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THE CHILD WELFARE DIVISION  
State Department of Public Welfare

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OUR CHILDREN  
AND  
THEIR STORIES:



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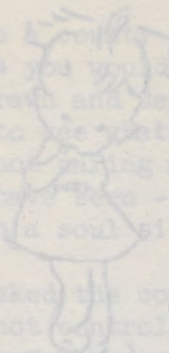
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RALPH

If you were into a court room that November day in 1954 you would have seen a 13 year old boy, withdrawn and depressed, sitting motionless waiting to see what was going to happen to him, and not saying much. The court saw what you would have seen - a good looking boy who was ill with a soul sickness.



The mother had asked the court for help. She said she could not control Ralph, and her husband (Ralph's stepfather) said Ralph could no longer stay in the home.

Since she had married this man, life had been much easier for her. She and the children wanted to keep him, and the court to tell you are a few of the many,

many children who are "our reason for being".

The mother told the worker Ralph had been stealing, staying out all night and was defiant. He destroyed the bicycle the stepfather had bought him, along with some expensive tools.

The mother said she had told Ralph many times that he should be grateful for the good home his stepfather was providing; that if he

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RALPH

TIMMY

KATHY

"GRANDMA"

THE PROBLEM MOTHER

Their stories speak for the other 5194 children in our care during the first nine months of 1959.

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RALPH

Had you gone into a county court room that November day in 1954 you would have seen a 13 year old boy, withdrawn and depressed, sitting motionless waiting to see what was going to happen to him, and not caring much. The court saw what you would have seen - a good looking boy who was ill with a soul sickness.

The mother had asked the court for help. She said she could not control Ralph, and her husband (Ralph's stepfather) said Ralph could no longer stay in the home.

Since she had married this man, life had been much easier for her. She and the children had things they had never had before. She wanted to keep them, and insisted the court take Ralph off her hands.

The court referred the boy to a psychiatrist who hospitalized him for a few days. The county child welfare worker was asked to help plan for the boy's future.

The mother told the worker Ralph had been stealing, staying out all night and was defiant. He destroyed the bicycle the stepfather had bought him, along with some expensive tools.

The mother said she had told Ralph many time that he should be grateful for the good home his stepfather was providing; that if he

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kept up this behavior she would have to leave the stepfather and they would lose all the good things they now had.

This, of course, prompted Ralph to redouble his efforts toward this end. It never occurred to him that if it came to a showdown his mother would choose his stepfather. The showdown came and the mother chose the stepfather.

Ralph was stunned and unbelieving, even though from infancy he had suffered cruel treatment from his father and unpredictable behavior from his mother - one time loving, the next, pushing him away.

When the worker talked to Ralph, he made excuses for his mother saying he didn't blame her because she had had a hard time. He knew he couldn't go home, but in his heart there was still the spark of hope that his mother could not give him up.

The worker talked to him about a foster home or a small group home. He chose the group home, but when placed there ran away, telling the other children he was going home to kill his stepfather and mother. The home said Ralph was too ill a child for them to help.

Back at the hospital, the worker began to prepare Ralph for entering a treatment center by explaining just what it was and why they would like for him to go there.

When Ralph arrived at the treatment center, he was fearful, tense and anxious under his

depression. At first every attention shown to other children, in his mind, constituted a rejection of himself.

Slowly with the help of his therapist and combined help of the resident staff, he began to be able to experience some emotional relief by talking about his feelings. His school work was started with rather elementary lessons so that he could be successful and accept the demands made of him. Gradually he began on his own initiative to accept a greater amount of work than was asked of him, studying with a hungry urgency. He took books out of the library and read them with interest. He began to take part in the games. He was delighted to discover that he was good looking and told the world.

There were, of course, periods of deep disturbance, but these gradually decreased both in frequency and duration. He was beginning tentatively to accept people and situations with confidence.

Some of these periods of deep disturbance were brought on by letters from his mother which clearly showed future plans did not include him. He was unloved and unwanted. Other times, some seemingly small thing would send him off and he reverted to hostility, refused food, talked in muffled tones, was destructive and cruel, both physically and verbally, to younger children. One time when he became depressed, he slashed his hand dangerously after a period of withdrawal.

Over a period of years therapy continued at a pace Ralph could tolerate. As he improved he was able to go to public school and later

take a part-time job in small meat market where he did so well that customers began to ask for him. When the manager was ill, Ralph impressed them all with his ability to help keep things going.

In 1958 he was captain of the football team, did construction work in his spare time, earning enough to take care of his personal needs. He dated occasionally and was much liked in high school by both teachers and students.

Because of his new found inner strength he assumed more and more responsibility for planning his own future. He wanted to go on to college and aimed at an athletic scholarship. His coaches gave him encouragement in this.

In the fall of 1959 he entered college. His most pressing problem at that time was which fraternity he would join.

And this is the boy who, a few years ago, would sit for as long as ten days without speaking; the boy whose intellectual functioning progressed from dull normal to superior.

# # # #

While this boy was slowly and carefully drawn up from a deep well of emotional torture, and set free, many children are being saved from such an experience by reason of services given when their worlds first began to rock.

Take the case of Timmy. It was late when we found him, but (as it turned out) not too late.



## TIMMY

Timmy is an attractive seven year old boy. He had been in an orphanage three years when our consultant on group care discovered him.

We learned that ever since he was born he had been shunted from one person to another. One after another had dumped him some place and gone out of his life.

His mother, apparently, felt no love for the child but would not free him for adoption. When he was four she placed him in an orphanage and didn't bother to visit him after the first few months.

Timmy did not know what was expected of him in a place with so many children and so many strangers. He was lost and he was anxious. He craved love and needed to feel he belonged somewhere. But what he was seeking was nowhere to be found, so with all the intensity of his small being he started after the crumbs - attention. This he could force.

When a child does this, the adults on the receiving end of his last desperate search for "his own" are in for a rough and frustrating time.

A forlorn child's attention getting devices can seem diabolical to the adult mind. Timmy, in short, was a disrupting influence in the Home.

Our first problem was to find some way of freeing Timmy for adoption. With the help of

the court and casework services with the mother, we were able to do this.

Now, the question was, had time run out on Timmy? He was seven. Had rejection, anxiety and disappointments completely killed that spark in him capable of accepting and giving love? We had to find out.

Timmy was seen by the Children's Diagnostic Center, and pronounced capable of accepting parents, but they had to have special qualities in addition to a love and understanding of children and a willingness to take a seven year old.

They needed the intestinal equipment to take what Timmy was most certainly going to dish out to them. They must have great patience and be able to take setbacks without becoming discouraged. Also, they must know how to handle a child who had been so long starved of love and security that he finds it hard to believe in either. We dared not make a mistake in this placement.

On our approved list of adoptive parents, we had a couple who had adopted little Debbie, whose 8 years of sordid existence had left her with serious emotional problems. Now, at 10, Debbie is a normal, happy little girl, and her adoptive parents wanted another child.

We told them about Timmy and they were interested. After meeting him, both they and Debbie wholeheartedly wanted him for their own. Timmy, too, took to the family.

Not long ago the adoptive mother told us Timmy was in the yard playing when she

overheard a salesman say to him, "Do you live here, little boy?". Timmy, with great disdain answered, "Of course, it's my home. My family lives here too."

So, at last Timmy has found his "growing place".

# # # #

### KATHY

In a shack down by the city dump, we found Kathy, age 11 years, living with her mentally deficient mother and retarded sister, 13 years old.

The father had long since faded out of the picture. Kathy only went to school when the spirit moved her, which wasn't often, although she was a very bright little girl.

There was only one thing to do for Kathy, and that was to get her into a foster home where she could live a normal little girl's life. But Kathy had never been away from home and was happy as she was. To move her directly from her home to a foster home would never do. The transition must be gradual if we were to help Kathy accept a new way of life.

First, the child welfare worker talked to her about going to camp for three weeks, telling her she could ride horseback.

Kathy had never been close to a horse in her life but her dearest wish was to ride one, so this did the trick. Kathy went to camp.

The experience at first was painful to her, and to her tent-mates. Her unit counselor was next door to being flattened out, but Kathy finally learned to get along with other campers, and to ride horseback. Before the end of the three weeks, she was enjoying camp.

After Kathy got home, the worker talked to her about a big house (institution) where there would be a lot of girls like at camp. Having left home once and lived through it, she was willing to try again.

After two months in the institution, Kathy was ready for a foster home. Today, two years later, Kathy is a happy, attractive, bright little girl, enjoying school and social activities as all little girls should.

# # # #

"GRANDMA"

The chief probation officer of the county court put in an urgent call to the county child welfare supervisor. The mother of four young children had just been committed to a mental institution, and the father had to take her there.

The father was desperate with worry over his children and grief over his wife. He wanted to keep his children with him but didn't see how he could do it and work. The mother had been mentally ill for some time and had burned most of the children's clothes. The children, of course, hadn't been properly fed or taken care of for some time, and were full of nameless fears.

With the father's consent, the child welfare worker sent a homemaker to the home to take over during the day when the father was at work.

She was a middle-aged woman who loved and understood children, and they invariably took to her.

When she walked into the small home, five year old Carrie just stood, looking dazed. Little Joe, three, told her solemnly "our mother go'ed away". Two year old Jeanne could only nod, silent tears rolling down her cheeks. Nine months old Mike looked sick and listless.

The homemaker took over, reassuring the children with her calm, matter-of-fact manner.

The children's physical needs were more easily taken care of than their emotional needs. When the homemaker suggested they go outside and play, they shrank back and told her there was a "killer" out there. Very wisely, she did not contradict them or insist they go out. Instead, she spent more time rocking them on her lap and playing with them. When she, herself, went into the yard she left the door open so they could see that nothing bad happened to her. Later she persuaded them to go out with her, careful not to leave them alone. Finally, their fears faded and they went confidently out to play by themselves.

There were, of course problems concerning the mechanics of living to be worked out. The child welfare worker acted as liaison between father and homemaker so that these problems were solved without friction or any feeling on the father's part that the homemaker was

"taking over" his home, or telling him how to care for the children at night.

As time went on the children blossomed, even to the extent of playing a joke on "grandma" as they called her.

Little Joe came running to the house saying Carrie was in the creek. The homemaker rushed to the creek, frantic, only to find both children convulsed with laughter at the joke they had played on "grandma".

When the father got the report from the hospital saying it could be years before his wife was released, he went to the caseworker - again worrying about his children. She assured him that the length of time a homemaker was placed in a home depended upon how long she was needed.

She told him of one case where the mother was institutionalized, leaving small children. There was no one to whom the father could turn for help in keeping his family together. In this case the homemaker stayed until the children were old enough to take over themselves - about ten years.

The father swallowed the lump in his throat - he could keep his children with him.

# # # #

## THE PROBLEM MOTHER

The child welfare worker heaved a deep sigh, On the face of it, the case before her looked hopeless.

Mrs. Sells, the mother of four children from 5 months to 8 years, had been warned by doctors at the hospital that if she didn't take better care of her children, they would be taken away from her.

The baby, Jennie, had been hospitalized three times since birth for malnutrition and dehydration. Eight year old Ronald's attendance at school was interfered with because of a scalp infection which the mother did not care for properly. She did not keep appointments at the clinic, and had a record of drinking and arrests. She had recently left the children with her sister while she spent a week in another city posing as the wife of the man with whom she was living there.

Since we believe that no stone should be left unturned in an attempt to make it possible for children to remain in their own homes, the worker talked with Mrs. Sells. She had to find out what strengths, if any, the mother had to build on. She wanted to find the reason behind her neglect of her children.

In talking with Mrs. Sells, she found her confused about how to prepare the formula and when to feed Jennie, even though the Visiting Nurses and the pediatrician had given her instructions. She became frightened when the baby grew worse and worse. What she was really doing was running away from her responsibilities because she did not know how to

handle them. Her strengths were her love for her children and her willingness to learn. Mrs. Sells could neither read nor write, and not being able to remember, had no way to refresh her memory.

The worker started with an offer to help her learn, and suggested that when the baby was released from the hospital she be placed in a foster home until she was completely recovered. This would give Mrs. Sells time to learn how to handle Jennie before she had the full responsibility.

The worker had Mrs. Sells meet the foster mother at the clinic when the baby was brought for checkups. Mrs. Sells was overjoyed at how well the baby looked, held it in her arms, and talked to the foster mother about how she had accomplished this "miracle".

Before the baby was returned home, Mrs. Sells asked to spend a day with the foster mother, "so I can see how she takes care of her". She also asked for written instructions so that if she forgot her neighbor could read them to her.

The worker kept in close touch with the family, teaching the mother, through endless repetition, fundamentals of child care, diet, grocery shopping, budgeting, etc.

As Mrs. Sells began to feel more confidence in her ability, she took great pride and satisfaction in being a good mother. Within a year she was giving consistently good care to her children. Not one instance of arrest for drunkenness was reported.



If a petition had been filed in court at the time of the baby's third hospitalization, and with a description of the mother's drinking and desertion, the children would most certainly have been removed from her care.

How much better a proud mother, and healthy, happy children in their own home - for which there is never a completely satisfactory substitute.

# # # #

Just as a building must have a firm foundation, so must a child welfare service program be based on a sound philosophy - the child first.

Each child has an individuality peculiar to himself and his world. In working with children you must proceed slowly and carefully. You must see the world and its inhabitants from the child's side of the fence. You must see as the child sees, feel as the child feels, or you cannot hope to "release the hidden splendor".

The welfare program in Colorado is county-administered, state-supervised. In child welfare, this means it is the responsibility of the State Child Welfare Division to foster the effectiveness of this philosophy and program.

Some of the avenues through which this Division and its Advisory Committee work in protecting and furthering the interests of children are: insistence on trained personnel and adherence to good casework practices; justifying budget request each year; working

for good children's laws; cooperation with other agencies interested in children; sponsoring workshops and bringing in outstanding leaders in various fields of child welfare; giving leadership in special projects designed to help or protect the children of Colorado; maintaining a state-wide register of approved foster boarding and adoptive homes; supervision of and consultation with county child welfare personnel; through local and national organizations, keeping abreast of what is happening in other parts of the country; discovering through study and discussion wherein lie the elements of success and wherein the elements of failure in fields of service to children.

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The 63 county departments of public welfare are legally responsible for giving services to children (infants to 21 years of age) who are in trouble, neglected or abused.

While these services fall into various classifications - a child cannot be classified. Each child and his emotional relation to his family and community must be studied individually to determine the kind of service, or progression of services (as in the case of Kathy) that will bring him the greatest good.

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In the preceding pages, we have told you about a few of these children whose tottering worlds were steadied for them, and how it was done. In concluding this brief story of child welfare in 1959, we will mention the workshops and the setting up of a special project.

## WORKSHOPS

The State Child Welfare Division provided for attendance of 25 directors of county departments of public welfare at the workshop on Services to Children held at the University of Denver School of Social Work. This workshop lasted a week and was conducted by Mrs. Annie Lee Sandusky, Consultant, Social Services to Children, Children's Bureau, Washington, D. C.

The Advisory Committee to the Child Welfare Division sponsored two workshops for institutional personnel. One was in Pueblo and the other in Denver. Both were conducted by Sister Mary Emmanuel, Director of Child Care Institute of the St. Louis University School of Social Work. Also sponsored were two recreational workshops - one in Durango, 5 counties participating; one in Lamar, 6 counties taking part.

Members of the ADVISORY COMMITTEE in 1959 were:

Mrs. Edmond F. Noel, Chairman, Denver  
Mrs. Alva B. Adams, Pueblo  
Mrs. R. J. Arnold, Denver  
Mrs. Everett Barden, Haxtun  
Mrs. Geo. B. Berger, Jr., Denver  
Mrs. Ruth B. Clark, Ft. Collins  
Mr. Charles R. Conklin, Delta  
Mr. Vincent DeFrancis, Denver  
Mrs. Lon T. Fidler, Denver  
Mrs. Lester Garner, Sterling  
Mr. L. M. Lopez, Denver  
Mrs. Henry Luby, Denver  
Mrs. Geo. Mosier, Greeley  
Mrs. Donald O. Olson, Colorado Springs  
Mrs. Dale Rea, Durango  
Miss Marie C. Smith, Denver  
Mrs. Benjamin Stapleton, Jr., Englewood  
Reverend Justin Van Lopik, Denver  
Reverend Edward Wichmann, Pueblo.

SPECIAL PROJECT

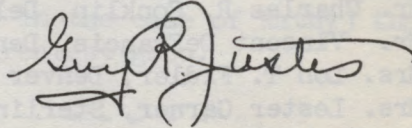
In 1959 we set up a special project in co-operation with the Pueblo Catholic Charities for recruitment of foster boarding homes and adoptive homes for children of Spanish-American ancestry.

To our way of thinking there is a home for almost every child needing one if we could just find it. There is an increasing number of Spanish-American children needing homes, and very few adoptive applicants willing to take children of a nationality dissimilar to their own.

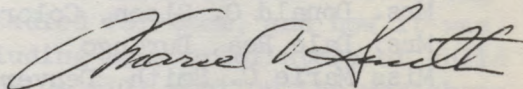
However, in the southern part of the state there are many potential adoptive parents of the kind we need. The problem is to find and encourage them to apply as foster or adoptive parents.

We have, therefore, placed on our staff a child welfare consultant, who speaks Spanish and whose headquarters will be in Pueblo, to head a program of recruitment of Spanish-American homes.

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Guy R. Justis, Director  
State Dept. of Public Welfare



Marie C. Smith, Director  
Child Welfare Division

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