



# The Foster Care Council of Canada

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## Richard Mackenzie

Prepared by John Dunn

THE FOLLOWING WAS RICHARD MACKENZIE'S FIRST FEW CHAPTERS OF A BOOK HE WANTED TO PUBLISH ON THE INTERNET ABOUT HIS LIFE IN FOSTER HOMES AND GROUP HOMES. UNFORTUNATELY THE BOOK WAS NEVER COMPLETED BECAUSE RICHARD DIED OF AN OVERDOSE OF DRUGS ON THE STREETS IN THE SUMMER OF 2004.

THE COUNCIL WANTS TO SUBMIT THIS TRANSCRIPT TO THE TASK FORCE ON THE HOMELESS AND THE SAFE STREETS ACT BECAUSE IT IS TYPICAL OF THE TYPE OF TRAUMATIC BACKGROUND SUFFERED BY STREET INVOLVED PERSONS.

THE COUNCIL WANTS THE TASK FORCE TO UNDERSTAND WE NEED HUMANE SOLUTIONS TO HOMELESSNESS TO PROVIDE THE KIND OF PEACE AND JUSTICE TO STREET INVOLVED PERSONS THAT RICHARD NEVER FOUND. WE ARE NOT SURE WHY SOME PEOPLE LIKE RICHARD NEVER MAKE IT OFF THE STREET. BUT THE COUNCIL IS CERTAIN THAT MORE ACCEPTANCE, SUPPORT AND VALIDATION OF RICHARD'S PAIN WOULD HAVE INSPIRED HIM TO CARE ENOUGH ABOUT HIMSELF TO SEEK ASSISTANCE IN DEALING WITH HIS TRAUMA.

### INTRODUCTION by Jane Scharf

We have lost one of our good brothers to the street last summer. Richard age twenty-five overdosed on heroine in the summer of 2004.

I met Richard in 2003 during a protest of the use of child restraints as punishment in-group homes. Richard stopped to tell me that he was a resident in the Peterborough group home where young William Edgar died during a restraint. He told me he himself and had many restraints performed on him which in group homes for as punishment but never for reasons of himself begin dangerous.

Richard logged many hours at the protest helping in many ways including passing out flyers and describing a physical restraint to passersby.

Richard had a tough punk look with spiked hair, lots of piercings and studs, but he was a very kind and gentle person.

Richard told me he wanted to write a book about his life in care and post in on the Internet. He has written several chapters and it is powerfully written. The poignant prose moved me profoundly. He tells how he was left unattended in an apartment by his mother, a drug addict, and father an alcoholic for several days before he was found. He was then placed in a foster home and group homes that were abusive. In the foster home he was sexually, physically and emotionally abused. He describes how, after he was raped repeatedly, that he tried to

kill himself by setting his bed on fire. At one point, he said that he wished with all his heart that the authorities had left him in the apartment to die alone when he an infant. The group homes were just about as bad.

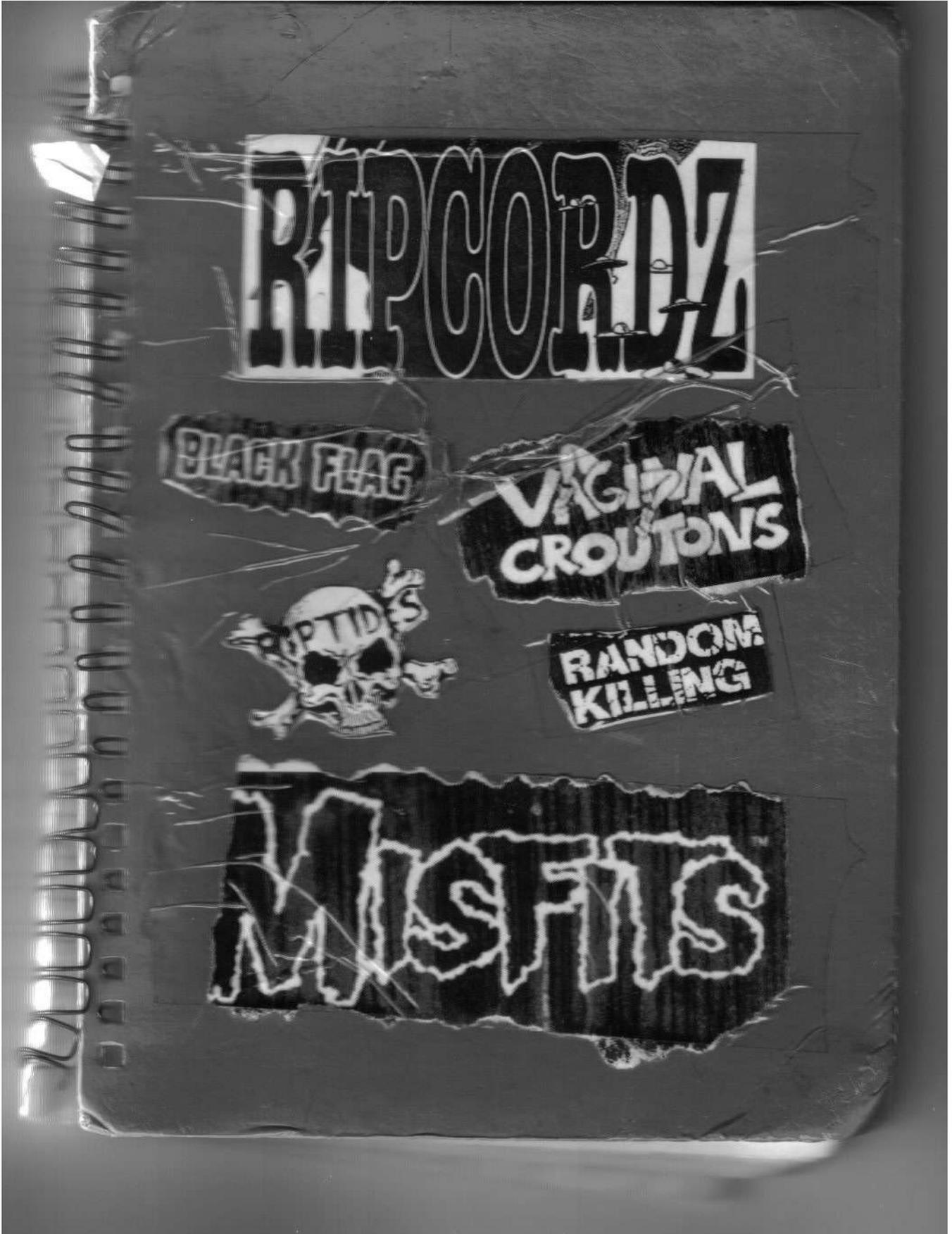
Richards main source of income was from squeegeeing. He wandered around during the day and usually arrived at our protest site at night to sleep. I really understood the depth of his sensitivity and caring one evening when he arrived back very late and I was sleeping. He had left his blankets with me when he was gone so he had to wake me up to get them.

When he woke me up I noticed that he was actually in pain about having to wake me and he apologized with great tenderness for disturbing me.

I recently met Julian Lacroix, Richard's best friend of 10 years, and he delivered the tragic news that Richard died last summer on the street of an overdose.

I want you to know that Richard's story is not unique amongst street involved persons. I want for other homeless persons the justice and peace that Richard never found.

# Richard's Story



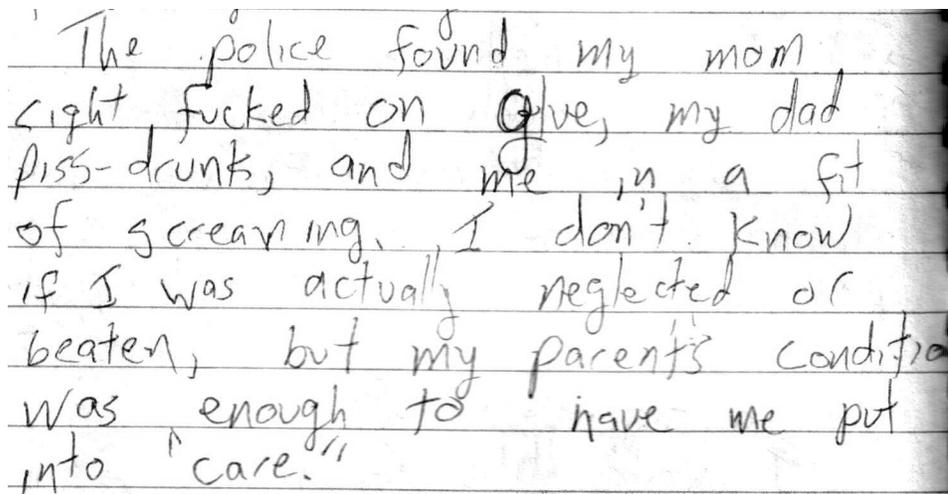
Where do I begin?

At the beginning I suppose.

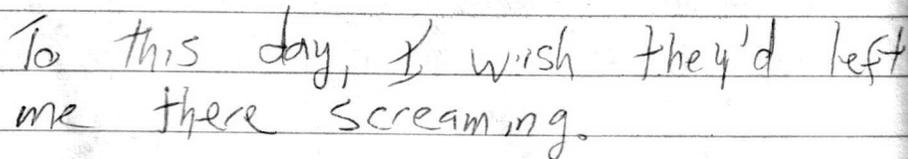
I was born in Toronto to Jean and Richard Mackenzie, on Feb 07, 1978. I was reasonably healthy, which is surprising since my mom was reportedly an impressive glue addict throughout the pregnancy (and beyond) my father, who was about as old as I am now, (24) was a raging alcoholic.

I would like to try and fill in more details about my parents and extended family, but the truth is, I don't really know that much.

I did meet my aunt and uncle on my mom's side, but I'll get into that later. Babies scream a lot, and I was no exception. However, when I screamed or cried, or made any noise, I was ignored. When I was one and a half, apparently the neighbors called the police because I'd been screaming and causing hell for a few days straight.



The police found my mom right fucked on glue, my dad piss-drunk, and me in a fit of screaming. I don't know if I was actually neglected or beaten, but my parents' condition was enough to have me put into "care."



To this day, I wish they'd left me there screaming.

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After about a year or so of being shunted about by the courts as they decided what to do with me, I was placed with Glenna Macdonald in Toronto. Glenna's house consisted of her, another foster son named Shaun, her own sons Danny, Fred, Bill and her daughter whose name I can't remember. I'll call her "Sue".

My earliest memories were of this placement. I was a happy child, noisy and with a very short attention span, which was medicated with Ritalin. I don't remember being particularly fearful, although even at this early age (4) I was very familiar with being beaten. I saw beatings as punishment for wrong doing. They weren't as frequent as they were a few years later.

When I was five, the MacDonald's took me to my "cousins" place for the weekend while I was there, my two cousins Shelby and Diane played outside, watched "Smurfs" on T.V., and had fun. Their mother, Glenna's sister, was a drinker and generally left us kids on our own.

The Sunday of that weekend sticks in my memory.

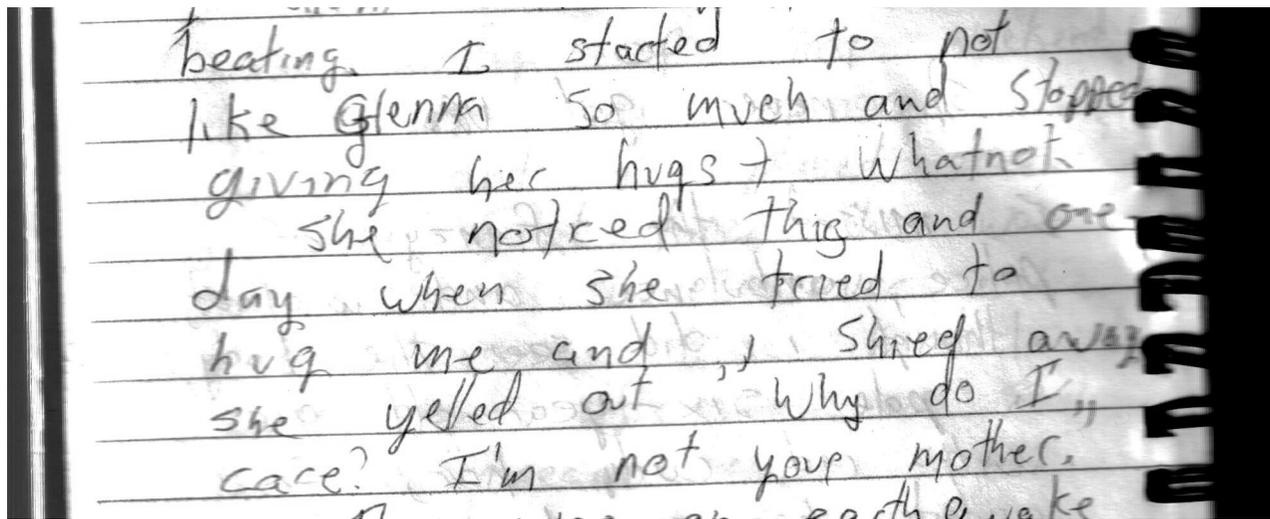
Dianne and I played "doctor" for the first time. She was the first girl I ever saw naked, which was kinda neat. Later that afternoon we saw the ice cream truck across the street with yells of glee we darted across the road. The truck narrowly missed me but caught Diane full on.

I remember pure confusion from that point, people screaming, someone holding me saying "are you alright?"

All I wanted was for Diane to get up so I could get ice cream. She had the money and the ice cream man was leaving...

She never got up.

I missed the frenzy of police, ambulance and what not, although, I did see the body, a pale six year old girl with red curly hair, life ended because her mother was more interested in soap operas and Budweiser, than watching us. Glenna was very distraught over Diane's death. I feel that this is when life at her house got really bad. The beatings got harsher and for stupid things. I lost a baby tooth at the dinner table and got beaten. I didn't come when called - beating.



I started to not like Glenna so much and stopped giving her hugs and what not. She noticed this and one day she tried to hug me and I shied (sic) away. She yelled out, "Why do I care? I'm not your mother". This was an earthquake for me, as my only memories of life were of living in the Macdonald household. I was hurt actually, I was more than hurt, I was devastated. In my mind, if she wasn't my mom, then were was my mom?

She must have not have wanted me. Why? Well, I must be a bad kid.

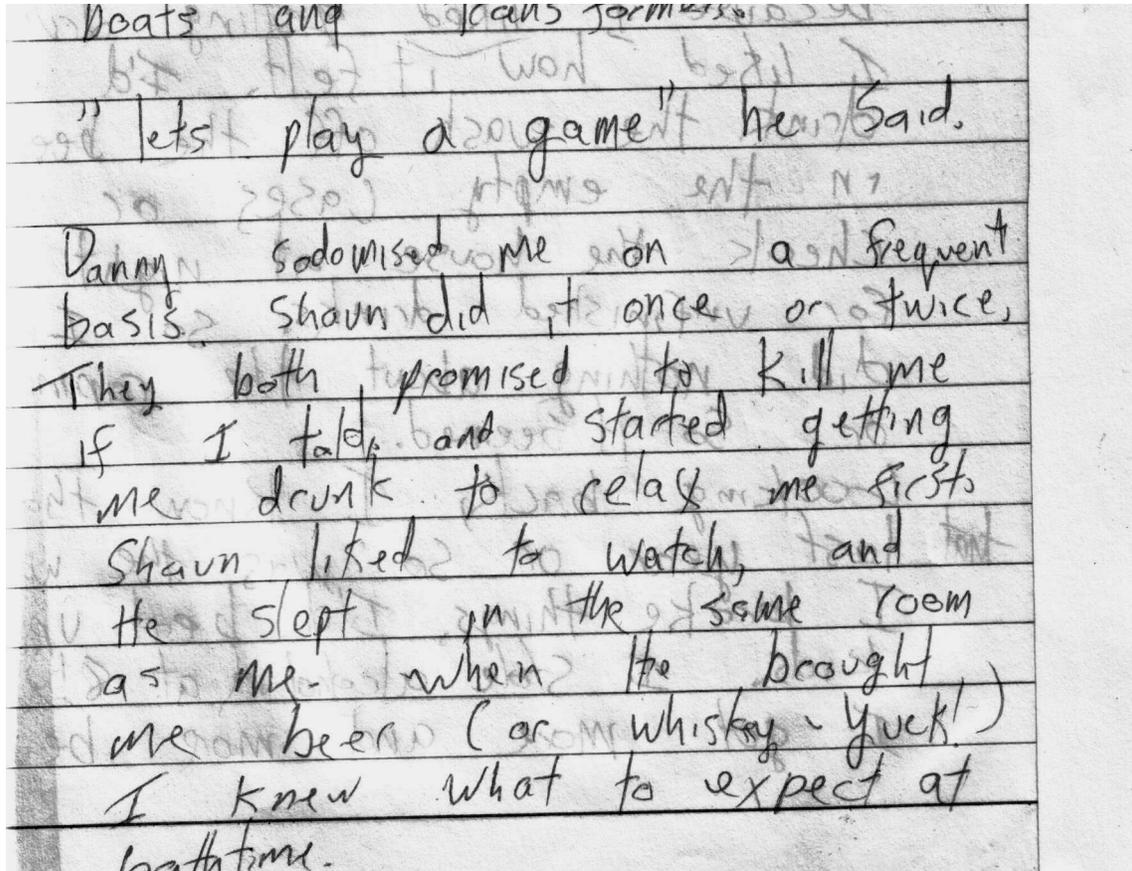
This mentality plagued me until I was twenty.

Well, on went life, basically the same as before. I remember a camp trip in the summer of eighty four or eighty five, when the Barrie tornado hit, and we escaped that by the skin of our teeth. Fred and Glenna were drinking by this point and the only reason we didn't get blown away was the radiator hose in Fred's care blew out. I remember it well, for at the Husky's station on the Hwy 400, where we ended up, which was very close to Barrie, the roof got torn off. If Fred had kept going like he wanted to, (Fuck the storm" he said) I wouldn't be here, likely.

Abuse is a funny thing, if you lived with it all your life. You just don't see it as abuse even when I met kids that weren't beaten, I never realized that maybe something was wrong in my home, I just thought they had really nice families... until the raping started.

I was seven. I was taking my bath before I went to bed. I remember Shaun coming into take a piss, then Danny. Everyone had been drinking all night and partying. The smell of hash and crack were in the air though I didn't know what these smells were (until I was sixteen and did those drugs myself) Shaun was talking to me and Danny walked in to piss too. They had a pissing contest, and talked about I can't remember what.

This was standard for this house; the bathroom didn't have a door, people pissed together or one in the can, on in the sink, etc, anyway, Danny was looking at me. I looked back amidst my boats and transformers.



“Let’s play a game” he said.

Danny sodomized me on a frequent basis. Shaun did it once or twice, they both promised to kill me if I told and started getting me drunk to relax me first. Shaun liked to watch and he slept in the same room as me. When he brought me beer, (or whiskey – yuck!) I knew what to expect at bath time.

Now here’s the fucked up thing. I hated them for doing it. I hated when Danny would whip out his dick, I hated Shaun when he’d bring booze up, I hated everyone for not knowing and myself for being a coward. But until I was eight and a half, I did nothing because I liked getting drunk, I liked how it felt. I’d drink the wash off the beers in the empty cases or check the house at night for unfinished drinks.

So I did nothing about the rapings or so it seemed.

Looking back, I know that last year or so was the worst. I broke things, I’d beat up kids, I stole alcohol (at eight) I got more and more beatings, but I was developing the anger to fight back now. This didn’t help – Fred threw (sic) me down the basement stairs for fighting back after a spanking for god-knows-what and gave me a concussion (I’d never heard that word before) I got really hurt in a fight with Glenna, Fred, Danny and “Sue” cause I threw a toy car to Sue too hard and cut her nose.

Basically that's where the story of the MacDonald's ends. I got a lighter and tried to set the house on fire, me included. Now I've glossed over a lot of facts, but basically by this point, I was a very fucked up kid. I wanted to die and I wanted to take everyone with me. I torched the bed, and lied down on it, waiting to die. I'd stolen the lighter from downstairs. When the fire got going really good, I realized that self-immolation (sacrifice by fire) was probably very painful.

I freaked out and called for help. Glenna ran up, saw the fire and me, grabbed me and ran downstairs. She called 911 and everyone went outside to wait for the fire department.

I don't think it was that bad a fire – only the bed and some paint off the walls burned – but it was enough to have me labeled a menace and the very next day I was removed from Glenna's house and placed at a facility for “troubled” kids in Toronto called “Lloyd S. Robertson Residence” (LSR)

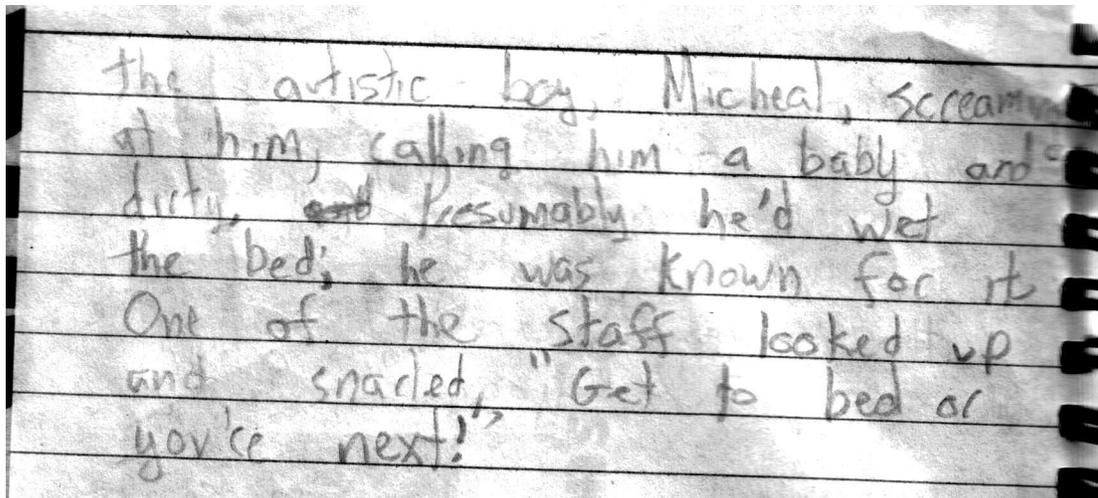
LSR is a large building capable of supporting up to I think 60 kids. It is split into 4 quadrants called “Houses” and numbered 1-4. I was in house 3. There is a small school room in the centre and for the older kids another school room in a public school not far away.

The property has a playground in the back and a medical center next door which I became well acquainted with. As nice as this may seem, the place was run like a prison, with restraints and other forms of corporal punishment galore. In retrospect, it seems that our (us kids) label of “troubled” was enough to assume that non-physical forms of behavior management would be ineffective. The most lax punishment was being confined in a 3' x 5' stairwell and most staff seemed to get pleasure out of grabbing the offending child, dragging them by whatever body part (arm, neck, hair) to the stairs, and giving them a shove at the top of the stairs.

The placement visit was very misleading. They gave me a teddy bear and led me around the place, extolling the virtues of their clean, safe environment and excellent food. The placement worker from CAS, Mary Hutchings seemed very satisfied and this was where I spent the next two and a half years.

I awoke to the sounds of screaming. This was something not altogether new to me, but usually it was an adult I heard, this was a child. Intrigued, I clambered out of bed to see what was up.

“Don't go out there” my roommate said “you'll get in trouble”.



I wandered to the door and peeked out. About six feet away, 2 staff were half-restraining, half stripping the autistic boy Michael. Screaming at him, calling him a baby and dirty. Presumably he'd wet the bed. He was known for it. One of the staff looked up and snarled "get to bed or you're next!".

I'm next? What did that mean? I wasn't about to find out. I ran back to bed and hid under the covers. "Told you" said my roommate.

The schedule at LSR was not unusual for most group homes. Awake at 7 for school, breakfast at eight, down the main corridor to the school by 9. School was new to me. I'd never gone at the MacDonal'd's and couldn't read or write. The teachers were very supportive and helped me get up to speed very quickly. They saw I was bright and heaped tons of praise on me. I was up to a grade 3 level in six months.

Back in house 3, thought, things were getting rough. It seems that when a kid first gets into a home, there's a "grace period" where either the kid tries extra hard to be good as the staff are lax on discipline, but essentially punishments are few and far between.

My time had expired. A minor infraction including the TV and my comment of "I hate fucking Care Bears" earned me an airborne trip down the stairwell. And -get this - the staff, Bruce, told me to "watch my fucking mouth" and to stay there for an hour.

There's not a hell of a lot to do in a 3' x 5' stairwell. I counted stairs (6) floor tiles, (9), bricks as height as I could see (my vision was bad as long as I could remember; no one realized this until three years later) played with dirt, but by fifteen minutes or so, I was up the stairs looking for other forms of entertainment.

Of course Bruce saw my little head poking out and started my hour over. An hour is an excessive amount of time to a kid with ADD or ADHD. It usually became an all-day event, trying to make a hyperactive kid sit still for that long. It often ended in a restraint; after that the child would fall asleep in the stairwell and finally not move for the prescribed amount of time.

I'm sitting in St Huberts at Kennedy and Eglinton Sts in Toronto. My social worker May has bought me lunch. I've been at LSR for six months.

This is a cusp. Every abused kid in care comes upon this question by a worker or other adult in authority, and the same thoughts race through our heads - do we tell? do we say "This staff did this, this staff did that, etc, do we risk the punishments, will this person believe us? After all, we're bad kids, that's why our parents didn't want us, that's why we always get in trouble.

"Fine" I say.

"So, how are you?" she asks. "fine". I lie. "How are things with staff?" "Fine". Another lie. "How are they treating you?"

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Mary proceeds to inform me that there has been change in structure and I would be getting a new worker. I didn't particularly want a new worker. But of course I had no say in the matter. Mary had been very kind to me. Not many people had. So this hit me as a form of rejection - I figured it was my fault.

Mary tells me there has been a decision and I will not be permitted to visit the MacDonald's or have any contact with them. I will get a good-bye visit....

*This book unfortunately was never finished....  
Rest in Peace*

**Richard Mackenzie**