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January 26, 1984

Mr. Van Gordon Sauter
President
CBS
51 West 52nd Street
New York, NY 10019

Dear Mr. Sauter:

I just learned that '60 Minutes' will be discussing Straight (a non-profit, privately financed, adolescent drug rehabilitation program) on its Sunday evening T.V. program. I've also learned that the only contact the producers have had with the Straight program has been a short discussion with the National Executive Director. If this is correct, I don't know how one could intelligently present a true picture of the Straight program without having talked with parents and their sons and daughters, both presently in the program and those who have completed the program.

Straight is probably the most successful program for rehabilitating adolescent "druggies" of any program in the country today. I personally observed the Atlanta program and know that over 95% of the more than 120 that have finished the program since it opened approximately two and one-half years ago, are still drug free. Some 2,000 youths nationally, ranging in ages from 14 to their early 20's, have finished the program. This program is not just a program for the adolescent or the young adult, it is also a program that involves the entire family which is why it is successful. The child not only gets the opportunity to get its life back, but also the child gets its family back and the family relationship is again rebuilt after the traumatic experience of having one of its family members being hooked on drugs.

What a wonderful experience it was to complete the program, to get a child back in the family whose life has been salvaged and can now go on to play a meaningful role in our society and one who is a pleasure to have back as part of the family. I know, as some of the 2,000 other parents know, what it's like as we've been there with no hope of saving our children except through the Straight program. Because of that program, my daughter is now a beautiful 20 year old who is working her way back by attending a local community college and working a part-time job. Without it, she would not be here today. She will attest to that, as only she knew how far down she had gone. She wanted to get away from drugs, but on her own she couldn't do it as she had become chemically dependent. In April of this year, she will be drug and alcohol free for three years.



The treatment for drug adolescents is quite different from treatment for adult druggies. An adolescent has never grown up and has never known how to deal with the things that they experienced, doesn't know which way to turn, and is not able to cope with the guilt and shame. Almost 100% of those going into the treatment certainly don't want to be there because of what they have to face up to. They all have a need to be there and it's really not until the late stages of the program that they realize that not only do they need to be there, but they also want to be there because they realize what the program has done for their life and for their family.

It took my daughter about twelve months to get to this point and in the final four months of the sixteen months that she spent in the program, she really made great strides. The family also needs the program to help them to regain their sanity and realize what has actually happened to their child and learn what the family members have to do together to help bring about successful treatment for their child. Some 25% of the families that started, withdrew from the Atlanta program basically because the parents weren't willing to make the sacrifices in their personal lives necessary to help their child get its life back and, therefore, justified their leaving the program by their condemnation of the program. I was single minded about saving my daughter to the extent that she came before my job. However, after my Parent Company (which is based in England) understood the problem, they went all out for her too in that they made a sizeable contribution to enable the program to be opened in Atlanta.

The child who does not complete the program, although is drug free during its stay in the program, usually does not remain drug free very long after it leaves. It is only natural, once taken out of the program by parents or through their own withdrawal, the druggie and its parents certainly would not have anything good to say about the program because it has elected drugs and rejected the opportunity to have a drug free life. During my approximately sixteen months time in the program, my daughter never experienced any physical abuse, nor did any of the foster children that lived in our home, nor did I ever hear of any. I certainly would not have put my daughter in a program where there was any physical violence that would have impaired her health and safety. One must keep in mind that all druggies are con artists, having graduated with a PhD in con work.

Having learned of the broadcast, I believe I have an obligation to advise you of the harm that you could do by broadcasting to the country a slanted view of a program that works, rather than giving the viewers the full story. I do not want to take the responsibility, nor do I think you and CBS would want to be responsible for the lives that could be lost through negativism that would influence and turn those families off from getting treatment for their child. It is a known fact that a chemically dependent adolescent winds up as a menace and a burden to society, a major cause of the breaking up of the family and one who could cause serious injury and death to others, more particularly, through traffic accidents caused by driving under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, and finally, an early death to themselves. Thus, we all lose as we continue to perpetuate the illegal use of drugs and further the degeneration of our society.

In this day and age in a country that is battling a drug epidemic that has impacted our adolescents, CBS has an opportunity to do something positive by telling the full Straight story by giving the positive side, the success story of Straight which has been a product of the free enterprise system without any government subsidies. It seems only the negatives get publicity when the big news is really the success stories in America, most of which are never publicized. I advocate that you tell the whole story, thus doing a real service to our society.

I too am the President of a Corporation, considerably smaller than CBS and not in a position to influence the lives of people in what I tell or show them, nor do I have an audience anything like you do at CBS. In whatever we do in our companies, one must always search their conscience to see that the right thing is being done. On this matter, I certainly hope you will do just that to determine whether or not the program that you're putting forth on Straight, which will be viewed by a large percentage of the population, is really a true depiction of what Straight is all about and whether or not through what is presented, you will cause families who need help to needlessly abandon the chance to get treatment from a program that has the success record that you apparently are not even going to discuss. I would think as President of CBS, you would want to take credit for helping and encouraging families to seek out any programs where children can get their lives back and the families can likewise be brought back together. If this is not what the Sunday night program is going to do, I would think one has to really begin to question what the contribution is that CBS is making to our society and, more particularly, to the families who have the adolescent chemical dependency problem and are searching to do something about it.

It may be best for CBS to not air the Straight story that it is planning on putting on at this time unless, and/or until, it can depict the full story of Straight. I recognize that oftentimes you probably do not know the full impact or what the overall content matter may be of a program that is being produced. Hopefully, I have been able to make you aware of my concern and the concern that I am sure would be expressed by all of the Straight parents and their "seven-step" kids who have successfully completed the program and have their lives back so that you can take whatever steps are necessary to discharge your responsibilities to our society.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,



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P.S. Enclosed are two unsolicited letters written by my daughter and her friend after they learned about your pending broadcast. Both of them have "seven stepped" from Straight and they tell the real Straight story. We need more kids like this in America.

cc: Mr. D. Hewitt, Executive Producer
Mrs. Nancy Reagan
Dr. Carlton Turner