demonic possession!

I have to wonder: What motivates a 21st Century Pope to cater politically to the most conservative element in his church, a bunch of Neanderthals that wants to turn back the clock to a bad old time when 'witches' were tied to stakes and queer men were used as kindling for the fire. George Bush and company built their base of support among the fundamentalist Christian crazies in their party. Obviously, Benedict has done the same in his church.

In centuries past, Catholics actually believed that demons caused disease. Mental illnesses were signs that the devil had taken over their bodies. Ignorance reigned supreme. Obviously, in Benedict's church, it still does. The former Joseph Ratzinger now has a new cause: Exorcism. As in the classic 1973 horror movie featuring Linda Blair as a young girl possessed by the devil. Obviously no one told the pontiff it was only a work of fiction.

My View

Demonic possession, at best, may have been a pre-scientific explanation of the cause of many medical conditions, such as mental illness and epilepsy. But the notion has done incalculable harm throughout the centuries. It's time humanity "exorcises" this absurd concept, and all religious beliefs, from our collective minds. It is time, instead, that we use science, reason, and compassion ("Humanism") to determine our beliefs and actions.

John Dearing
President of CSS

Footnotes:

1) http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/worldnews.html?in_article_id=504969&in_page_id=1811

2) http://www.beyondchron.org/articles/What_the_Pope_and_Linda_Blair_Have_in_Common_5227.html

Hitting the Road (Literally) with Some Faithful

by Gary Tuchman, CNN, 12/19/2007

DALLAS, Texas (CNN) — If you turn to the Bible — Isaiah Chapter 35, Verse 8 — you will see a passage that in part says, "A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness."

Now, is it possible that this "highway" mentioned in Chapter 35 is actually Interstate 35 that runs through six U.S. states, from southern Texas to northern Minnesota? Some Christians have faith that is indeed the case.

It was with that interesting belief in mind that we decided to head to Texas, the southernmost state in the I-35 corridor, to do a story about a prayer campaign called "Light the Highway."

Churchgoers in all six states recently finished 35 days of praying alongside Interstate 35, but the prayers are still continuing.

Some of the faithful believe that in order to fulfill the prophecy of I-35 being the "holy" highway, it needs some intensive prayer first. So we watched as about 25 fervent and enthusiastic Christians prayed on the the interstate's shoulder in Dallas.

They chanted loudly and vibrantly, making many people in the neighborhood wonder what was going on. They prayed that adult businesses along the corridor would "see the light" and perhaps close down.

They prayed for safety and freedom from crime for people who lived along the interstate. They prayed that all Americans would accept Jesus into their lives.

The woman who came up with the concept of "Light the Highway" is a Texas minister named Cindy Jacobs.

She says she can't be sure Interstate 35 really is what is mentioned in the Bible but says she received a revelation to start this campaign after "once again reading Isaiah, Chapter 35."

Jacobs also points out that perhaps there is a link between the area near this highway and tragedies that have happened in history, such as the bridge collapse on I-35 in Minneapolis last August and the assassination of JFK 44 years ago near I-35 in Dallas. That's why prayer certainly can't hurt, she adds.

Now, it's only fair to say most people, the religious and the non-religious alike, don't buy any of this, but none more than the owners of some of the adult businesses along I-35.

At an adult go-go club, the owner tells us he resents people trying to impose their will on others. And he says his club holds fundraisers, food drives and toy drives to help the community.

But on the side of the road, the prayerful aren't going to change their minds. Holy highways and nude clubs, they believe, are not a combination God has in mind.

Politicians Wield Faith as Weapon

by Danny Westneat, *Seattle Times*, 12/12/2007

David Domke is married to a Presbyterian minister. Suffice to say he hears a lot of God-talk in his life.

But to his ears, the way politics sounds like a sermon these days is jarring. And unprecedented. Candidates for president invoke the Bible incessantly. Hillary Clinton effuses about "prayer chains." Mitt Romney's campaign is consumed by questions of faith. Mike Huckabee's TV ads label him, bluntly, a "Christian leader."

What's the top issue in national politics right now? It's not war. It's who believes.

It's like we're electing the Pastor of the United States.

So Domke, a UW communications professor, wants everyone to know: This isn't normal. Historically speaking. In fact it's downright un-American.

"This is as far into the realm of religion as American politics has ever gone, at least in the modern era," he says.

Domke's got a new book out called "The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America."

I called him when I saw the word "weapon" in the title.

I don't mind some political faith talk — the nods to a higher power, the appeals to the better angels. But lately I've felt bludgeoned. It's not only the quantity. The tenor feels different.

Domke looked at more than 15,000 presidential messages back to 1932 — speeches, platforms, proclamations. He found a huge jump in the use of faith language, starting in 1980 and ramping up in intensity under George W. Bush.

More telling is the change in tone he noticed. When politicians of old invoked the Lord, they tended to do so as "petitioners," those seeking God's blessing or guidance.

Now, they're likely to be telling us what God wants. As if they're prophets. Such as when Bush said we'll win the war on terror because "God is not neutral" in it. Or when Romney said freedom was dependent on belief in God.

It isn't that these guys are closer to God than, say, Jimmy Carter was. It's that they're using faith as a calculated political tool. It energizes some voters. But the effect is also to divide.

"It was one thing when a politician would ask God to watch over us. Now it's that we're the instruments of God," Domke says. "It's cultural religious war talk. It's a very dangerous shift."

And the solution?

I used to believe in John F. Kennedy's answer, that faith was personal and "the separation of church and state should be absolute."

No more. It's a fantasy in today's climate. Many politicians cast votes or craft policies — some of them disastrous — based on religious beliefs.

So now faith to me is like a candidate's tax or health-care plan. It's something to be vetted. Debated. Truth-squadded.

I want to know from the would-be presidents: What are your specific beliefs? How far will you take them?

Yes, this means more God-talk, not less. It's also not exactly what the founders had in mind — there's supposed to be "no religious test" for office.

Tough. Candidates are the ones putting faith into politics, for their own ends. If they don't like being scrutinized about it, they can take it back out.

Man Cuts Off, Microwaves His Own Hand

by Associated Press, 1/9/2008

Hayden, Idaho (AP) — A man who believed he bore the "mark of the beast" used a circular saw to cut off one hand, then he cooked it in the microwave and called 911, authorities said.

The man, in his mid-20s, was calm when Kootenai County sheriff's deputies arrived Saturday in this northern Idaho town. He was in protective custody in the mental health unit of Kootenai Medical Center.

"It had been somewhat cooked by the time the deputy arrived," sheriff's Capt. Ben Wolfinger said. "He put a tourniquet on his arm before, so he didn't bleed to death. That kind of mental illness is just sad."

It was not immediately clear whether the man has a history of mental illness. Hospital spokeswoman Lisa Johnson would not say whether an attempt was made to reattach the hand, citing patient confidentiality.

The Book of Revelation in the New Testament contains a passage in which an angel is quoted as saying: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink the wine of God's fury."

The book of Matthew also contains the passage: "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."

Wolfinger said he didn't know which hand was amputated.

OSU Launches New Website on Paulings' Peace Activities

OSU Media Release, 11/30/2007

CORVALLIS, Ore. – The legacy of peace activism by Linus Pauling and his wife, Ava Helen Pauling, is the focus of a new website just launched by Oregon State University.

Linus Pauling, the only individual to win two unshared Nobel prizes, was internationally known primarily as a pioneering chemist until his wife encouraged him to use his stature to advocate for world peace. For five decades, the Paulings were active in efforts to promote peace and their drive to halt the proliferation of nuclear weapons led to Linus Pauling's receipt of the 1962 Nobel Peace Prize.

The new website, "Linus Pauling and the International Peace Movement," includes more than 500 archival documents and more than 50 audio and video clips from the 1950s through the 1990s. The centerpiece of the site, which was developed by the OSU Libraries Special Collections, is a richly illustrated, 53-chapter narrative written by Pauling biographer Thomas Hager.

"Their efforts to promote peace earned the Paulings both acclaim and enmity, though not always in equal measure," said Chris Petersen, a faculty research assistant in OSU Special Collections. "To some, the legacy of the Paulings' peace work remains controversial, but few will deny the duo's wide-ranging historical importance."

Among the highlights of the new website is a calendar-based presentation of the complete details of the Paulings' activities for the years 1950 and 1951 – when McCarthyism was taking root. Just one year later, the U.S. State Department would revoke Linus Pauling's passport, denying him an opportunity to speak at an international scientific conference.

Other highlights of the website include:

- Selections from the United Nations bomb test petition, circulated by the Paulings in 1957-58, and bearing the signatures of more than 9,000 scientists from 50 countries, demanding an end to above-ground testing of nuclear weapons;
- A travel diary kept by Ava Helen Pauling, recounting the sights and sounds of life at Albert Schweitzer's medical compound in central Africa;
- Correspondence between the Paulings and a host of notable figures, including Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Nikita Khrushchev, Ho Chi Minh, Schweitzer, Martin Luther King Jr. and numerous internationally known scientists;
- More than 70 photographs of the Paulings and other peace activists.

Linus Pauling graduated from Oregon State University and met his wife on campus. Pauling donated his and his wife's papers to the university in 1986, eight years before his death. This is the fourth in a series of documentary history websites created by the OSU Libraries Special Collections on aspects of the Paulings' lives.

The new website, "Linus Pauling and the International Peace Movement," can be accessed at:

<http://osulibrary.oregonstate.edu/specialcollections/coll/pauling/peace/index.html>

Boy Banned from School Christmas Party

Daily Mail (UK), 12/22/2007

Teachers banned a nine-year-old boy from his class Christmas party because his parents had barred him from RE [Religious Education] lessons.

Douglas Stewart was forced to stay at home while his friends received presents from Santa and tucked into ice cream and jelly.

His parents were told he was not welcome at the celebration because they had pulled him out of religious education classes earlier in the year.

Headmaster Ian Davidson said that because the youngster had no interest in religion he could not celebrate the birth of Christ.

Furious mother Dawn Riddell, 38, said yesterday: "I've helped out at the Christmas party before and it's got absolutely nothing to do with Jesus. Douglas was heartbroken he couldn't go. It was cruel."

The boy and his brother Callum, 11, attend Cluny Primary, a council-run school in Buckie, Banffshire.

As the family have no religious beliefs, Miss Riddell had asked for them to be exempt from RE lessons.

But she was stunned when the head called with the news about the party.

She contacted Moray Council to find out its policy on school parties and was told these were non-religious.

After the council spoke to the school, the decision to exclude Douglas was put down to a "misunderstanding".

Callum was allowed to attend his party a few days later and Douglas received a present Santa had left behind.

Secret Sabotage

by Michele Ulriksen, CSS member

I had no idea that on the morning of September 1st in 1986 I'd be trading in my normal life for a year in a fenced-in religious asylum. I was told by my parents and sister we were going on a family outing to the San Diego Wild Animal Park. What actually happened was quite different and by the time I'd realized what was going on, it was too late to run.

Reform at Victory is a book I recently finished writing. It is based on a true story about my year in a locked-down all-girl evangelical Southern Baptist styled reform school where I was held against my will when I was sixteen. I was taken immediately to solitary confinement where I was left for several hours in a dark room the size of a walk in closet. Jerry Falwell's hate filled sermons played through a cassette player outside the door to drown out the sound of my crying. There I sat, having a nervous breakdown, amidst self proclaimed born again Christians who thought this was acceptable treatment to reform an Atheist teenager. I wanted to die.

There I sat, having a nervous breakdown, amidst self proclaimed born again Christians who thought this was acceptable treatment to reform an Atheist teenager. I wanted to die.

Every day for a year I was told by the preacher that I was a worthless sinner and that I was going to burn in hell for an eternity. He somehow convinced my parents I was on drugs, even though I had never tried drugs before going to the reform school. At Victory, there were no visits from anyone other than our parents and siblings (after four months); there was no TV, no radio, no reading material (except the Bible), no phone calls, no doctor visits, no dental visits; it was complete isolation from the outside world. We were not allowed to wear pants and instead were forced to wear culottes; perhaps the biggest fashion travesty in history. The reason: it was a sin for women to wear pants or even to show their knees. We were not allowed to talk about boys, movies or celebrities. Rock music was of the devil. Sometimes, we were not allowed to talk at all and were put on dorm silence for no reason. New rules were made up daily to keep us operating in a robotic fashion. We were encouraged to "break" new girls into "submission" by using intense verbal abusive tactics which included extreme humiliation, racial slurs and ousting lesbians in chapel. Brother Mike Palmer (the preacher and owner of the home) said in chapel once that we should "do to the gays what the Nazi's did to the Jews."

We were forced to take strange pills upon our arrival. We were forced to conform and get 'saved' otherwise we were threatened with being there until our 18th birthdays. We were forced to watch movies about the rapture. The film I remember was *Thief in the Night*. This film offered those left behind two choices: get your head chopped off and go to heaven, or get the mark of the beast but spend an eternity

in hell. I had nightmares for ages. I could go on and on about the injustices I lived through and witnessed; these are details the book will reveal.

Sadly, there are hundreds of these 'schools' (I use the word 'school' loosely as these religious facilities are not licensed, approved or accredited by the US Board of Education) operating all over the U.S. and they need no license to operate if the property owner (also the preacher in many cases) claims freedom of religion. Additionally, George W.

Bush's Office of Faith Based Initiatives offers funds and protection to the owners of these alternative treatment facilities because they claim to be religious; therefore, they are seen as good alternatives for parents who have already tried other means of rehabilitation for their teens. In 1997, Bush, then the Governor of Texas, passed a law allowing these schools to forego state licensing. Unfortunately, when these places are unlicensed, they are also

unregulated by the states in which they are located, and they are not held accountable for wrong doing and there is no way those inside can get real help. Please check this important web site for pertinent info about this issue: www.isaccorp.org. Here is a link that will take you to the timeline of VCA: <http://www.isaccorp.org/victorychristianacademy.asp>

It is *critical* for parents to know that many of these unregulated "schools" (claiming to be caring religious schools), do not have a state license to operate; are guilty of numerous safety violations; are not accredited to teach school; have solitary confinement rooms, which is illegal; and some refuse to allow fire departments, social services and health inspectors to conduct inspections of the grounds. Additionally, there have been documented deaths in some of these schools, and rape and abuse allegations are common. They use severe brainwashing techniques to force those inside to conform to an extreme and oppressive version of Christianity that violates women's rights, civil rights and freedom of speech. Furthermore, staff is not qualified to deal with mental health issues as they usually have no formal education. Many of the "staff" at these boot camps and reform schools are teens themselves who are also in the program and don't even have high school diplomas. They are given the authority to put your children in chokeholds and sit on them until they can't breathe as punishment for giving someone a dirty look or not finishing their food.

These "schools" are not teaching love like they claim; they are facilities that are in place to do nothing more than to punish your child and brainwash them. Parents deserve to know the truth before signing custody of their teen over to

someone they don't know for a year, or longer, to live in a facility that may be dangerous to their teen's emotional, mental and physical health. Many girls who have come out of such places have struggled with depression and self-esteem issues for years afterward, myself included. The only form of counseling we received was Biblical scripture.

Recent Media Coverage: October 2007

Last October, Congressman George Miller (D-CA), held a full committee hearing to examine the deaths of several teens that were placed in unlicensed and unregulated locked down boarding schools/boot camps/wilderness camps. A representative from the Government Accountability Office was there and presented a thorough report of his findings from his examination into the deaths and mistreatment of at-risk-youth in such facilities. Dr. Allison Pinto (who wrote the preface for my book) was called as an expert witness to give testimony. To view the hearing and related documents go to these links:

Dr. Pinto:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3ye8YB109M>

Congressmen Miller:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgBlqMnZ97I>

Greg Kutz, GAO:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THQ5AKk_QR4

You can view the hearing in its entirety here:

<http://edlabor.house.gov/hearings/fc101007.shtml>

Excerpt of Preface from *Reform at Victory*; a book written by Michele Ulriksen:

The Rise of Alternative Residential Treatment Facilities

Over the past two decades, new forms of residential treatment have developed as alternatives to traditional residential psychiatric and substance abuse treatment. These programs often self-identify as "therapeutic boarding schools," "emotional growth academies," "therapeutic wilderness programs," and "residential behavior modification programs." They claim to offer interventions to support intellectual, social, emotional, and behavioral (and in some cases, moral or spiritual) development in residential settings that enable them to provide a general, therapeutic milieu. A number of these programs are run by or affiliated with particular religions or faith traditions. They are now easily accessed through the internet as "specialty" schools and programs that provide services for youth who are referred to as "troubled teens." The programs vary greatly in terms of size; some accommodate less than twenty participants while others house over 500 participants at any given time. They also vary greatly in terms of cost; reports from youth and parents indicate that programs range from \$1000 per month to \$1000 per week.

In many states, because these programs self-identify as private schools or private camps, they are not required to meet the standards set for traditional residential treatment centers, or even the requirements set for foster homes, or even the educational standards set for public schools. As such, there is no regulatory body overseeing these programs in terms of health and safety conditions, staff qualifications, supervision of youth, content / quality of education and therapeutic interventions, or protection of human rights. Often families and professionals express disbelief when they come to discover that these programs are not required to be licensed or regulated...it is unfathomable to many people, given that other facilities providing direct services (e.g. nail salons, restaurants, pet grooming) are required by law to be licensed. It is likely that the absence of licensing or monitoring requirements has also contributed to the flourishing of alternative residential treatment programs in many states.

The Pattern of Mistreatment and Abuse in Alternative Residential Treatment Facilities

Given that there are so many alternative residential treatment programs now available, and many of them are operating without basic standards of accountability, it is of great concern that a growing number of reports have emerged regarding the mistreatment and abuse of youth in these types of programs. Many program operators and guilds such as the National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs (NATSAP) have dismissed these reports, focusing on the fact that not all alternative residential programs are characterized by maltreatment. However, there are now so many reports of mistreatment and abuse, related to such a diversity of programs in such a broad range of states and countries, that it has become possible to identify patterns of institutional maltreatment. Once patterns become apparent in this manner, it is not appropriate simply to consider each report in isolation of all others, or to dismiss a report as an exception to the norm. Rather, it becomes necessary to understand each report in the context of an evolving, societal phenomenon of institutional mistreatment and abuse, which needs to be recognized if it is to be addressed.

Substandard Treatment

One pattern that has become apparent relates to substandard treatment in alternative residential programs. Substandard treatment refers to care and services that do not meet generally accepted standards that already exist in American society regarding child protection, healthcare and education. These standards are reflected in the ethical codes of professional societies (e.g. American Psychological Association, American Medical Association, National Association of Social Workers, Child Welfare League of America) and in the minimum expectations set by accrediting institutions (e.g. the Joint Commission, Committee on Accreditation, Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitative Facilities) and state licensing bodies (e.g. Departments of Health, Human Services and Education). Despite the existence of commonly accepted standards,

numerous reports from youth, family members, program staff and investigators are describing non-consensual transport, unsafe and unhealthy program conditions, counter-therapeutic psychological interventions, educational deprivation, medical neglect, and misuse of seclusion/restraint in alternative residential programs.

Non-consensual transport:

A number of families are hiring "escort services" to transport their child against their will to the residential program where he or she will be admitted. Youth are typically not informed of this plan beforehand, and are frequently awakened in the middle of the night by one or two strangers who explain that the family has decided to send the youth to a residential program and that they have been hired to provide safe transport. Reports from youth, family members and escorts indicate that escorts often threaten to use restraint (including handcuffs or leg irons) or force if necessary to ensure that the youth is successfully delivered to the program, and do not allow the youth to interact with family members once the escorts arrive. Many youth have described this experience as terrifying.

Health and Safety:

With regard to program conditions, reports are describing facilities in which youth are not provided with the basics of a sanitary environment, such as clean bedding or the opportunity to shower on a regular basis, and in some programs youth have contracted communicable diseases such as scabies. Reports are describing meal plans that are so restricted that it is impossible to maintain a healthy, well-balanced diet. Youth describe being housed in cramped quarters, and in residential settings wherein staff supervision is not consistently provided to ensure the safety of program participants. Adequate protection from the elements is not always provided, such that youth suffer severe sunburn and dehydration that could be prevented with appropriate program standards of care.

Psychological Intervention:

In terms of the psychological interventions used in alternative residential programs, a variety of archaic methods are being described. In the guise of "behavior modification," participants are required to earn their constitutional and human rights to privacy, dignity and contact with their family members – rights that are safeguarded for all participants in licensed and accredited mental healthcare facilities. Furthermore, aversive conditioning is being used, consistent with thought reform techniques described in the 1974 Congressional Report titled, "Individual Rights and the Federal Role in Behavior Modification." In that report, the techniques are described as follows:

"Groups begin first by subjecting the individual to isolation and humiliation in a conscious effort to break down his psychological defenses. Once the individual is submissive, his personality can begin to be reformed around attitudes determined by the program director to be acceptable. Similar to the highly refined 'brainwashing' techniques

employed by the North Koreans in the early nineteen fifties, the method is used in the treatment of drug abusers (p. 15)."

Since the 1970's, these methods have been deemed harmful and unethical and are now prohibited in public educational settings, licensed mental health care and drug treatment facilities, and prison settings (not to mention private homes – this type of treatment by parents would qualify as suspected emotional abuse and warrant an investigation by child protective services). Despite the societal standards that now exist, a pattern of counter-therapeutic psychological intervention has emerged in alternative residential programs for youth.

Education:

A pattern of educational deprivation has also become apparent. Reports suggest that in a variety of programs, youth are not receiving instruction from trained and qualified teachers, textbooks and educational materials do not meet state curriculum standards, and vacuous education is being provided in the guise of "independent study." A number of students who have eventually returned home to their original school settings have found themselves significantly behind, as they were not exposed to the subject matter that their classmates were learning in their absence. Some students who have "graduated" from the alternative residential programs have since discovered that the diplomas they received are not recognized by their home states and their transcripts are not acceptable to college admissions departments.

Medical Care:

Medical neglect is occurring in alternative residential programs as well. Youth and families have described the administration of medications without appropriate supervision by trained medical personnel, as well as the discontinuation of medications without physician monitoring. A lack of communication between program staff and hometown, prescribing physicians has been reported as well. The absence of trained medical providers in alternative residential programs has caused health problems to go unrecognized and untreated. Numerous reports of medical problems misinterpreted as "psychological resistance" or "manipulation" have been described as well.

Seclusion and Restraint:

Misuse of seclusion and restraint is also occurring. Participants and staff have described seclusion or physical restraint being used in alternative residential programs as a consequence for rule violations, disrespectful comments, negative facial expressions, or cursing. In licensed mental health facilities this would be prohibited, as seclusion and physical restraint can only be used when a person is determined to be a serious danger to self or others.

Abusive Treatment

In addition to reports of substandard care, there are numerous reports emerging regarding treatment that is

explicitly abusive. Youth have described being deprived of food, sleep and shelter as a consequence for breaking rules or not evidencing sufficient progress in the program. Youth have been forced to endure stress positions, physical pain and fear-inducing encounters (for example, being taken into the woods blindfolded). Incidents of physical and sexual abuse have been described that were never reported by youth due to distrust of staff, generally intimidating program environments, or the absence of universal access to child protection and advocacy hotlines (which is required of all licensed residential healthcare programs). A number of participants have said they were informed by staff that their parents were aware of the abuse they were enduring, and then felt betrayed and abandoned by their families, causing damage to their relationships that has been difficult to heal even after families have been reunited. For some youth, the memories of their experience in alternative residential programs are deeply disturbing and have led to a pattern of anxiety consistent with post traumatic stress disorder.

Conclusion

Twenty years have passed now since I was an inmate at Victory Christian Academy. During this span of time I have suffered from a variety of mental and emotional disorders that I, and many professionals, believe are a direct result of my experience in that abusive environment. While I was writing my book, I interviewed dozens of survivors of not only VCA but other similar reform schools. We all have the same issues. We have all attempted suicide, we have all struggled intensely with low self-esteem, we have all sought therapy, we have all had problems with maintaining healthy relationships with men and women, we have all abused drugs and/or alcohol at some point in our lives, and most of us hate religion. Well, the latter is no surprise since it is religion that was used against us as a weapon to keep us under fierce subjugation. So, in a nutshell, these locked down programs DON'T WORK; especially the religious ones. They are harmful and if you know of, or hear of, anyone who might send a troubled teen to one of these places, please direct them to www.isaccorp.org.

Oh – and I would be happy to talk with them too.

Bonnie Lee Jaron

November 16, 1971 — January 7, 2008

Married: Debbie Jaron on August 6, 2005

Step-children: Brad and Katey Barnhurst

Other Family: Sister Linda Winkelman, her husband Tim and their daughter Meagan. Sister Lori Windish. Uncles Steve Windish and Verle Piper.

Cause of Death: Pulmonary Embolism

Remembrances can be made to:
Human Rights Campaign
<http://www.hrc.org>

From the Editor...

(continued from page 1)

Last week, I got a phone call at work. It was Debbie Jaron, the partner (oh, screw the euphemisms, WIFE) of Bonnie Jaron — CSS member, and close friend of Angela and me.

Bonnie had dropped dead in the shower that morning, at the age of 36.

We later found out that a blood clot in her leg (which a recent ultrasound had missed), had broken free and travelled to her heart, killing her instantly.

So I spent my 40th birthday attending my first funeral ever (I'm not sure how I managed to avoid the funerals of friends or family prior to this).

Bonnie had JUST completed her PhD in Counseling at OSU last month. Her thesis topic was:

The Effects of Client Status as Atheist/Agnostic on the Counseling Working Alliance

...and she had planned on speaking at our February meeting to discuss her findings.



Bonnie chose Oregon State University, in part, because there was a local Atheist/Humanist group — Corvallis Secular Society. Her first CSS meeting was the one immediately following Angela's and my wedding. We quickly became good friends, and it

turned out that she lived nearby — so we would frequently get together to see movies, go out to eat, or just stay home and play cards and board games. (We loved trivia games, especially about the 80's, but we always skipped the Sports category because none of us were any good at that.) She loved playing with our cat, Cally, and our dog, Buttercup.

She was still lonely, however, and with Angela's help, placed an online personal ad on Match.com. Shortly afterward, she met Debbie, and knew she had found her life partner at last.

Nancy Ross (formerly Powell), who had married Angela and me, performed their wedding service. And on January 12, after just over two years of their happiness together, she performed Bonnie's funeral as well.

It was much too soon.



Reed Byers
Editor, Willamette Freethinker



12-27-07

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- Full CSS membership: \$30/year (\$2.50/month) (includes newsletter)

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