

Elderado-San Angelo Incident

Week #1: April 8th – April 10th (Fort Concho)

- ❖ We attended a briefing on the status of the situation upon arrival. We were told that the encounter with the FLDS women and children would be unlike anything we had ever experienced. We were informed that they would be dressed very strangely, but in clothing of the highest quality and cost. We were told not to expect any of them to engage with us, and if by chance they spoke to us it would be to tell us to speak with their lawyers. We were told that even the children were directing all outsiders to contact their lawyers.
- ❖ We were informed not to wear anything red, even nail polish. When I asked someone about the significance of the color red I was told that they believed it represented evil. Later we learned that red signifies the blood of Christ and is therefore sacred.
- ❖ The next morning I was assigned to Shelter #6 at Fort Concho. Upon arriving at the site I noticed a building set apart from all the others with a large handwritten sign designating it as Shelter #6. When I approached the building I could find no one with which to check in and proceeded to circle the building. On the backside, away from everything, was a small group of men sitting before a closed door. At my approach several of them rose and came toward me. When I stated my purpose in being there I was immediately told I was in the wrong place and to return to the other buildings. When I pointed out the sign identifying the building I was again told to leave and return to the group of other buildings. We later learned that the adolescent boys were being housed there, although we seldom saw any of them allowed outside.
- ❖ Returning back to where we had been earlier I learned that there was another building designated Shelter #6 for mothers and children. I located the CPS shelter supervisor and identified myself. He informed me that the building housed four women and sixteen children, but they were not likely to engage in any way. Since the door was open, I knocked on the doorframe and entered. I introduced myself and initiated conversation to build rapport. The children were quiet, but openly attentive and inquisitive. The women were guarded, but readily identified themselves with their first names when I introduced myself and the names and ages of their children when I inquired.
- ❖ The one room they were staying in was approximately 20'-25' x 20'-25' and built of rock walls with no insulation, unfinished wood plank floors, and had two windows – only one of which opened. There was a large potbellied wood stove in the center of the room and the four walls were lined with their twenty cots. There

was no storage for their clothing or other belongings and it was neatly piled on cots and in the floor.

- ❖ The door to the room was almost constantly open. Even when the women closed the door to reduce noise during naptime or to dress themselves or the children, it was almost immediately opened again. At one point when the door was closed, a CPS worker stated that she did not know how she was supposed to “watch and supervise these people if they keep closing the door”. The women eventually dressed themselves and their children in the public restroom in order to have privacy.
- ❖ At one point I headed toward the public restroom and was immediately grabbed by the arm by a CPS worker who told me to use the port-a-potties outside the rock wall, “because we don’t know what kind of diseases these people might have and we don’t want to catch anything from them”. I was later told that it had been determined that STDs were rampant among the women because of their promiscuous lifestyle. I did not believe that information since I knew none of the women had submitted to examination.
- ❖ On the second day, the shelter supervisor (a man) entered the shelter (housing four adult women and their children) without knocking. Several men and a group of Texas Rangers followed him. I levered myself through the group in order to observe what was happening since I had already learned that the women and children were being treated discourteously and disrespectfully at best, with some observations of verbal abuse and emotional threats. I could not get close enough at first to hear what the shelter supervisor and his entourage were saying to them, but finally heard them ordering the women to submit their children for physical examinations. I also observed the Texas Rangers’ interactions with the oldest woman of the group. The Rangers were respectful and polite. The Ranger in charge of the group, a young woman named Wendy, squatted down to eye level with the woman, and greeted her by name. She returned the woman’s cell phone to her and told her that plans were being made to reunite the entire group.
- ❖ Although the women were not charged with any crimes, they were not allowed to communicate with the women in other shelters or with the outside world, and their cell phones had been confiscated. Shortly after one of the mothers in Shelter #6 had a cell phone returned and was openly making a call, a CPS worker ordered a DPS officer to take it away from her. The DPS officer confronted the woman and asked her where she had gotten the phone. She told him that the Texas Rangers had returned it to her and I backed up her explanation.
- ❖ The CPS workers were openly rude to the mothers and children, yelled at them for trying to wave to friends and family members in surrounding shelters, threatened them with arrest if they did not stop waving to others, continually reminded them that the women were guests only and could be made to leave if they did not cooperate, threatened the mothers with never seeing their children

again if they did not cooperate, and ignored requests for anything. The mothers began asking if everyone who approached them was CPS or not.

- ❖ CPS workers became irritated when the mothers requested brooms and mops to clean their surroundings. One broom, one mop, and one bucket were finally provided and were shared by neighboring shelters.
- ❖ CPS workers carried clipboards and continuously took notes of everything said or observed, sometimes writing while a mother was still talking to them.
- ❖ Mental health workers were treated rudely and their presence was discounted at every turn. We were repeatedly told that if we interfered in any way with CPS directives to us or to the guests, we would be arrested and charged with interference with a public servant in the performance of their duties.
- ❖ By day three, it became obvious that both the mothers and the mental health workers were being lied to and/or ignored. Even the simplest request was discounted. At one time a mother told me she wished she had some peppermint or chamomile tea to give to her toddler daughter for her runny nose. I approached the shelter supervisor with the request. Later his supervisor came to me and told me that herbal teas were medication and could only be approved by a physician. The request was denied.
- ❖ The mothers complained about the food and snacks provided for them. One mother told me that her children were accustomed to nuts and fruits for snacks, not commercial fried pies. Chicken was served almost every meal with little or no seasoning and no flavor. Vegetables were scarce and everything was highly processed – very different from the women and children's typical diet of homegrown organic and unprocessed foods. Very quickly, many of the children developed diarrhea and gastrointestinal problems.
- ❖ I observed that their clothing was indeed well constructed in a variety of styles and pastel colors, but was homemade. They were very modest in their dress and no skin was ever visible except hands and faces, even on small children. I learned that some women were known for their seamstress skills while others sewed little at all, so a group of the women sewed for everyone as their contribution to the community.
- ❖ The children were amazingly clean, happy, healthy, energetic, inquisitive, well behaved, and self-confident; while the mothers were consistently calm, patient, and loving with their children. Discipline was firm and consistent, with never a hand or voice raised. These mother's parenting skills were textbook child development strategies. The children did not bicker among themselves and seldom cried. If a child did cry, his or her needs were met immediately and the crying stopped.