

# STRAIGHT Harsh lesson learned in drug program

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## 'I learned not to trust anybody' — Fred Collins Jr.

A harsh lesson was learned by a young Alexandria man who escaped from a controversial drug rehabilitation program.

"I learned not to trust anybody," said Fred Collins Jr. about his experience in Straight Inc. one day after a U.S. District Court jury decided he was illegally imprisoned by the drug rehabilitation program. But then he corrected himself. "There was one guy I trusted. One day at an open meeting he got up and said he thought Straight was a slawashing place, and he said I might as too."

"So I got up and confronted him. I was put back in the program and I was praised," Collins told the Gazette Friday. "It's a jungle and you have to turn on your friends to survive... I felt terrible."

During the five months Collins was in Straight he says he learned to play the game and cooperate in order to survive." But, he said, "There was



always a part of me that knew I was going to escape."

Officials of the program deny that any adult has to "escape" the pro-



gram. In last week's four-day trial, Straight officials said their program is totally voluntary and Collins could have walked away at any time.



Collins, however, had a different story and the U.S. District jury agreed Thursday that Straight had falsely imprisoned him. The jury,



Staff photos by William Bayes

however, sided with Straight on two other counts of alleged assault and inflicting mental distress.

"They're constantly bringing in

people as an example of what happens to you if you try to escape," Collins said.

Collins could not estimate how many people had successfully escaped from the program.

"Whenever anyone escapes... you can't talk about them. They just disappear and you don't know if their parents took them out or if they escaped," he says.

When Collins entered Straight, his 15-year-old brother George was already in the program. One day George escaped, but was later caught by the police in St. Louis and returned to the program.

George Collins is now a staunch supporter of the program, and even testified against his brother in the trial.

"After a year and a half of constant harassment he has come to believe," said Fred Collins. "It's reprogramming."

Collins said his brother George never told him about his plans to

(See COLLINS, page 2)

man he confided in him, Collins hesitated, then answered, "No." Pressed on the question, he acknowledged, "Well, I might have."

"Its reprogramming," he said. "It turns everyone against each other. You tell on your friends and turn your brother in."

In the early hours of October 31, 1982, Collins threw a table chair through the window of his parents Alexandria home, where he was locked in at night, and climbed out through the window. His father, also a staunch supporter of the program, also testified against Collins during the trial.

The "reprogramming" stayed with him for months after he left Straight, Collins said. "I didn't touch a drop of alcohol for three months. I was afraid of what would happen. I was afraid I would just go crazy or snap or something."

Collins said Miller Newton, clinical director of the program, is treated as though he is "omnipotent" by youth in the program.

"Newton is treated like a god at Straight . . . When he comes into a room everyone chants, 'We love you Dr. Newton,' . . . and they sing songs to him.

"They tell you you have two choices. You can go back to drugs and go to hell or you can go through Straight and go to heaven," he said.

The many parents who support Straight have been brainwashed into believing if they don't support it something awful will happen to their children, Collins said. "They have no choice. They're convinced without Straight their son or daughter is going to die."

Collins estimates that about half of the young people in Straight have drug problems, although "none are hardcore." The other half are children whose parents think they have "bad attitudes" or, like himself, are siblings of clients.

Straight's sibling policy says if they determine the brother or sister of someone in their program has a drug problem, the sibling must join the program, or the parents must disinherit the sibling, or the child currently in the program is thrown out.

Under Straight rules, Collins family can not support him financially or emotionally. He has managed to continue his education in engineering at Virginia Tech on loans, and apparently does not feel bitter toward his family.

"I would sit down and eat dinner with them tonight," he said. "My parents were very good parents. They never tried to force their ideas on me . . . until Straight."

Collins says the grueling four-day court battle, in which both his father and brother testified against him, was worthwhile "if it keeps just one person from going through what I went through for five months."