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“ . . . I am in a situation that I am very depressed about.”

Veronica Schlosser and her brother are in a foster home. They are under the protection of the state by the order of the court. Social workers and Guardians ad litem (GAL) are diligently striving to protect these two children's best interests. To be the voice for children who have no voice. At least that's what they claim. Veronica has a different take on the situation:

“Danielle Coakley, Karen Brown, Kelly Radke and John Vapp (the social workers and GALs) are grownups. I thought they were supposed to set examples for us by not lying.”

Veronica has written two letters to Judge Joseph Hiatt pleading to go home, *“I would like to bring to your attention that the caseworkers are pressuring me to say that my parents molested Annie* and myself, and I have told them many times that this is not true.”*

“Why won't anyone listen to my brother and me? Just because we are kids doesn't mean that we don't know the truth. . . My brother and I want to go home, now. Please help us.”

This reporter could not turn a deaf ear to her plea. Veronica has recently made a video taped statement at her own request. She ran away from her foster home and contrived to meet with this reporter for that purpose. She is hoping that someone out there will heed her plea for someone to listen to her.

It is a rare opportunity for someone to actually interview a foster child and get their side of the story. The judges almost never do it. And for an outsider to obtain such access is virtually unheard of. All of these proceedings, as well as the children, are protected by the confidentiality laws and most children are carefully monitored. If the parents protest their innocence, as Veronica's parents have, and are uncooperative with social services, their access to the children is severely limited to only supervised visits, or even completely forbidden.

The confidentiality laws are ostensibly designed to protect the privacy of the child, but are actually used as a veil of secrecy to hide the deceitful and illegal operations by CPS agencies. They don't want the children to expose the lies they are told, to publicly deny that they were abused, or confess the grief they must endure alone. When someone pierces the veil, as Veronica has, there is a mad scramble for damage control as is currently happening with Veronica's case.

Upon her return to the foster home after the interview, she was evidently interrogated by her 'protectors' about where she had been. Veronica is only a child, and finding herself being forcefully confronted by the very people she doesn't trust, confessed about the interview. Nobody has had access to Veronica since this interview. Her parents and supporters are very concerned for Veronica's well being and safety.

There is currently a petition before the court to suppress this interview and prohibit the distribution of this tape. The petition states that Veronica '[read] a prepared statement regarding the abuse allegations.' There are witnesses to this taping who will verify that Veronica did not read a prepared statement. However, lies are commonly

employed by CPS (Children's Protective Services) agencies nationwide to support their allegations against parents. Think about it, if they were to state that Veronica made a voluntary and spontaneous statement, and if that statement were to contradict their claims about the abuse, they would lose all legal standing to keep the children in foster care.

Pretending concern for the supposed coercion that Veronica faced during the interview, the GAL and the social workers want 'to review the tape to see what, if any, further action or therapy for Veronica is warranted.'

This is this child's **third** attempt to have her voice heard. Three separate times this girl has said she is being forced by the social workers to make a false disclosure against her parents. Three times she has said that she and her brother want to go home. Three times, her 'protectors' have ignored her pleas to be heard.

These children *are* in danger. By virtue of these disclosures of the truth, they are in danger of being taken to a psychiatric facility and drugged into compliance by the very people who are professing to protect them. They are in danger of never seeing their parents again. They are in danger of continued trauma and emotional abuse at the hands of their so-called 'protectors.'

"My parents have never done what they are bring accused of. My brother and I are tired of being lied to. He cries all the time."

According to Veronica, when Randall* cries for his mother, his foster mother won't comfort him, but sends him to his room alone. This unhappy child, deprived of the love and nurturing that he is accustomed to from his parents, and the innocent victim of the harsh judgment of the court, must endure his anguish alone.

"I would like to ask that you consider this letter as a request from Randall and me that we desperately want to return home and that our parents be freed of these accusations. I have seriously thought of committing suicide because no one will listen to me."

Social workers across the country, like the social workers who removed Veronica and Randall from their home, insist that they are protecting abused children. They often state that they are the only ones who do protect children. Many don't believe that parents have the child's best interests at heart.

However, to the horror of their parents, these very children are routinely held hostage for the parent's cooperation and compliance by CPS agencies. Many parents have told this reporter that a social worker has told them they will never see their children again unless they agree...to a plea bargain, to a treatment plan, to divorce their husband, and more.

There is rarely clear-cut evidence of abuse in the home. Often the only evidence is an unsubstantiated accusation. However, it is too common an occurrence where the decision is made to 'err on the side of the child.'

As activist John Harvey states, "We must expose error rather than perpetuate it. . .The governor has adopted this mindless non-sense. Its logic is rooted in Machiavellian philosophy which says that the ends justify the means. In other words, if we are intent on protecting a child, every tactic that we choose, every law we violate, every rule we break, every family we destroy, every slander we utter and every right we trod underfoot is fully justified, because we have nobly sought to protect a child."

When the state intervenes unnecessarily, the children suffer even more than the

parents do, as we have seen from Veronica's letters. Many children act out their anger and frustration with bed wetting, creating conflicts, and destroying things. Veronica has run away and

considered suicide. The only abuse this child has suffered has been at the hands of her 'protectors' by the order of the court.

The social workers claim that when children 'act out' in the foster home that it is the result of the trauma the children suffered at the hands of their allegedly abusive parents. They completely deny the fact that the separation trauma is actually the cause of the problem most of the time.

When a child who has been removed from the home asks to speak to the judge, they are told it isn't necessary, that the GAL will speak for them. Then, in the courtroom, the GAL does not inform the court of the child's wishes nor advise the court that the child wishes to speak to the judge. Who really hears the voices of the children who cry in anguished loneliness, pleading to be with their parents again?

Clearly not the social workers or the GAL, or else they wouldn't strive so diligently to keep the child from testifying in court or speaking to the judge in chambers. The parents are helpless before the court to plead on behalf of their child, or to even comfort their child. Often, the only time a child's voice is heard is when the child takes matters into his own hands, and defies the authority of the people over him to find someone, anyone who will listen.

Sam Dogget did it in Washington. Her parents were accused in the Wenatchee sex ring case. She fled from CPS agencies for several years and didn't go back to her foster home, but then, Sam was sixteen.

Veronica is only thirteen and she did it for a day. She sat awkward and self-conscious before the camera and made a brief statement about her situation. She denies that her parents abused her, just as she stated in her two previous letters. She states the social workers are coercing her into making a false disclosure, just as she stated in her two previous letters. She said she wants to come home, that she and her brother do not belong in foster care. For the third time.

"I was interviewed at school by Danielle Coakley. . . I wanted my mom at these interviews but they said no. At that time, I was scared and under pressure by the caseworker." This is the face of child protection today, where children are pressured by strangers and denied access to their parents' protection. Where they are all but sequestered from their parents. Where they cry alone in the dark for their mommy and daddy, and are reprovved for their very real and legitimate grief. Where they scream the truth but nobody hears them.

This reporter hears them. Veronica wants her plight published. She wants the world to know what's happening to her and her brother. I hope I can do that much for them, and I hope it's good enough to get them returned safely home.

P.S. November 16, 2002 - The judge ordered this reporter to turn over all copies and originals of the tape of Veronica's disclosure - this reporter defied the court order and has never been held in contempt. Two weeks after this article and the video were released to 20 media outlets and aired in New York City, the children were returned home.

The parents have since divorced as a direct result of the CPS intervention.

Veronica still suffers the effects of this 'protective' incident. She is afraid to be away from her mother, and does not trust strangers. A knock on the door makes her

afraid. For the first year, she was unable to go to sleep unless the bedroom light was on and her mother was in the room. CPS calls this a 'positive outcome.'
Veronica's mother is suing the state.

*not their real names