

'Going Straight' brings comments from readers Series: LETTERS

[CITY Edition]

St. Petersburg Times - St. Petersburg, Fla.

Date: May 16, 1987

Start Page: 17.A

Section: EDITORIAL

Text Word Count: 1887

Document Text

Editor: I wish to congratulate David Finkel for a sensitive and compassionate report on the [REDACTED] family and their experience with Straight.

Paul, Bill and Julie [REDACTED] should be highly commended for sharing with us the heart-wrenching times that they have experienced. Through it all has come one message and it shows the wonderful devotion and love that parents can show for a child and the response given by the child in return.

Their love comes shining through and Paul should be congratulated once again on becoming the son and brother that his family treasures.

Thank you for a really excellent series. Judy Marley, Clearwater

Editor: Your innovative series on the rehabilitation of young Paul [REDACTED] seems to me to represent journalism at its best.

Congratulations.

Drug abuse today is at least as serious a problem as it was in my time, back in the infamous '60s. I survived that generation, somehow. I outgrew grass, acid, mushrooms and clinical speed to become, in the early '70s, an HRS counselor of both dependent and delinquent teen-agers. Many of my kids were on drugs. Some I had to refer to The Seed, a former and quite controversial rehabilitation program which is mentioned in your article as being the forerunner of Straight. Thus I am able to say that the two agencies do indeed seem to be quite similar in their approach. In both cases their results are impressive. Nevertheless, I had some reservations then, with The Seed, and after reading your article, I have some reservations now, with Straight. At the risk of sounding heretical, let me make two points.

First, in our zeal to address a problem, we must remember that the end goal, however necessary and desirable, does not automatically justify the means employed to reach that goal. In this case, the means consist of the methods used by Straight to reprogram Paul [REDACTED]. Hardly anyone, I suspect, would dispute that the methods as described amount to "brainwashing." What is being coerced and manipulated is a young man's mind, not just his behavior. Knowing this - and yes, I actually shed tears of thanks when I read of Paul's successful graduation - how many of us will nevertheless stand on principle and declare such methods unacceptable? After all, it is not exactly illegal to have a bad attitude, or to be lonely, or to despise one's parents. Not that I recommend such a stance, of course. But are we justified in holding a kid's head under the water until he gulps down a new set of notions?

Second, in the operational philosophy of a program like Straight there is a hidden assumption that needs to be made explicit. And that is the Machiavellian nature of those who lead others around by their belt loops. "Might makes right," is the disturbing motto, and we watch as kids are shorn of their identity and turned into pious clones of unthinking respectability. But why must every individual who would bolt from society be tackled and wrestled to the ground, pummeled into submission? Should we not heed the words of the Christian theologian, Soren Kierkegaard, who insisted that where there is a crowd, there is untruth?

Again I speak from principle. I recognize the need for effective drug rehabilitation. But I always cringe when Authority even seems to trample on the rights of the individual. The danger we must constantly beware is that in eradicating an evil we do not simultaneously kill the spark of responsible dissent.

We still teach Thoreau in our schools, and Thoreau declared that the individual conscience is a cubit or two above the majority. John Hayes, Treasure Island

Editor: I enjoyed very much the series on the drug program, Straight. The drama that was played out in that one family's life was remarkable. The [REDACTED]s are very special people to have shared it.

Your reporter - David Finkel - deserves a journalism award. His story showed that there can be hope for young people entrapped by drug addiction. David Beaven, Tampa

Editor: Re: Drug treatment program isn't answer for every child, May 10.

I agree with reporter David Finkel that I would only send a child to Straight if it was a last resort. In spite of the good they apparently do, some of their methods seem suspect. Also, I was surprised and appalled at the cost of the program, in spite of all the vounteer work required of the parents and the ``clients`` themselves.

Once again, the people who really need help are denied it, and the middle class parent has to really struggle to keep a child in, never really knowing if the child will be helped or if the money is down the drain. It would be interesting to know what the directors and other higher ups are paid. Robert Taylor, Seminole Don't rehire lawbreakers

Editor: I cannot agree with your May 10 ongoing editorial stand (Rebuild the air safety system) that favors reinstatement of fired air controllers to help alleviate a potentially dangerous situation. Rehiring federal lawbreakers would set a precedent for future unionized federal employees. Upholding the firings as ``permanent`` will dispel any future threats of unions to break a federal law.

If, on the other hand, the President was to rehire any of the former controllers, all, I repeat, all of them would be entitled to the same treatment. Remember, this is a democratic (social equality) society. Six years after the layoffs, the controllers would require considerable retraining, relocating, and especially, how to deal with seniority problems that would surely arise.

Many thousands of people sympathize with the discharged controllers who were following, like sheep, the leadership and opinions of the union officials who instigated the strike. The real blame should have fallen on those officials who were unscathed by the layoffs.

A preliminary hearing, FAA vs. the union, might have produced a judgment to indict the union officials, along with their members, in the event of a strike. In that context, the firing of the controllers might never have become necessary.

I do not believe the government should be solely responsible for the salaries and the working conditions of the controllers. Insurance companies and airline owners have paid out millions in accident claims. At least some of those accidents might have been prevented if additional competent controllers had been employed. Why shouldn't those companies (perhaps willingly) share the cost of the present controllers and the cost of employing many more that are needed to ensure safer flying? Clifford M. Martin, Tarpon Springs Working with Medicare

Editor: There has been much publicity lately about Medicare Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs), supplemental insurance and cost containment. An item of special interest to the cost-conscious Medicare recipient, which has not received much attention in the press, is the fact that there is a growing number of physicians who are participating in the Medicare assignment program.

These physicians have entered into an agreement with Medicare, whereby the physician accepts the fee allowed by Medicare as full payment. All physician services are billed directly to Medicare, and subsequently to any supplemental insurance or co-insurance, in the absence of which the patient becomes responsible for the difference.

The benefits for a patient to seek a participating physician are many fold. The patient can maintain total freedom and independence in choosing their physician or hospital as compared to an HMO. They can be assured that the fee is reasonable and fair as approved by the government. In most instances, all physician services can be free to the patient. These physicians are in private practice, getting paid on a fee for service basis, and hence are motivated in rendering quality care.

Medicare publishes a directory of the participating physicians each year, which is easily available to all Medicare recipients, or they should call toll free 1-800-342-7586 to obtain specific information. V. Iyer, M.D., S. Naman, M.D. T.J. Diamandis, M.D., Palm Harbor Conducting business

Editor: In view of your strong support for truth-in-lending, government-in-sunshine and similar laws, how about a stricter observance on your part of the principle of truth-in-editorial writing?

I refer to the May 8 editorial, Clubs that discriminate. You say, ``Maryland stripped the greenbelt tax exemption from the Burning Tree Country Club where male lobbyists and congressmen conduct much of the nation's business out of public sight``

`` ... much of the nation's business ...``? What hogwash! I spent 20 years in Washington as a business lobbyist and, while not a member of Burning Tree, I played there as well as across the road at the Congressional Country Club, where I was a member. There is no way that ``much`` of the nation's business could be carried out in such a setting. Legislative business, which is what you are talking about, is carried out in legislators' offices, in committee hearings, in committee drafting sessions and in House-Senate committee conferences.

To carry such an untruth in a column supposedly devoted to enlightening the public is a disservice to your readers and a violation of the canons of journalism. Don A. Goodall, Dunedin Share your opinions

We invite readers to write to us. Letters for publication should be addressed to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 1121, St. Petersburg, 33731. They should be brief and must include the handwritten signature and address of the writer.

Letters may be edited for clarity, taste and length. We regret that not all letters can be printed. Paradyne official responds

Editor: I take strong exception to the image of Paradyne and its people portrayed in your May 3 article. It was incorrect and irresponsible. You disparaged all Paradyne people regardless of their involvement in the Social Security Administration (SSA) contract. Your subsequent correction was virtually invisible and totally ineffective.

With respect to those specifically involved, you pronounced judgment based on accusation. No individual pled guilty or was found guilty by the court. In addition, the settlement agreement neither admits nor proves the government was defrauded by Paradyne or any individual. As a matter of record, the SSA renewed the contract six times after the award to Paradyne in 1981 and expressed satisfaction with the equipment.

Paradyne employees and management are hard working, dedicated and ethical people. We would like to see our contributions to industry and the community acknowledged rather than unjustifiably maligned by the inflammatory type reporting of the St. Petersburg Times. Paradyne employs 1,600 of its 3,100 employees in the Pinellas area with a local yearly payroll in excess of \$40-million, which helps support our economy. In addition, the company and its employees support local organizations including PACT, the Florida Orchestra, the Dali Museum, Abilities Rehabilitation Center, United Way, University of South Florida, Eckerd College, various chambers of commerce, St. Anthony's and Morton Plant Hospitals and many other activities and organizations.

I am proud to work for Paradyne. I am proud of our people and of our products and services. I know our people and our company well. I did not know Nelson Poynter, but I am aware of his philosophy: "The policy of our paper is very simple - merely to tell the truth." I believe Nelson Poynter would have been disappointed with your article. Jerry T. Kendall President and Chief Executive Officer Paradyne Corporation, Largo

[[Illustration]]

BLACK AND WHITE CARTOON, DON ADDIS; Caption: PTL needing \$20-million in 90 days

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