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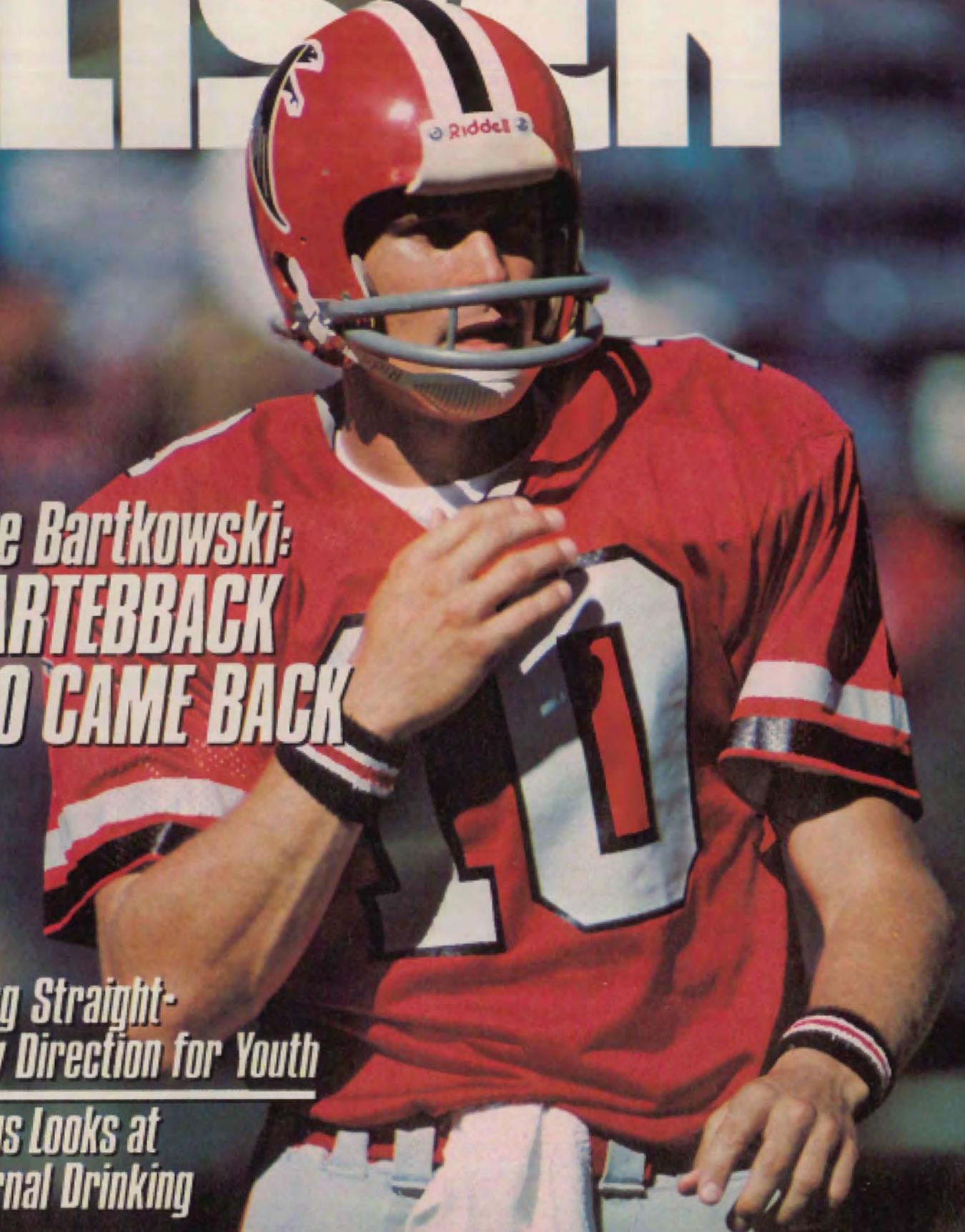
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# LIFE

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QUARTERBACK  
WHO CAME BACK**

**Getting Straight-  
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Maternal Drinking**



# ONE FAMILY'S WINDING ROAD TO STRAIGHT

**I** hate you! I hate you! You—" Carolyn [REDACTED] stopped her car in the middle of traffic. She had had enough. "Get out! I don't have to take that kind of talk from anyone. Now, get out!"

"No way. I'm not getting out, so get going!" Billy screamed.

"OK, then we'll just sit here. I'm not taking you anywhere."

Cars lined up behind them. Horns honked as drivers grew impatient with the delay. Finally Billy got out of the car. Carolyn watched as her eldest son triumphantly walked to the car just behind hers and got in. The driver was a schoolmate of his.

More abuse awaited her as she drove David, Billy's younger brother, to school.

"One of these days I'm going to burn the house down with you in it!" he threatened. "I hate you! I hate you!"

The [REDACTED] boys had been everybody's choice for least likely to develop a serious drug-use problem. Billy had been an honor-roll student, class officer, and athlete. David had always been the quiet, gentle, introspective type, full of artistic and creative ability. Their father, Bill, is the office director for the United States' secretary of commerce. Their spacious home is in a fashionable suburb of the nation's capital. The boys had had many advantages, including a Christian education at private schools.

**Deanna  
Davis**

Acquaintances who learned of the boys' drug involvement often commented, "Oh, you look like such a nice family too." But chemical dependency is no respecter of persons.

Carolyn first learned of her children's experimentation with drugs when Billy's principal called her in December of 1978.

"I think Billy's taking drugs," he told her. "His grades have dropped and he has the other symptoms. I don't want the school to get a bad reputation. It's just a rumor. I'm telling you, but I'm not going to check into it because I'll have to kick him out of school if I find it's true."

"I was mad," Carolyn remembers. "I thought he was making too big a deal out of it." Billy and David admitted that they had tried drugs but convinced their parents that the drugs weren't a problem.

"We talked to other parents, and they seemed to think that this was just like alcohol back in the sixties when we were growing up. Every kid tried it, but ours were good kids, so you really didn't have to worry."

The signs of Billy's continued drug use went unrecognized—his red eyes, the empty baggies in his pants pockets, oregano flakes on the kitchen counter.

"At first we were unaware. We didn't know. And then we went into denial, which is very common. But then in about November of 1979 we started to get really concerned."

Billy's school had called again. This time they called to tell his parents that he was getting straight F's. One of his teachers smelled pot on him during class. Later, the police caught Billy smoking pot under a street light and brought him home.

**B**ill and Carolyn decided that family counseling was needed. After the entire family had met with the counselor three times, the counselor told Carolyn, "You have a really great family. The problem is that you worry too much. You're doing everything right, but you don't give yourself enough credit. I don't need to see the kids anymore, but I need to see you." So Carolyn went for counseling by herself.

"I went to counseling for six months," she says with chagrin. While she was learning not to worry, her boys were getting deeper into drugs.

We changed our life-style to accommodate our sons' desires," recalls Bill. "We thought this was the way to get them to continue to be involved with us."

"We bought the boys new motorcycles," Carolyn adds. "We said, 'Hey, if they have enough good interests, they're not going to need to do drugs.' We went on a lot of ski trips. We were looking for a new interest so they'd stop taking drugs."

Bill sums up the results of this effort simply, "It just didn't work. Nothing seemed to work."

After searching for almost a year for a solution to their sons' drug problems, Bill and Carolyn discovered that Billy was smoking marijuana every day. Their only gain during the year had been their own increased awareness of the effects of marijuana and of the enormous peer pressure adolescents face to use mood-altering drugs. They also had made a commitment. "We're going to save these kids," they said. They would not give up. They would continue the search for a solution.

"If there's one thing I've learned out of this whole experience," Bill notes, "it's that no one cares about your children like you do as a parent, and that there are more people out there looking to destroy

your child's life than are willing to help you save it."

One night they listened in on their boys' telephone conversation and learned they were planning to go out and smoke dope with some friends. Carolyn called the police. "I told them the license plate number of the car and said, 'There are going to be six kids in the car using drugs, and we want you to pull them over.' They said, 'Forget it. We can't waste our time looking for those kids.' "

Then Bill took the phone. "Look, I expect you to stop them. They're in possession of illegal drugs. I'm telling you I want them stopped!"

"I told them exactly where the kids were going," he says, "They still didn't do it."

For Carolyn, seeking a solution to her sons' drug problems became an obsession. Bill recalls the stress that was put on their marriage. "I would be showering in the morning, and Carolyn would come in and say, 'Bill, I'm really concerned about these boys using drugs. What are we going to do about it?' I'd reply, 'I'll talk to you when I get out of the shower.'

"After my shower while I was shaving, she'd say, 'Bill, I just don't know what I'm going to do today.' 'I'll talk to you after I finish shaving,' I'd reply. But then I'd postpone the discussion again, saying, 'I'll talk to you tonight.'

"When I got to the office, Carolyn would be on the phone to tell me her experience driving the kids to school that day. She would call me several times throughout the day, saying we need to

## I THINK BILLY'S TAKING DRUGS."

Along the way to St. Petersburg. Left to right Mark, Billy, Carolyn and David [REDACTED]



do this and we need to do that. 'You need to be stronger,' she'd say, and I'd reply, 'No, you need to be stronger.' So we'd argue back and forth.

"At home that evening we'd again talk about the kids' drug problems until I began to wonder, 'What am I doing here?' We discussed nothing but the children's drug use."

Another casualty of the situation was Mark, their youngest son. He was rapidly becoming a lost child. He gave his parents no trouble, and he received no attention.

**W**hen the local high school held drug awareness meetings, Carolyn and Bill were in attendance. There they learned about parent support groups.

"We came home and decided we were going to start a parent support group," Carolyn recalls. "We made a list of Billy's friends—30 kids. We visited their parents and told them that we thought that our child was using drugs, and we were concerned about what was happening in the neighborhood. We set up a day and a time for a meeting. At the first meeting we had about 50 parents at our house."

Reaction to the meeting was not all positive, Bill remembers. "The next morning there was a dead rabbit on my car."

"Why do you have those dumb parent support groups?" Billy asked his mother. "Everybody on the street knows you. You're a hated person out there."

John Meeks of the Maryland Psychiatric Institute was a guest speaker at one of the group's meetings. When he opened his presentation with "I'm here to tell you why psychiatrists cannot help you with your child's drug problem," Bill [REDACTED] sat up to listen. "He sounded like he was being honest," Bill said. "All of the others we had talked to claimed to have the answer. We had tried their advice, and it hadn't worked."

Meeks mentioned that he had been at a new drug rehabilitation program in St. Petersburg, Florida, called Straight, Inc., and thought it was the best in the country. He explained that he had come to believe that in order to get a child drugfree, he first has to be put into a drug-free environment.

## WE ARE GOING TO SAVE THESE KIDS.

Carolyn and Bill decided to attend a local Straight information meeting. Bill was impressed from the beginning.

"When I first walked in I had the strange sensation come over me that here were some people who had experienced the problem and knew what the solution was. I saw fathers who had gone through all the disarray that I'd been through. I identified with their frustration in not being able to find the solution. Then I heard them talk about the solution they had found and the effect the program had had upon their children and how it worked."

He also learned that unlike other drug rehabilitation programs, some of which demand \$15,000 or more to free a child from drugs, Straight is a nonprofit organization. The fee for however long it takes a child to complete the program is about \$2100. An additional \$100 per month is required for the child's room and board with a foster family.

"What this said to me," notes Bill, "was that this particular program is more interested in saving children's lives than in making money." Bill and Carolyn decided Straight was the program for Billy.

**N**one of the [REDACTED] children knew the real reason for their trip to St. Petersburg. Carolyn was silent as the family ate breakfast at a waffle house the morning Billy was to be admitted to the program. Her eyes were large and blurred with tears. She couldn't stop staring at Billy. Were they doing the right thing? Would he ever forgive her for what she was about to do? "Someday your child will thank you," a promotional brochure for Straight had promised. As her unsuspecting son showered his \$10 breakfast with unprintable expletives, gratitude of any sort, now or in the future, seemed a remote possibility.

Less than five minutes later their car pulled into the parking lot of Straight, Inc. Billy had been told that the large one-story stucco and concrete structure was a government building that was closing down. His dad had come, Billy thought, to pick up some things from the building to take back to Washington. By prearrangement, Bill left his wallet above the visor in the car. This would give Carolyn an excuse for following

Carolyn and Bill [REDACTED]



them after they got into the building.

Bill and Billy stepped through the front door. "Are you here for an intake?" a young girl asked.

"No, I'm Bill [REDACTED] from Washington, D.C." The girl caught on immediately and went to find the intake coordinator. They walked back to her room.

"Why are you bringing me here?" Billy asked.

Just then Carolyn arrived. "You forgot your wallet," she said, extending the wallet in Bill's direction but fixing her gaze on Billy.

"Mom, where are we? What is this place? Where are we?" Billy was becoming frightened. If Carolyn had wanted to answer, she couldn't have. She was too choked up by then.

"You'll find out in a couple of minutes," Billy's father assured him.

"Mr. and Mrs. [REDACTED], would you come this way?" A voice was calling them out of the room and away from their son. Reluctantly they stepped into the hallway. As they were going out, two husky youths were coming into the room.

"Mom! Mom! Get me out of here! Get me out of here!" Billy's screams followed them down the long corridor. The Straight program requires self-discipline of both children and parents. Resisting her longing to turn around and comfort her son, Carolyn forced one foot ahead of the other. Tears streamed down her face.

In intake Billy was told exactly what to expect from the Straight program. Kids are counseled by other kids who are in the program and then invited to sign themselves in. Straight will not accept a child who does not voluntarily sign in. Billy signed in four and a half hours after entering the facility.

When Bill explained to David and Mark that their brother was in a drug rehabilitation program, Mark looked at his father and asked, "Why did you wait so long?"

"That really hit home and caused me to rethink my role as a father," Bill remembers. "I guess that's a message a lot of parents need to hear."

For the next two weeks Bill and Carolyn quarreled about what to do for David. They knew he was also using drugs. Carolyn did not think that David's problem was as severe as Billy's. She felt that a Christian boarding

school could get him on the right track. Bill, however, felt that David was chemically dependent and needed to join his brother in the Straight program.

## I N INTAKE BILLY WAS TOLD EXACTLY WHAT TO EXPECT.

*eventeen days after Billy entered the program,*

David was taken to Straight for an intake interview. Six and a half hours passed. The intake coordinator approached Bill. "I don't think David's going to sign into the program. He's already said he isn't going to sign up."

"There's no way he's coming back home," Bill replied. "He has to sign into the program."

"Then you're going to have to go in there and be tough with him and tell him he has to come into the program."

It was a 45-minute confrontation, eyeball to eyeball.

"You're going into the program."

"I am not."

"I love you and care about you. You need help. I believe in this program. You will go in."

"I will not! I hate you! You're a lousy father!"

Bill left, discouraged and apparently defeated. As soon as Bill was out of the room David broke down and cried. "I thought I was the most stubborn person in the world," he sobbed, "until I heard my dad talk." David signed in.

Looking back, Bill believes that David "knew his mother loved him, but he needed to know that his father loved him enough to be tough with him, to insist that he do something even against his will. Deep in his heart he knew that he needed the help."

Through the Straight program Bill and Carolyn have become more aware of and confident in their role as parents.

"I have to keep in constant communication. I have to be in tune with what my children are doing. I don't have to be a druggy friend. I do have to be a very strong father figure to apply tough love every day. I do not dare slip," Bill says.

"Very often these teenage kids intimidate you into believing that they really are reliable and responsible kids and that you don't have the right anymore to tell them what to do," Carolyn notes. "I know that I do have that right, that this is our home,

Mark [REDACTED]



and we are the adults in the family.

"It doesn't matter if Johnny's mother and Jimmy's mother and Brett's mother don't do it. I still have the right to do it. We can be strong parents. That's our God-given right; that's what we're expected to be, and that's what our boys need."

Billy and David have been at Straight for over a year now. They're straight, and they're proud. They've developed self-esteem, honesty, and the ability to accept responsibility and to cope with problems in a healthy way. They're clarifying values and are beginning to set goals for their lives.

Both Billy and David are honor-roll students again. David has become more outgoing and has returned to creative and artistic pursuits. His family cherishes the ceramic figurines he has made for them.

**B**illy is completing training to become a staff member at Straight. Eventually he wants to be a youth minister. David is undecided about a career choice but knows he wants to go to college "for at least six years."

Participation in Straight has not been accomplished without sacrifice. Bill, Carolyn,

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HAVING  
THEM BACK  
AGAIN."

and Mark make a grueling 19-hour trip to Florida every month to see the boys and to participate in open meetings at Straight. They leave Washington, D.C., Thursday evening and drive through the night. Open meetings are held Friday and Monday nights from 6:15 until 1:00 a.m. After the last meeting Bill and Carolyn begin the long drive home.

The family is unanimous in its praise of Straight.

"Now I know my older brothers," says 11-year-old Mark. "They couldn't have been called true big brothers in the past. But that's all changed. I talk and play with them now. The best thing that ever happened to me is having my brothers put in Straight."

Carolyn, now Straight intake coordinator for the state of Maryland and a full-time employee of the National Federation of Parents for Drug-free Youth, says both of the boys have thanked them. "We really appreciate what you've done for us," the boys say. "You've saved our lives. You've given us a second chance, and we really appreciate it."

"It's great having them back again," Carolyn says of her two oldest sons, for although they are away in Florida, they are closer than they have ever been before. "It's been exciting to be able to talk with them and share affection again."

Bill, now serving as the organizational co-chairman of the Washington area Straight, Inc., recalls sitting in church one week conscious of Billy's arm around his shoulder. Tears rolled unchecked down his face as he thought, "Here was a child who was in trouble, and we found an answer for him. We've come back to have communion together."

After church a woman approached Bill and asked, "You and your son are really close, aren't you?"

"I feel that way today," Bill replied with a happy smile on his face.

"I think it's beautiful, but my son thinks it's stupid."

Bill looked at the woman and smiled proudly. "At one time Billy probably would've felt the same way, but he doesn't feel that way today."

"Those," says Bill, "are the moments that you cherish." ◇



The brothers at play—Bill and David