

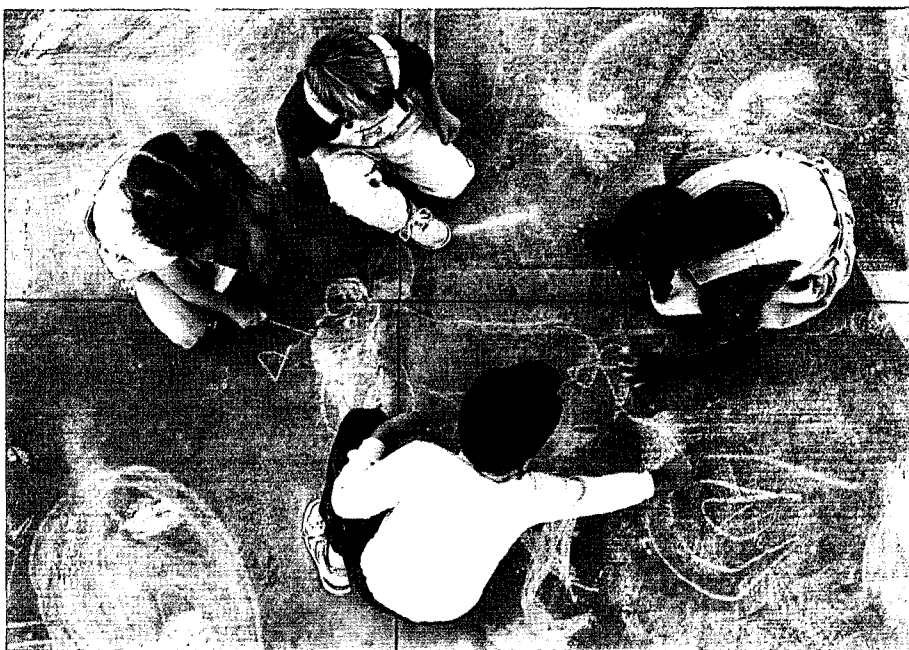
Orphanage Alumni Speak for Themselves

Hillary Rodham Clinton called proposals to create orphanages “unbelievable” and “absurd.” George Stephanopolous suggested sending copies of *Oliver Twist* to Republican members of Congress. Other critics excerpted the fiction of Dickens and Faulkner to create distressing images of orphanages.

Orphanages, group homes, boarding schools—call them what you will—are hardly a preferred way to raise children, especially very young ones. Psychological research demonstrates that any basically decent home is better for a child than an institution. If the decision was really between decent homes and orphanages it would be an easy one. But alas that choice is not the one we face in lots of real-life cases today.

The most harrowing imagery of our time appears not in novels but in news—in the catalogue of abuses inflicted upon children by many unwed welfare mothers. Contra critics, the focus on orphanages is not driven by some desire to snatch babies from parents; it grows out of the cold fact that thousands of children are now being thrown away by derelict parents, and that society currently has no better option than to return the child along with a bi-weekly check to the neglecters.

Interestingly, the orphanage debate has generated an enormous response from individuals who actually grew up in such institutions in earlier decades. Many of them argue that orphanages are better than present alternatives and ought to be revived as an option for children in the worst circumstances. Below, we reproduce a sampling of first-person accounts.



Stephen Simpson/FPG International Corp.

An Orphan on Orphanages, Richard B. McKenzie, *Wall Street Journal*, November 29, 1994

...A funny thing has happened in the emerging debate [over orphanages]: No one has thought to ask us orphans, the children who grew up in institutions, what we would prefer.

I've spent a lifetime quietly listening to others disparage orphanages as cold and loveless institutions where every child longs to be adopted. I know that this description is out of date and out of whack, and should have no bearing on the debate of how to help some of the least fortunate children among us. I was there. I grew up in a home with 150 or so other girls and boys in North Carolina in the 1950s—and I'm damn proud of it, and thankful!

Life in The Home (which is what we called it) was no picnic. When we were young, we got two baths and changes of clothes a week, regardless of whether we needed more. We went barefoot to school until late November (which, until it got cold, was a marked advantage). We went

to bed in “sleeping porches” that were totally unheated. We worked hard for long hours on the farm and in the shops, and we lacked a lot, not the least of which were the daily hugs other children take for granted and the requisite level of encouragement to read and study.

Critics of orphanages stress what the children there did not have. Those of us who were there have a different perspective.... [In an orphanage] we got security in the knowledge that The Home would always be there, no mean advantage for children whose families had failed them. We had 1,500 acres of pastures and woods to roam, and we made dozens of lifelong “brothers and sisters.”

I know many people...harbor fears about workers in homes for children. They, however, have never had the good fortune of meeting Albert McClure and Rebecca Carpenter, the highly religious leaders of The Home, who devoted their lives to making sure, as best they could, that we learned (albeit reluctantly and imperfectly) the difference between right and wrong....

The critics have never had the opportunity to sit in Frances Moore's seventh-grade class. By her unbounded force of character, she turned my life, and the lives of so many of my classmates, away from a destructive course to one that had prospects....

I often watch the television program *Cops*, and I am especially drawn to the episodes involving domestic violence and abuse of children. My heart goes out to the children caught off to the side in the pictures. I know that many will remain mired in their unfortunate circumstances. Few will have the opportunity that the kids at The Home had, to be catapulted into a totally new environment and onto a totally new life course.

...People should understand that homes for children must remain a viable option for many children. Those of us who were there share an array of experiences that children from many families—the traditional ones and the publicly supported variants—can only envy.

Letters to the Editor, *USA Today*, January 6–8, 1995

...Society today believes strongly in keeping the family unit intact. My definition of a family is a unit that provides love and safety from harm to our children. A mother and father need not be included as family if violence, abuse, and neglect are occurring and recurring in the original, biological unit....

"Houses" for abused, neglected children would be a feasible and desirable answer and produce profound positive effects on these children. They would be houses of love, houses where there is safety from harm, houses where children can share their problems, houses that give the children a chance to grow up outside the cycle of violence. The children would receive professional help and be mainstreamed in schools and activities.

The cost to the taxpayers has been an issue. My question: What kind of dollar value can you put on a child's quality of life?

Speaking for myself and other adult survivors of child abuse, yes, someone would have done us a great service by taking us out of our original family homes. They were not homes anyway, and we have suffered for a lifetime the abuse in-

flicted on us by our own parents.

The watchword should always be safety and security for the children.

A house is not a home.

*Deborah Simon Safer
Forget Not the Children Inc.
Savannah, Georgia*

I was raised from the age of two to the age of nine in an orphanage. My earliest memories are of that.

It was very democratic. I was fed, sheltered, clothed, and treated as an equal. I was provided a very good moral structure that I cannot escape; anytime I try, it still creates difficulty for me. I was given the best that any home could provide.

I support orphanages and think they would take care of a lot of the problems plaguing our society today. I am 51 years old, have raised four children, and things are great for me. I believe a lot of it has to do with being raised in an orphanage.

*Jacqueline Ramsdell
Arlington, Texas*

I am 70. I was raised in a state orphanage for 14 years. I don't think orphanages exist in today's changing world as we knew them, but if they could be like they were in my childhood, I would recommend them....

My 20 classmates had nothing but positive things to say when we celebrated our fiftieth anniversary in 1993....

*Charlie W. Johnson
Dunnellon, Florida*

Orphanages Saved Our Lives, *Wall Street Journal*, December 29, 1994

...In 1933, when I was three years old, my father took my sisters and me to the orphanage [St. Michael's School in Hopewell, N.J.] after my mother died.... He could not afford a housekeeper or nanny and had to work to support us as inexpensively as possible. The separation from home, father and mother was traumatic, but we adapted. The nurturing, stable routine of living with 20 to 30 age-mates from infancy to age 13 was extraordinary.... We learned to share our meager possessions and went halves with our "grub," which lucky orphans received on visiting Sunday from their families....

Our lives were sheltered from the world at large. We learned by rote, and

obeyed the rules At the age of eight we were assigned a daily job that changed every month and was appropriate to the ability of each child; this taught us responsibility....

At age 13, I left the orphanage and experienced a traumatic rebirth.... I felt stupid and ashamed of having been an orphan.... Eventually, I came to understand and accept that I was not responsible for what happened to me and that I was as good a human being as anyone, including the Pope. This realization gave me a psychological boost and I went on to do well in high school. I worked to generate enough money to pay my way through nursing school; I got married, reared six children and one foster child from Vietnam. I have had a satisfying life.

I have kept in touch with my sisters throughout the past 50 years. Orphanages staffed by child educators and trained caretakers can be a better situation than foster homes or natural families in which children are neglected and abused.

*Cecille Haggerty/O'Brien
New York*

When I entered the Hershey Industrial School (now the Milton Hershey School) in 1937, the only "social welfare" program available at the time was whatever extended family members and neighbors could afford to contribute from their own meager resources....

Had it not been for Milton Hershey and his philanthropic concern for orphans, I may have been writing this from a prison cell, if I could write at all, rather than from the comfortable retirement that I am in....

As far as I know, none of our "family" has ever had problems with the law, most have become solid family men (the school now includes females), and many have made national contributions to society in various fields—medicine, religion, sports, teaching, etc. The point is, when compared with today's "warehousing" of orphans through the governmental hodgepodge of social welfare programs, there is no comparison. One has only to catch 15 minutes of the evening news on any day to ascertain that as a truism.

*Darrell Blizzard
Glenwood, Maryland*

Orphanages Can Help, *Fort Myers News-Press*, December 23, 1994

I lived in an orphanage from the time I was 3 years old until I went to live with a great-aunt 10 years later. My orphanage provided me a shelter, a home, a big and warm family of ad hoc sisters and brothers, a casual but caring love, and an education. In short, a home.

*Regina P. Hammond
Fort Myers*

Orphanage Chorus from the Past, Mike Royko, *Washington Times*, December 12, 1994. (Responses to an earlier column on orphanages.)

Mr. Gertz, a leading Chicago attorney, says: "As a child I was in the Cleveland Jewish Orphan Home from 1917 to 1920, and in the Marks Nathan Jewish Orphan Home in Chicago from 1920 to 1923. I can attest that we had better education, discipline, religious training, health care, recreation and companionship than those outside of our facilities. The supervision was generally superb...."

"I have long regretted that the Jewish community here and elsewhere abandoned the orphanage concept for foster homes and the like. It was a mistake that ought to be corrected."

Mr. Liddil of Peterborough, N.H., says: "Caring people [in orphanages] fed and clothed and hugged me during the years my family could not. They worked tirelessly to fulfill my needs. Far from eating gruel, I spent many a happy meal at a table with 15 of my 'brothers.'"

"Orphanage is not a dirty word. It is a composite of love and care and hope. It was a support system outside the cottages where we stayed, where a gatekeeper kept out the bogymen."

"The orphanage was a good place to be by any standard today's homeless kids must endure."

Orphanages Still Exist—A Close-up

Some critics concede that orphanages may have worked in the past but cannot function well today. Barbara Mathiss's article on the Baptist Home for Children and Families in Bethesda, Maryland, offers another view.

The Orphanage Experience As It Was, As It Is, Barbara Mathiss, *Washington Post*, December 12, 1994

Fourteen-year-old Joyce doesn't appear to know anything about all this bureaucratic hoopla about orphanages. After being bounced from more than a dozen foster homes in four years, all she knows is that after being abandoned by her drug-addicted parents when she was 10, she's finally found a place where she wants to stay and people she can trust. It's called the Baptist Home for Children and Families, an independent non-profit agency that runs a therapeutic facility discreetly tucked into a wooded area in a Bethesda neighborhood.

Nearly a year ago, Joyce came to the Baptist Home's Greentree Adolescent Program, which houses and treats 10 boys and 10 girls, ages 12 to 18, in two plain, single-story dorms that sit adjacent to each other. Built in the 1970s and equipped with donated furniture, the most notable quality about Joyce's new home is that it is impeccably clean....

Down the hall are five small rooms, each with one window, two beds, two dressers and bookshelves, which many of the girls like to place between their beds so they have separate space and privacy. Again, the most jarring impression is how orderly and clean the rooms are. Even with the collections of toiletries displayed like trophies, clusters of greeting cards and family photos taped to the walls, there's no sign of indulgence or clutter.

"Our job is to keep the room clean," says Joyce proudly, noting that she had her shoes lined up under the bed and had hidden her radio and shoe box of tapes so a visitor wouldn't think she was "messy." Joyce is reticent to talk about her nine brothers and sisters, who live in foster homes. She doesn't have pictures because she rarely gets to see them or hear from them. The holiday time is especially hard, she says shyly. "I can forgive my parents, but I can't forget them."

It's easier to talk about life at the Home. A seventh-grader, Joyce goes to the Greentree school on the grounds, a 60-day, approved transitional program she needs to attend before it is decided where she will go to school. If she misses any classes, she says, there are "consequences"—that's the word they use for

what happens when you break the rules, like not getting to bed on time or causing a late-night disturbance. When that happens, the culprit may have to be confined to her room for a day, or do extra chores or community service. "It's not that bad," Joyce says with a shrug. "When you have consequences, they do bring you your food, but nobody likes to stay in their room all the time."

The first few months at Greentree, Joyce kept running away, just like she used to from her foster homes when she thought she was the cause of things not working out....

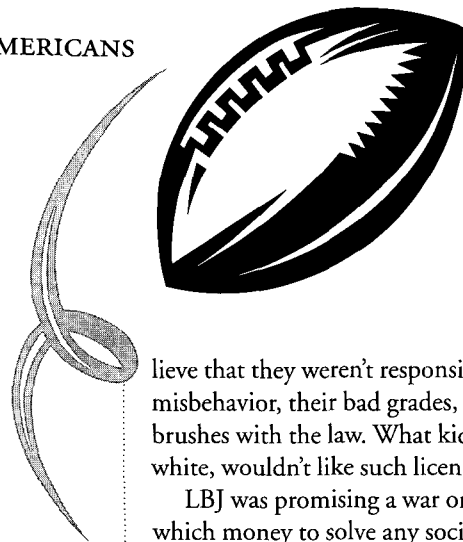
Gradually, with the help of her counselors, she realized running away wasn't getting her anywhere. She also had started to like the friendships she was making with the other girls, and all those little things, such as the donations of stuffed animals, shampoo and hair spray, clothing, and, most important to Joyce, the opportunity to earn an allowance (\$4.20 a week) by doing chores....

According to Susan Barnhill, the director of the Greentree Adolescent Program, its policy is to prepare the teenagers for a return to families, or foster placement or independent living. To do this effectively, the child must be treated for his problems before he is released to foster parents who are given special training and backup from the Greentree staff. Depending on each child's therapeutic progress, this may take from a few months to two years. The ultimate goal is not to have the child stay permanently, says Barnhill; rather, to have him adjust to family life and the outside world.

Does Joyce ever think about her future? "I don't think about it as much," she says, then pauses. "I don't think I'm ever going to leave here, to tell you the truth, because I don't have nowhere else to go. I ran away from so many places that this is the only place I can go. But it's good."

...It's nice here."

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Paying the "Fool Dues" of the '60s

Douglas Glant

In 1966, fresh out of Stanford and into the family scrap business, I started coaching football and tutoring English and history in Seattle's Rainier District, where I had grown up. On the shores of Lake Washington, Rainier Valley had been predominantly Italian, Scandinavian, and Jewish until 1960, when its Asian and, especially, black populations began to grow rapidly.

My team, the 10- to 13-year-old "Pee Wees," was 90 percent black, its two coaches Jewish—yours truly and Jim Greenfield, *Washington Post* editor Meg Greenfield's brother. Jim and I played good cop/bad cop, respectively, though we both loved our kids, probably to excess. Jim took the lead on the X's and O's of coaching, while I concentrated on discipline, physical and mental, including staying on top of schoolwork, exercise, practice, and game decorum (no foul language, no taunting, no celebrating till game's end, etc.). Our kids were from the poorest families, most of them with part-time fathers at best. So Jim and I also became surrogate "uncles" for the bulk of our kids; this entailed such things as providing meals and taking them to sporting and family events. Several kids came to my grandparents' Seder every year and even joined me on the occasional trip to Portland or Vancouver to sightsee.

We had the best young athletes in the city, but before Jim and I took over and instilled discipline, they struggled to win 50 percent of their games. Our first season we lost a tough city championship game. Then we won it for five consecutive years. What hadn't yet been termed "tough love" was working for all of us, which was remarkable given the conven-

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tional wisdom of those racially difficult days of the late '60s.

Many of the older brothers of our kids were Black Panthers in a city that had as much counterculture tension as any in the United States (In 1969 Seattle had the most bombings per capita in the country.) After the spring 1968 murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., dicey situations at Rainier Playfield were all too frequent, but the two Jews and their mostly black team continued to defy the odds.

Yet by 1970 I could see that in two crucial areas we were beginning to lose the battle: drugs and education. I had been an SOB with our guys about even the mildest of substance abuse, and Coach Greenfield agreed. But about this time pop culture (*Easy Rider*, Timothy Leary, the Beatles, et al.) was telling my kids that it was a good thing to "tune in, turn on, and drop out," and man, did our guys listen to that siren song. They liked to be-

lieve that they weren't responsible for their misbehavior, their bad grades, their brushes with the law. What kid, black or white, wouldn't like such license?

LBJ was promising a war on poverty in which money to solve any social ill, real or imagined, would be virtually limitless, and I had kids tell me they flunked a test because of racism—only to discover their teacher was blacker than they. What abrogation of individual responsibility wasn't permissible under these new rules? The more I protested, the more my white liberal friends called me a reactionary; they couldn't very well call me a racist.

As my Pee Wees went off to high school, I saw them falling one by one to drugs, crime, and failing grades. Oh, not all of them failed, but most did, damn it. And the best and the brightest of our players, Erwin and Tedde, what of them? Erwin was a Harry Belafonte look-alike, a splendid athlete with two college-grad parents in an intact family. He could have played pro football or baseball, but drugs did him in. After years of addiction and prison, I recently heard that he is finally putting his shattered life together at age 40. Tedde did play college football, but drugs caught up to him too, including being shot in a gone-bad deal.

Tedde called me last Christmas and said, "Doug, you were like dads, you and Jim, and I wish I'd listened to you about education and drugs, but everybody else was saying something else. But I know you'll be proud to hear that I now have a wife and two great teenage sons, and a job as a high school coach in Kentucky. My sons won't have to pay the 'fool dues' I did."

Well, Tedde, I pray that you are right about your sons, but what about the mil-