

**TWENTY-  
FOUR**

**TALES OF**

**TRANSITION**

**THE SELF-NARRATIVES  
OF YOUTH LEAVING  
CHILD WELFARE CARE**

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TRANSITION**

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## INTRODUCTION

This book is intended as a teaching resource in courses or classes that require a familiarity with adolescents and/or the child welfare system and/or interviewing. It contains the original transcripts of two interviews with each of 24 youth, 12 of each gender. These youth were participants in my doctoral research. Although the material has informed several papers, as well as the thesis itself, the data have not been fully exploited. What I have learned in my gleanings is only a small portion of what it has to teach. It seems too valuable a resource to languish unseen and unused.

The interviews included here were the second and third of four data collection events. The youth who participated were 18 or 19 years old at the time of the interviews, which took place in 1995. They had been in the care of the Children's Aid Society of Metro Toronto at the time they turned 16. Some had been in care most of their lives, others more briefly. Some left care soon after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, others when they turned 18, and some were receiving extended care (optional financial and counselling support) at the time of the interviews. All but two of them were living on their own, 'independently'. Some had partners, some had children, some had both. The names by which they are identified in the research were chosen by them.

The focus of my study was gender differences in how young people conceptualized and managed the transition to living on their own, which, for wards of the state, is legislatively imposed when they reach the age of majority. In Ontario, this is their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday; leaving care often anticipates rather than celebrates this event. The youth who participated were randomly selected from among youth of their age served by the child welfare agency. They were located with information from case workers, agency files, and anyone who would talk to me about the participants. If they agreed to participate, they were asked to attend three individual interviews that could take place in their homes, my home office, or any neutral location, and a gender-specific focus group discussion. Thirty of 48 selected youth agreed to participate, 24 provided full data sets (three interviews), 14 participated in the group discussion. Participants were paid \$20 for each interview.

The first interview consisted of the participants completing the Census Canada '91 Long Questionnaire, presented on a lap-top computer to introduce them to the idea of communicating with me through the medium of a computer screen. This is an essential component in the technique I call 'direct scribing' that was used in the two interviews that are included in this book. Direct scribing involves the young person speaking and me typing *verbatim* while s/he sits beside me and watches the words appear on the screen. I make changes as directed, without question. My questions or comments are also typed while spoken, so that we are both participating to the creation of the data in the same way.

The second interview began with me giving an explanation of narrative (what it is, what the narrator's job is) and my perspective on the adolescent transition, which I defined as the process between being the responsibility of someone else and being responsible for oneself. I explained with drawings that it is a prolonged process, perhaps beginning early in childhood and stretching far into the future, and that it is not a straight line, but rather a back-and-forth process. Then, with my hands poised above the key-board, I asked them to tell me their story of how they made that transition, explaining that I will type exactly what they say and will change or erase it at their command. And we began. The narratives in this book are exactly (except for potentially identifying information, which is identified by single quotation marks for first use of chosen names, or my description in italics) like the printed copy they received at the end of the session.

The third interview took place in most cases within a week or two of the second interview. It was described as a collaborative analysis of their narrative, and was conducted through a structured series of seven tasks. We started with re-reading their narrative and making changes as they decreed. They were invited to add to it; this was direct scribed and in most cases recorded in the third interview, but occasionally integrated into the narrative interview and noted as such. I then

gave a brief explanation about the story arc and asked them to identify the beginning, middle and end of their narrative, which was direct scribed. The fourth task was for them to identify the events they had selected, from among the many that were available, to carry their story. An event was defined as a thing that happened that moved the story along. The events were briefly listed. I reproduced the list and for the fifth task: after explaining that events can help or hinder the protagonist/narrator in achieving his/her end goal, I asked them to rate each event from -3 to +3 in terms of the power and direction of its impact on the narrative, and where appropriate to indicate how its valence had changed over time. The responses were direct scribed. I again reproduced the events list and asked them to select from among the list the six most important events, from that the four most important events, then the two, and finally the most important event. They were asked to not share their thoughts while making the choices, but just to call out the numbers of the events selected, which I recorded. When they chose the most important event, I read it out and asked if that felt as if it were indeed the most important event. Finally, as a closing exercise, preparatory to their narrative going out on its own, independent of them as its creator, I asked them to make a brief statement about what their narrative meant, and this was direct scribed. Some participants offered what they would say if they were personally introducing a reading of the narrative, others gave a précis or overview of the content, others gave a benediction to those who would listen to their story - in this case, you. The transcript in this book is again exactly like the hard copy that the participants received at the end of the session, except for identifying information.

The narratives the participants offered are broadly divergent responses to the question I asked. They vary in loquacity and eloquence, but each of them offers insights that surprised me, although I am a veteran in the field. The way in which I interacted with what they offered was also varied, depending on the chemistry between us and how my thinking was evolving. There are some memorable interviewing goofs baldly evident, but sometimes I, too, sound amazingly eloquent. In re-reading their stories to craft this book, I am once again overwhelmed with respect for their courage and perseverance in the face of astonishing difficulty in the past, present and future. I am once again awash with gratefulness at the depth and detail they shared, which allowed me — and now you — a glimpse into their worlds, both inner and outer. I wish you good learning for both your head and your heart.

This book is intended as a case-study resource. It also demonstrates one approach to interviewing adolescents, which is an art in itself. If you are interested in learning more about what I have gleaned from my study of this data, the following papers have been published:

- Tales of Transition: Leaving Public Care in *Youth in Transition: Perspective on Research and Policy*, eds. Burt Galaway & Joe Hudson, Thompson Educational Publishing Inc., Toronto, 1996, pgs 99-106. This locates the participants within the context of their age cohort on Census '91 variables.
- Tales of Transition: self-narrative and direct scribing in exploring care-leaving in *Child and Family Social Work* (1998), 3, 1, 1-12. This describes and discusses my methodology, including the rationale for the use of self-narrative and direct scribing.
- Tales of Transition: The stories of Julie and Jim in *Community Alternatives, International Journal of Family Care* (1997), 9, 2, 67-85. These are two of the narratives included in this book.
- A related paper co-authored with Teresa Palmer, a young person from care, based on different data collected by her, is Transitions to Adulthood: A Child Welfare Youth Perspective in *Community Alternatives, International Journal of Family Care* (1997) 9, 2, 29-60.
- My thesis is entitled Tales of Transition: Gender differences in how Canadian youth

conceptualize and manage emancipation from child welfare care. It is lodged at the University of Bristol, where I studied. There are copies with my benefactors: the Canadian government (a Canada Welfare Grant, a now defunct program), the Laidlaw Foundation (an Advanced Study Fellowship), the Children's Aid Society of Metro Toronto, and some individuals.

These papers and the thesis are accessible through my web page at ----.

Fay E. Martin  
Haliburton, Ontario  
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**THE STORY OF AFFRENAWAY**

*July 13, 1995. I met with Affrenaway in the living room of his friend's mom's house, in a medium-size city north of Toronto. The mother was away at work, and his friend went out to give us privacy.*

I was born in Florida, and I was back and forth from Canada to Florida a lot. I lived in 'Flamingo Park', that's in Toronto. I was from the age of 9 I was an only child, but my mom had a baby. My mom worked a lot so I had to take care of my sister when she was a baby, so as you said about the stage from adolescence to adulthood, I started at about age 9.

Then at age 14, I was put in a group home. I was abandoned in Canada. And that's when I really started to mature. I've been to a number of schools -- 26 -- I don't know if I was kicked out. I just moved a lot. High school was rough. I felt like I was going to drop out of high school, but I guess because I was in a group home I was forced to go.

By the age of 16, I had my first charge, and I had probation. And that's when I really started getting heavy into drugs. And that went on for a year. I never tried any hard stuff, just weed and hash. And hash oil. And I ran into the law again at age 17. This time I was incarcerated. And I went away for 2 months. And in that whole 2 months, I started thinking about a whole lot of stuff, my life and how it was going to turn out. And how I hated the place I was at. Because jail makes you think a lot, when you're in jail. I guess I owe it to my mom to not being dead or in jail still, because she's really a strict woman. I was a really a bad child, but she was strong enough that she still somehow pulled up. I don't blame her for putting me in a group home. I guess that's what I needed, because I've changed ever since I was in there. I've matured.

Right now I'm kind of struggling at age 18. I have a child, a little daughter named 'Exodus'. She's 2 months old now. Right now I'm struggling, where I'm living now. I can live either at my dad's or stay at friends', but I'm going to stay with my dad until I get my life in order. I want to finish school and go to university, become a recreation leader. That's what I see myself doing in the future. Planning on having a family, moving back home to Florida. That's it, there's nothing else really to say. My life is not an adventure or anything.

Well, I have had my ups and downs of adventure. I remember the time when me and my cousins used to go on adventures and stuff, I would say, but...

I've had my offers in life to do stuff, but I've matured and I realize I don't need that kind of stuff.

R: You use quite a bit of shorthand, so let me get you to expand on some things.  
Like...abandoned in Canada. Tell me more about that.

Well, I was in Florida and I got suspended from school. I guess before I moved back to Florida, I lived with my dad, and I guess he didn't really think it was appropriate for me to live with him because he was a truck driver. And he wouldn't be there a lot so he could keep an eye on me. And then my dad sent me back down to my mom's in Florida and she couldn't handle me so she sent me back up here to a group home. And then she left me and went back to Florida. She said it was going to be a year, but I didn't believe her.

R: Why did she bring you up here to put you in a group home?

I dunno.

R: What were you doing that she couldn't handle.  
I was bad all around. Everything she said, I did the opposite to.

R: And this was when you and your cousins were adventuring?

Yeah.

R: Doing illegal stuff?

Yeah.

R: Big time or little time?

Both. Let's put it this way. In grade 7 and 8 I was driving cars, so my mom thought Canada would be the best place for me.

R: Are your cousins in trouble now, or did they go straight?

I dunno. I haven't talked to them. Well, they weren't really my cousins, but you know, real close. We weren't really a gang or anything, just people that you kick it with, chill with.

R: Okay, I'm not clear on when you were in Flamingo Park and when you had to take care of your sister.

You see, my sister has a different father than me, and my dad and her dad weren't around really, so when my mom worked, I had to babysit all the time.

R: And after that, she went back to Florida with you?

Yeah. She's always lived with my mom.

R: Your sister?

Yeah.

R: And your dad stayed here.

Yeah.

R: Could you talk a bit about how you got involved with drugs, or why, maybe???

How I got involved was around people, you know. It was the scene and I didn't want to feel left out. And why was weird. I guess I just felt like every time I did it I was someone else. I left my life for an hour or two. I stepped in a whole new life and I kinda liked it. I don't do it a lot, but occasionally, still. It's not like I'm a big time drug dealer or anything.

R: Do you think that drugs is any kind of problem in your life now?

Well, sometimes I don't remember things. Like people tell me I said something and I won't remember talking to the person.

R: But do you get rowdy?

No, when I first started I used to laugh a lot. I thought I had a good time. But that was like, I just want to relax, just spark a bud. And things, you know, cool.

R: Is alcohol a part of your life?

I don't drink like a fish. I have an occasional beer, but I don't, you know, don't take it so far I'm staggering around places and making an ass of myself.

R: Some of the guys in this study say that when they drink, they get rowdy and end up in trouble with the law, but when they do grass, it mellows them out and they can get away from life, like you said, without getting into trouble.

It's true, because like when you smoke weed, bun weed or whatever, it's like you still know what you're doing, you can like get back into reality. But when you're like drinking and stuff, you can't control it, can't control what you say. It's like your bad half comes out.

R: Talk a bit about probation and jail, how they were helpful or not helpful, different from each other, what you thought about that helped you turn around, that kind of stuff?

Well, probation and jail is different, because on probation you're free. But you just have to watch your ass, because you can't do all the stuff you want to do, you can't go around causing shit and stuff. So you, like, you know, but when you're in jail, it's totally different, you're closed in. You just can't get up one day and say, I'll go to this party and stuff. But some people say, like I was in open custody, and there's closed custody. There's a big difference. In open custody, you're in a house like this, and you have your room and stuff, and it's so tempting because the door is open and you can, like, run. But in closed custody, you can't run so you don't think about it. That's why I think it's harder to be in open custody than in closed custody, because there's like temptation.

R: So what thinking did you do that turned you around?

Well, I thought that I never wanted to be in a place like this again where I don't have freedom. And I thought about all my friends outside who can do what they want to do. But when you're in there, you're like stuck, and you're limited, and you realize all your friends do all this stuff. The worst is when you talk to them on the phone, and they say, like there's this party happening tonight and you want to go so bad. That's it!

R: Okay. High school. Last time we met you told me about basketball, and I thought that helped with high school, maybe.

It does. Because then you have something like, you know, you want to do good in school so that you can play on the team. That's like, it helps you. It gives you something to strive for.

R: Do you find school work difficult, or the social part, or the rules, or all of the above?

Yes, I'd say all of the above. Because sometimes, you know, school is like, you need help and there are classes to help you but you don't want to look like, you know, a retard going into them. So sometimes it gets difficult. Ad the way people judge you at school, like you're cool or average or a geek. You always want people to think that you're cool.

R: So what did that require in *this town*?

You have to dress a certain way, listen to a type of music, just all the stuff that, you know, follow the trends.

R: Was being black an issue, one way or the other?

Yeah, it is. Because you know, sometimes it can be an advantage or a disadvantage. Sometimes

when you're black they immediately associate you with basketball, they just think that you can do this sport.

R: So it that good or bad?

Well, I don't really like it because it's a stereotype, really. And I feel sometimes that they should stop judging people. And they always think you're in trouble, or something, like in a gang. But, I've had my taste of racism, in schools.

R: Have you experienced racism in other than schools?

Yeah, like people stare at me. Like one time me and my best friend, he's white, and we were in Oshawa and an old lady was around the corner and I turned the corner and she squinted up her eyes at me and faced the wall, so she couldn't see me, like I was evil because I was black or something.

R: Did you experience racism while in care?

No.

R: In jail?

No, because it was, like, it was a bunch of guys. We didn't look at colours. We were friends. It was funny, when I was in jail, the staff said that I brought something with me when I came. Like an aura or something. Like people just started loosening up around me.

R: Some guys had tough times in custody, hassles with staff. Did you?

No, I think they bring it on themselves, because they come in there with an attitude.

R: Okay, now this baby. I have to admit that I am confused, because the last time I saw you, you were with a lady that I thought was your partner and she wasn't pregnant, and that was about 2 months ago. So, straighten me out.

Well. Before that lady, I was with someone, it was 9 months ago from when you saw me. And somehow she got pregnant for me, and she had a baby girl.

R: What role do you think this baby will play in your life?

Well, I believe everything happens for a reason. I can't really say now, but there's a reason she's in my life.

R: Do you and the mother have a relationship, or still have a relationship?

Well, no, we have a friendship. We broke up and then she found she was pregnant after we broke up.

R: What role for you does she see? Does she expect you to parent this child?

Well, she expects me to be there. It is my child. But she doesn't expect a family, or like marriage or anything. Or that's what I think, I'm not sure.

R: And maybe it will change over time.

Maybe.

R: Does she live on her own with this baby.

No, she lives with her family.

R: And how old is she.

She's 20.

R: Another older woman?

Yeah.

R: Is becoming a father an important event for you?

Yeah, it is. Because I never, my dad was never really there for me, so I'm trying hard, even though I know it's my blood, I'm trying to be there for her. Like father, like son, how people say that. Even though I know so many people that their fathers left them when they were young, and they swear on their graves that they're not going to be like their fathers, but they *are* going to be like their fathers.

R: So you're saying that you're going to try hard to be different, but you realize that it is difficult and you might not succeed

but I will succeed, though.

R: What will be important in succeeding where your father failed?

Well, I'll try to be there every day. And, do things for her. That's it really.

R: When you first learned that this girl was pregnant, did you consider asking her to terminate the pregnancy?

No, I don't believe in that.

R: Do you recall your first knee-jerk reaction, your first feeling on hearing, good or bad, what?

When I heard about the baby, I was shocked. I didn't know what I was feeling. Just confused.

R: One more...About staying with your dad until you get your life straightened around. What does that mean?

Right now I'm kinda going up and down, so I think I'm going to stay with my dad for a month or two until I learn...

R: Learn what?

Learn life.

R: So what would that look like, when you knew life?

I guess when I start doing stuff on my own and making right decisions, and knowing that they're the right decision, instead of making a decision and wondering if it's the right one.

R: So being self-confident, and showing good judgement.

Yeah

R: How long do you give yourself to get yourself together?

Probably until I start school.

R: Why not longer?

Once you live on your own it's hard because you're so used to waking up and doing whatever you want. But when you live with your parents you have rules.

R: So do you think that you will learn good judgement and self confidence by living in a house of rules?

Yeah.

R: So why didn't that happen earlier, when you lived under rules, like in group homes and probation and in custody?

Because I was stupid.

R: Or young?

Yeah. That too.

R: Which, most?

Young.

R: I think so too. Most kids your age don't have to be either using good judgement all the time, or being self-confident all the time. They still have the luxury of making mistakes without screwing up their lives. But you don't have that same buffer from the consequences.

I guess so.

R: Do you think about that, as not fair.

No. Like I said, everything happens in life for a reason.

R: How far are you from finishing high school?

I've one more year.

R: In *this town*?

I dunno.

R: What would you prefer, *this town* or Toronto.

Toronto.

R: Because why?

Because Toronto is much bigger, more opportunities, I can go to school, get a part-time job. Won't be running the streets.

R: Also more opportunity for trouble?

Well, I can get a job more easily, and if I can get a job, I won't be running the streets, I'll be working.

R: Have you had work experience?

Yeah. Worked in MacDonaldis. Worked in Florida in a convenience store. Worked for my uncle. Worked as a camp counsellor.

R: But not in *this town*?

No.

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**ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF AFFRENAWAY**

*August 22, 1995. I met with Affrenaway in the dining alcove in his father's apartment in a suburb north of Toronto. Affrenaway met me outside the building and spoke of his frustration with his father for being unreasonably authoritative. His father and step-mother were present in the apartment. They declined Affrenaway's suggestion that we use his step-mother's 'office'(a room with a door), but grudgingly established themselves in the back of the apartment to accommodate my request for privacy.*

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND

R: Last time, as I was printing out your story, you talked about how sports was problematic at some level, about the kids knowing you by your basketball name but not your real name. Could you talk about that stuff on the record?

Sure. When I played basketball in *Appletown*, I was like the biggest guy on the team. They called me "Shaq" (which is the name of a big black bald basketball player in the States) -- I hate that name now because he's stupid, he's slow and he's dumb and he sucks.

R: But what did you think about it then?

I didn't like it then either, but they just called me that so I had no choice. Some people didn't know my real name.

R: What I remember you saying was something like it was as if you as a person weren't important, just you as a basketball player. And there was a story about the coach almost bullying you to play, really exploiting you on the court.

He kept trying to get me to play but I didn't want to play. Then when I played one time, I just liked it.

R: And the story about being kept on the court for the whole game?

That was when I was playing this good team, the coach wouldn't let me get off.

R: And the other part I recall was about the teachers letting you off easy academically so the school would have you play at hard games?

Yeah. One time I got sent to the office and the principal, or the vice-principal, started talking to me. After he gave me a lecture, don't do this, don't do that, he said make sure you're going to basketball practice. And another time I got suspended from school, but they said okay you can still play basketball. And that's not right. Because if they don't want me in their school, why do they want me on their basketball team?

R: Were there or are there positive parts about being an athlete?

Yes and no.

*At this point we were Interrupted by his father, who basically says that he wants to talk to me about what Afrennaway is saying to me, which he then says, in front of Afrennaway is a lie and a manipulation. The "discussion" between us soon involves Affrenaway, and escalates. I eventually ended the session, since confidentiality was not possible under the circumstances, and clearly it was not an environment in which the work could take place. Another appointment was made, which Affrenaway failed. Affrenaway attended the group session for about an hour in the middle, between seeing his social worker and attending another essential appointment. He made a good contribution while there, and promised to contact me to make arrangements to complete this session, but never did.*

## THE STORY OF CLARK

*June 6, 1995. I met with Clark in a pleasant apartment in a city west of Toronto, where he lived with his fiancée and baby daughter. His partner was at work and he was caring for the baby.*

With me and my mom, the reason that she sent me to CAS was that every time, after school, after lunchtime, I'd throw parties in the apartment. Because my school was right next door to my mom's house. And when she would ask me all the time to stop bringing people over and I just kept bringing them over, so she felt like she just couldn't handle me any more. So one day I had a few people over around lunch time when she was at work, and she just showed up out of nowhere and caught all the people inside the apartment. She had a cab waiting outside for me, and she took me to CAS. A lot of times she'd threatened me that she was going to send me away, but she never had the guts to, and then, all of a sudden, she just did it.

From there, I met my worker and I got shipped off to *Newtown* to my first foster home. And the place was gross. It was disgusting. There was 4 other boys living there and you couldn't even see the floor inside the house. It was just gross. Every time they would give us meals, they'd keep all the good stuff for them and give us all the crappy food. That's a true story too, the classic orphan story.

They made us do 4 or 5 chores a day and we ended up getting \$3 or \$4 a week allowance, which didn't go very far then, way out in the middle of nowhere. When I first moved there, I didn't have many clothes. My worker was supposed to send her money and she did, but when we went out shopping she took me to some cheap store and bought \$30 and kept the rest for herself. Because no way my worker only gave her \$30 when I had no clothes. And she did that for the others too, kept the money for herself.

Our curfew time, we'd have to sign in every 15 minutes, and that was kinda tough because we were out in the country and there aren't many places you can go except down the street. And the last thing I remember about that place was Christmas time, when me and another boy in the house wanted to go to our families for Christmas. And out there the snow was really bad, really deep, and the wind was blowing really bad, and she wouldn't even give us a ride over to the GO station, which was like a half a mile away. So me and the other guy had to open up our suitcases and wrap our clothes around our heads and bodies so we wouldn't freeze to death and walk to the GO station.

Then after that, I just got sick of being there, so I kept running away so I'd get sent somewhere else. So my worker came to get me and she told me about a place called 'FourSquare' group homes in 'Braetown'. She told me it was a really good program, and when I got there, it was really clean and really in order. I made friends very fast there; there were 10 other guys living there. It was in a nice area. There were a lot of nice things around. And the chores there were reasonable. You only had to do one a day and you got a lot more allowance there. And you also got a clothing allowance there every month, and it was really good. And the curfews, on Level 1 you had to check in every hour, on Level 2 check in every 2 1/2 hours, and Level 3 check in every 8 hours. And if you got good points through the week by doing your chores and everything, you got sent to Phase 2, which is less staff and more responsibility: it's called independent living.

I spent 2 years in Phase 1, then I ended up leaving FourSquare to live with my ex-girlfriend. Then I ended up getting arrested. FourSquare came to bail me out and they gave me a chance to make it to Phase 2 if I did everything right for a couple weeks. I ended up making it to Phase 2 and then screwing it up there and going back to Phase 1. And everything was going okay in Phase 1 until they hired this new staff named 'Tony' and because I was the oldest and the biggest guy in the house, he always picked on me in the morning, telling me if I take him down one-on-one, he'll give me \$50 or whatever. So one morning I got up and I was in a really cranky mood, and on my way downstairs he started on me again, and I really freaked out. And I told him if he was man enough to

take me on, to come outside and I'd take him on. And he didn't have the guts to come outside, so he called on other staff members to come over to the house to help him out. And one of the nice staff guys who knew me really well was 'Steve' and he just sat down and talked to me and asked me what happened. And that day they had a staff meeting about me and they ended up sending me to a Phase 3 in 'Maintown' to see how I'd handle independent living again.

Phase 3 was going okay. Then I ended up getting into a fight with one of the boys and they shipped me off to Phase 4, the very last phase in FourSquare. And they told me if I didn't make it in Phase 4, that was it, they were just gonna let me go. Phase 4 went all right, and then I ended up meeting up with some of the guys that I was in FourSquare with in Phase 1. And we did a lot of stealing cars and stuff and FourSquare had to keep bailing me out. So I was in jail for a couple of months, and when I got out FourSquare wanted to give me one more chance in phase 2 again. I ended up going back to Phase 2, and I ended up getting arrested again. And when it came down to court time, the staff at Phase 2 said that if I ended up going to jail, getting convicted, that was it, I'd be out of his program. And I got convicted so I went to jail thinking that that was it, when I got out I would have no place to go.

Anyways, a week before my sentence was out, my worker came to visit me in jail and told that when I got out, I was to go back to Phase 2. And I was like, you guys told me that once I got convicted, I was out, but he denied it, and so I said fine, and he said it's only till my 18th birthday. So once I'm 18 I'm out of the program.

A week before my 18th birthday I ended up moving in with a friend of mine, 'Tracy' and her mother. I was paying rent there, and her mother was like a real crazy person. Like she was a few fries short of a happy meal, I guess. And she had a serious drinking problem. Even though I was paying rent, she was giving me curfews and wouldn't let me have people in, and generally acting like she was my mother. Even though I was paying rent.

And I wanted to move out of there as fast as I could but she wouldn't give my rent back, so I had to leave there with nothing. And a friend of mine told me to come live with him in order to get out of there, so I did. So now I'm living in 'Head Lake' with my friend. Living with him, every day was like a Saturday; nothing but fun and games. But then one day he decided to screw off without paying his half of the rent, and what not. A bunch of friends moved in with me and we did a whole lot of crime for money. And we ended up getting caught and arrested. And we ended up getting out that same night. At the time, 'Monica' was pregnant and she watched me get arrested that night and when I got out, I promised her that I would never do any more crime again.

So I had to move out of there and into a shelter up in Maintown. And every day from the shelter, I'd go to downtown Toronto to visit some friends. And I ran into a friend of mine, 'Jerry', and he told me if I moved down to Toronto, he'd fix up a place for me to stay and he'd talk to his connection about giving me a job. Selling drugs.

So I went back to the shelter and grabbed my things, and moved down to Toronto. And I had my own apartment. He got me the job and I was making just over \$100/day. Every day down there was a party. Monica ended up having the baby and I went to Braetown to visit her. And she knew all about what I was doing and she wanted me to stop. But I wasn't about to stop because I needed the money.

And at the time I was in Toronto, I missed out on a court date for the crime I'd done in Head Lake. And there was a warrant out for my arrest. And then I would just hide out in downtown Toronto, with my friends, doing what I do, making my money. And then Monica wanted me to move out to 'Steeltown' with her, to keep me out of trouble.

Everything was going fine in Steeltown, we were like a happy little family. Two weeks later, I took the baby on the bus on the way to apply for school and the bus driver was a real ass-hole and

wouldn't let the baby on the bus because she was in a stroller. So he started calling me a punk and an asshole, so I got up and asked him what his problem was. He got up as if he was going to attack me, and I started to punch him. And he closed the door on the baby and he wouldn't let the baby out. So I jumped back into the bus and he was calling the police. Everybody who was driving by the bus got out to see what was going on. One of the ladies that was there tried to help me get the baby out of the stroller and the stroller out of the bus. My apartment building was right across the street, so I just took the baby and went across the street to the apartment, and everybody was trying to help me. The bus driver wanted to make a citizen's arrest, but I wouldn't let him. And the other people were trying to keep him away so I would get away. Anyways, I ran upstairs and Monica asked me what was going on, and I told her what had happened, and she said to just stay where I was because the police were all over downstairs. But I said I was sick and tired of running and I just wanted to get all my charges dealt with in Braetown, do my time and come out free.

I went downstairs and turned myself in, told them everything that happened. Then the police told me I could have gotten away with it, but I told them I didn't care, that I just wanted to do my time and get it over with, that I was sick of spending half my time in jail.

So they ended up sending me to *jail*, and Monica's step-father bailed me out a week later. And when I got out, Monica told me that my probation officer had called and said that if I didn't start going back to probation she'd breach me (because I hadn't been going for, like, one or two years).

I called my probation officer, had my files transferred down to Hamilton. I started going every week. All my charges in Braetown got dismissed, because there was no evidence. My charges in Hamilton for the assault and the breach, both got dismissed on a peace bond, because the bus driver put my daughter's life in danger, so they couldn't blame me for assaulting him, so they let me go. And now all my probation is done and over with, Feb 2/95. And now for the first time in my life I have nothing to worry about. I don't have to go to court. I don't have to go to probation. I don't have to sign in for bail. I generally just have nothing to worry about.

So now I'm getting married on July 8. Our baby is going to be a year old, and everything is just perfect now. I've got a nice place to live, and a good family. I'm going to have a nice job this summer, making lots of money, working for Monica's uncle, in construction. That's my story.

R: Are there any other of these many stories that you could tell that are essential to someone who doesn't know you understanding why and how you turned yourself around?

How and why I turned myself around? I just got sick of hanging around with people, the people I kept getting arrested with. They're the people who are going to spend the rest of their lives in jail, they're never going to be on the street. They're just going to go back and back.

R: In this story, it sounds like Monica was the "rock" that changed the course of your stream...Yes?

Yes..

R: Could you say a bit about where and how you met her?

I met her at roller skating when I was living at Phase 4. In Toronto.

R: So what did her family think about her going out with a guy with a record, in custody?

The first people I met in her family were her aunt and her uncle. They didn't like me too much because Monica had a friend there who went to smack me in the back of the head, and I turned around and smacked her hand away from me before she could hit me, and she went downstairs

and told them I smacked her in the face and they threw me out. And the other person I met was her mother -- that was when I was in Toronto selling drugs -- and she really didn't care. She knew what I was doing, but she didn't really mind because Monica's father used to do the same thing. And he gets out on parole next month. She didn't mind. But now when me and Monica moved to Steeltown and had the baby and everything else, the day of the baby's christening, I had a chance to tell her aunt and uncle my side of what happened in the house. And now we're the best of friends.

R: Is this the uncle that you will go to work for?

Yes.

R: So why was Monica attracted to you, do you think?

I have no idea. I was really sweet to her when I first met her, and she just fell in love with me. And even though I still had a girlfriend, she didn't care. She waited for me all these years until we broke up, just so we could go back out. She hasn't been with anybody else since she met me.

R: What influence did having the baby have on your relationship with Monica and/or with settling down?

When she first had the baby, we weren't even going out. In fact I hated her guts. Not because of the baby, but because she tried to break up me and my girlfriends. I kept going out with girls because I didn't want to be with her. Then she ended up having the baby, and I gave her a call to see how the baby was doing, and then I went to hospital to visit the baby. And that was in June. Then I wanted to straighten out my life and be a father to my daughter and we started going out in July and that's when we started making plans to move to Steeltown and everything else. Because I thought if she was willing to wait for me all that time, all these years, and put out all that effort to break up me and my girlfriends, she must love me a lot and I gave the relationship a chance. And it worked out.

R: So how did the decision to have the baby come about?

I was still going out with my other girlfriend and Monica told me she wanted to talk to me, and I told her I didn't want to talk to her. And she said it was very important, so I said, fine, come over and talk to me. And she told me she was pregnant. And then I told her I was not going to be there for her, and I said I wasn't going to be there for her, so just don't bother having it because I'm not going to be there because I don't love you. She said she's not going to get rid of it, she's going to keep it. And then I just walked out on her. Half-way through her pregnancy, I kept visiting her and buying her stuff, but nothing would happen because I had a girlfriend and she knew that. And then she had the baby, I suppose, and at that time we weren't talking. But then when I seen the baby, that's when the whole thing started. We started to go out and to work on a relationship, and then when we moved to Steeltown, I bought her a ring. Well, actually, we were walking around jewellery stores and she told me how much she liked a ring and I bought it for her.

R: It sounds like the baby was what changed the tide.

Yes.

R: But if I remember correctly, you had another child before.

Yes.

R: So what is the difference? Why this one and not that one?

Before I started going back out with Monica, I tried to give the other mother another chance. She complained all the time how I never came to see him and what not, so when I decided I wanted to take responsibility, and I would call to come over, all the time it seemed she had other plans, because she wanted to be with other guys. Like she wanted me just for the money, but the other guys to be with. And I wouldn't have it, I said it had to be one or the other. And obviously she chose other. But with Monica, she loves me more than anything. She'll do anything for me, and she would never cheat on me. She's trustworthy, and I never have to worry about her trying to find another father for my daughter. She likes me for me and not for my money.

R: And obviously she has other domestic skills--or somebody here does, judging by how well-cared for your apartment is. Is that an element?

I do all the cleaning, she does all the cooking. She hates to clean, but I have to be in a clean place.

R: Could you say a bit about her background. You mentioned her dad was in the drug business and in jail.

That's not the reason he's in jail, though. The reason he went to jail, I don't know the full story, but he's in there for sexual abuse for his daughters. But they all forgave him. He's been forgiven by all of them, except for the mother, and as a matter of fact she's not going to show up for her own daughter's wedding, or at the baby's birthday. And in fact, as far as all the daughters are concerned, they don't have a mother any more. She was never there for them when they were little, and the father was. And nowadays, the only time their mother wants to act like their mother is when she doesn't have to take any responsibility for them. So they just disowned her as a mother, which is pretty sad.

R: But Monica still has lots of family support?

Yes.

R: Okay...What about your family? Anywhere in this picture?

They love Monica. They're helping out with most of the wedding. Same with Monica's family, they're also helping out a lot with the wedding. Now they're pretty good friends. Both sides of the family get along pretty well.

R: What family do you maintain important contact with, and who not?

Mostly Monica's family. Because I only really keep contact with my grandparents on special occasions. They're out of town a lot on trips and they work all hours of the day. Monica's family drive us around if we need. Like we spend weekends at her aunt and uncle's house. The main reason we spend more time with her family is they're around more. Mine is really really busy. Monica's family has more time in their schedule than mine does. Like all the stuff that's going on now, like the wedding and when I had court stuff, it was all in *the area* where all her family is, so her family would always come and get us.

R: Who was in your family? Your mom, anybody else?

Just my grandparents, my mom and two uncles. That's my whole immediate family. Monica has a bigger family than me, as well. Like 19 uncles (I'm exaggerating), a lot of family. I don't know where my dad is. The rest of my uncles and my cousin live out in Vancouver. So the only person I get to see is my mom and my grandparents.

R: But your relationship with them is good?

Yes.

R: Do you still assume any responsibility for your son?

None. Because I have a family to support now, so I'm not going to support her habit too. She had a choice, and she took it. Her parents pay for her apartment, for her car, they give her money when she needs it. So what does she need my money for? I have a family to support, I can't support her.

R: Does it feel like a loss to not have contact with the baby?

No, none. I don't even know the baby. I've maybe seen him twice in my whole life. I don't even know for sure he's mine, to tell the truth.

*(Pause for diaper change)*

R: Talk a bit about the role of working in your life, whether licit or illicit.

I don't like to work but I have to work. It's money in the hand.

R: So the decision to let go the easy money, the illicit money, doesn't have to do with choosing other work, but with ending being in jail, yes?

Yes.

R: No rush of adrenalin that you miss?

Kind of, kind of. (Laughs) It's hard. I miss it. It's fun. But I dunno, now I have too much to do on the outside, I can't risk going back on the inside. I'd rather make a little money legally than make a lot of money and risk losing it all by getting arrested.

R: If you did get back into crime, would Monica give you the boot?

I wouldn't go back to crime unless me and Monica broke up. She's the only reason why I'm staying out of it, her and the baby. And she would never give me the boot anyways. No.

R: Were you raised in a middle class family?

Yes.

R: Single mom?

Yes.

R: In the future, do you see Monica being a traditional at-home mother, or working, or both of you working, or you being a house-husband--what?

After the wedding, I'll be making more than enough money for the two of us. And she'll be home with the baby for a few more years, and when the baby is old enough to go to school, or nursery school, she'll be getting herself a part-time job while I'm going to be working full time.

R: You're planning to be married in a church ceremony and you're changing religions?

I've already changed. I'm already Catholic.

R: So is religion important to you, to Monica, to your life together? And how?

Yes. It's just another thing to keep me out of trouble, on Sundays anyways.

R: Okay...Did you ever have trouble with drugs or drinking?

No.

R: Never used?

Well, everybody has tried. But I've never been an addict, and I've never done the hard stuff, like powders or hallucinogens or stuff like that.

R: One of the things that some of the guys say is that jail is better than group homes. But it doesn't seem you think so.

Obviously whoever told you this hasn't been in a group home.

R: Yes, they were.

They lie. They're dumb. They're just showing off. There's no way that jail is better than a group home. I have no problem with jail, but I'd rather be in a group home than jail. You don't have to worry about your life in a group home.

*(Brief phone call about the baby's birthday party)*

Whoever can say that they'd rather eat crappy food and spend maybe 20 hours a day in a cell with a bunch of guys, with no freedom, rather than be out in the nice fresh air with your friends, doing whatever you want to do, then either they're gay and want to be around guys all the time or they're stupid. And if they like jail so much, why don't they just go kill somebody and be in there all their life. That is just dumb. I can't believe someone would say that.

R: Or maybe they had a different experience in group homes.

Still. I'd rather live in a cardboard box with the Waltons than be in jail.

R: Okay, just wanted to hear you on that. Got no more questions. Do you?

No.

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### ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF CLARK

*June 13, 1995. Again we met in the apartment, on the balcony, as Monica was doing housework and caring for the baby..*

#### Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

#### Q2. ADD OR AMEND

R: My question this morning was that it seemed to me that you had a fairly "normal" middle-class life until adolescence, and then a brief but intense romance with the underlife, criminal life, and now are back into middle-class? Do you think that's a fair understanding of you?

Yes.

#### Q3. THE FORM

The beginning...is arguments with my mother

The middle is...the underlife

The end...Monica.

#### Q4. LIST THE EVENTS:

1. Parties
2. Mom coming with the cab
3. The bad foster home
4. FourSquare; the wrong crowd
5. Not thinking ahead, i.e., getting myself into trouble
6. My ex-girlfriend having a baby, me trying to assume responsibility
7. Meeting Monica's aunt and uncle
8. Monica getting pregnant
9. Turning 18; no more FourSquare
10. Going to jail in Braetown
11. The shelter; moving to Toronto
12. Monica making me promise to stop criminal stuff
13. Selling drugs in Toronto
14. Moving to Steeltown
15. The bus incident
16. Finishing with charges
17. Staying out of trouble; getting engaged, becoming Catholic, planning the wedding
18. Getting on with my life; getting married, celebrating baby's birthday, getting a job with uncle

#### Q5. VALUE THE EVENTS

1. Parties: 0 because I didn't really think I was doing anything wrong.
2. Mom coming with the cab: -1 because I didn't want to go anywhere.
3. The bad foster home: -1 because I didn't want to be there, but I've been through worse.
4. FourSquare; +1 because it was a really nice place and I got along with everybody and everything was going good.
- 4b. The wrong crowd: 0 because at the time it was fun, and the excitement and everything, so it wasn't all bad. It's not like I got caught for everything that I did.

5. Not thinking ahead i.e., getting myself into trouble: -2 because I'd keep going to jail. I spent more time in jail than I did outside.
6. My ex-girlfriend having a baby, me trying to assume responsibility: + 2 on my side but in the end it turned out to be a -1 because it really didn't matter to me. It's not like it really hurt me. I was only doing it for her and the baby.
7. Meeting Monica's aunt and uncle: -3 because if I ever seen them before the christening on my own time, then he would have been hurt really bad. I was that angry at him. I didn't even want him to come to the christening. At the church, everybody was telling me to go talk to him, but I said no. But at my house, I did talk to him; he came up to me and apologized, no hard feelings, stuff like that. That was when I explained my story to him.
8. Monica getting pregnant: +1 because we were still fighting and still weren't getting along that well. But it was still my baby. So even though I told her to get rid of it, I didn't mean it.
9. Turning 18; no more FourSquare: +2 because I was on my own finally and everything was going good until I met Tracy's mother and seen what she was really like.
10. Going to jail in Braetown: -3 because everything was going good but then it just screwed up again.
11. The shelter; -3 because now I had absolutely nothing, no money, no nothing , no place to live
- 11b. Moving to Toronto, selling drugs in Toronto: +1 because I had my own apartment now and I was making a lot of money, but it was still illegal. But I never got charged for this time of my life, selling drugs. All of my charges are for assault and stolen cars. I got maybe 3 convictions for all my charges, just 3 things on my record instead of the million of things I went to jail for.
12. Monica making me promise to stop criminal stuff: +2 because it just showed me that she cared. And then we started our relationship there.
13. Selling drugs in Toronto: see 11b
14. Moving to Steeltown: +2 because it was helping me stay out of trouble although I didn't really want to move to Steeltown.
15. The bus incident: 0 because I knew that if I got convicted for it, I would only do about 15 days, so it didn't really matter. +1 because it got me to get rid of all my charges. If it didn't happen, I would still probably have all these warrants.
16. Finishing with charges: +3
17. Staying out of trouble; getting engaged, becoming Catholic, planning the wedding: +3 because everything is fine now, everything is done with. I've done with the trouble-making part of my life. It was time to retire, hang up my crow-bar.
18. Getting on with my life; getting married, celebrating baby's birthday, getting a job with uncle: +3 because of the above.

R: There is a lot of theory about how to make guys who are criminal, as you were, go straight. And it seems like you have. So what would you say is the difference between you and the guys you know who are still in trouble with the law?

Because the reason they're doing crime is to make money, because they have none, but I don't need to do that for money any more. So that's why I don't have to bother with crime. It's keeping me out of trouble.

R: So is it right to say that if guys had access to jobs that paid decent money, and where the boss was okay...

Yeah, they'd stay out of crime. I don't see why they wouldn't. Because if that was the case, everyone would be doing crime. No one would be working.

R: What if it was a choice between a nasty job or a poorly paying job, and crime as a means of support? How would that compare?

Depend on which pays more.

R: Only that?

Yeah.

R: But the job you're going into doesn't pay as much as you could make if you seriously sold drugs. There's got to be another...

In a way it does, because I'm still making enough to support myself and I'm not at risk for going to jail or having the IRS catch up with me. If I seriously sold drugs, and all I did all my whole life was sell drugs, and I had a nice car and a big house, somebody pretty soon would figure it out. Because when you watch movies on drug dealers and something, usually they have a club or two or something like that so that way they have something to lean on so if the cops say, "How did you get this nice big car?" or whatever, they can just say, "Well, I have this club." They always have to have an alibi or motive for having the money that they have. Makes no sense to have a nice big car or a big house and not paying taxes on either one: somebody is going to figure it out.

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. Parties
2. Mom coming with the cab
3. The bad foster home
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5. Not thinking ahead, i.e., getting myself into trouble
6. My ex-girlfriend having a baby, me trying to assume responsibility
7. Meeting Monica's aunt and uncle
8. Monica getting pregnant
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15. The bus incident
16. Finishing with charges
17. Staying out of trouble; getting engaged, becoming Catholic, planning the wedding
18. Getting on with my life; getting married, celebrating baby's birthday, getting a job with uncle

6 = 1, 4, 8, 9, 16, 17/18

4 = 1, 16, 17/18, 8

2 = 8, 17/18

1 = 17

Q7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

This is a story about change, about now knowing the wrong paths to take.

*(Clark had quite a bit of difficulty with this. I prompted that as a listener, it seemed to me that the change was connected with relationships, but although he seemed to agree, that was not part of his statement.)*

*Clark attended the focus discussion group in September 1995 and took an active role. His wedding had taken place as planned in July, but the construction job with Monica's uncle had not yet materialized.*

## THE STORY OF DOMINIC

*August 30, 1995. Dominic and I met in a room in the local skating arena in a suburb north of Toronto. He was living in a very small cottage on lakefront with his mother, her partner, and his sister, sleeping on the sofa, with no possibility of privacy. He hadn't mentioned the problem when he arranged the meeting, so I had no alternative in mind. We asked to borrow a room at the local library, where Dominic went regularly to check for job listings on the public-access computer. They suggested the municipal recreation centre, the arena. It was not open for skating, but the manager readily unlocked a room with stacked chairs and tables for us. We made a work space for ourselves and started.*

I guess I'd have to scratch my first foster home, because it's totally blank to me...I guess mine would have to be when I turned roughly 15. That's when I knew that soon I'd be, well, I thought I'd be getting out of care at 16. That's what my worker said to me, anyways. The next step was when I turned 16. I voluntarily left the foster home and that's when I guess I realized that I had to start taking care of me. Like actually going out, finding a job, taking medical care and hygienic care of myself. Well, I guess I had my doubts at first, like sometimes you don't think that a 16-year-old can get a job, pay rent. But I guess a lot of people think they can do it themselves, but you always need someone you can fall back on. In my case, my family. Just as a means of moral support. I guess the hardest part for me was being alone and managing money. I guess the transaction (*sic*) thing was probably a lot longer, but you just subconsciously don't think about it until the time comes when you just have to start adjusting. I probably will keep going through it until, at least I figure I'm actually settled down and got my past put behind me and just concentrating on my goals in life. I guess in the last few years, I've moved around quite a bit, met lots of people. And I guess once you become friends with some people, when you do leave, it's emotional for everybody. I figure everything you do in life is for a reason. I guess what I'm trying to say is that this transition period has really had its toll on me. Like because people move around a lot, I get flashbacks of people's faces and I don't even know who they are. But I guess overall, my emotions are what have really been hit the hardest. Because you don't know, you have friends one day and the next day you're gone. And everyone knows -- well, I think everyone knows -- what it's like to move into a new town and not know anybody. You have to start from scratch again. But sometimes I didn't think it was worth it because I didn't know if I was going to be there the next day. I think that's all I can think of.

R: This is amazingly dense shorthand. Like every sentence could be a chapter. So I'd like to have you fill in the details a bit more, okay? I'll ask questions, okay?

Okay.

R: So you came into care when you were too young to remember the details.

Yes. I know why I came into care, but I just don't remember that transaction period. It seems like my mind blocks out memories that it doesn't want me to remember.

R: But you were very little; how old?

Three, I believe.

R: And would you say, in a little sentence, why you were told you came into care?

Because my step-dad was an alcoholic and used to beat on us.

R: Okay, and you were in a series of foster homes until age 16, when you moved out on your own?

Yup.

R: Like how many, roughly?

I don't know how you'd count it because one family I lived with went on a holiday to Florida, and we moved to another family, but when they came back, we went back to them. And the other foster family, they were deaf. And then I moved up to 'Pleasantville', and that's where I spent 9 years. And then I was 16 and I moved out.

R: Two things. One is that you understood from your worker that you were going to leave care at 16, but you're still involved with the agency now. So how did that get re-negotiated?

I guess the new placement worker tracked me down. Like I was with 'Laura' and she went on maternity leave, so I got another worker, a fill-in worker, I talked to her once on the phone. And then Laura came back but they changed her caseload so I got a new worker who is my worker now.

R: When in those changes did you leave the foster home?

When Laura first went on her maternity leave.

R: Was those two events connected in any way? Her going on maternity leave, and you leaving a foster home of 9 years?

No. I left because once I turned 16, they really started hounding me, so...

R: Hounding you about what?

Well, everything. School. Work. I guess the major thing was their curfews were just a bit extreme.

R: So you came to a parting of the ways, by mutual agreement?

Not me and my worker. I just, whsst, goodbye!

R: Did you talk with the foster family at all about your intention to leave?

They knew for awhile that I was starting to get fed up, and that when I turned 16, if they were still hounding me, then I was going to leave.

R: Was that foster home a good place for you for some or most of the 9 years you were there?

Well, I guess for some of it, it was better than my last placement. Like every family has its ups and downs. I guess that's normal in every household.

R: Do you still maintain any contact with them, or with any part of your life there?

Well, just friends who live around there. Me and that foster home, we didn't leave on good terms, so we just sort of let it go.

R: If I remember correctly, you found yourself a series of friends/families to live with in that area, for quite some time.

Yeah, for awhile. Well, just basically the kids I knew from school, some of them.

R: You moved in with their families for a shorter or longer time? Like, that's how you found

a place to stay, was using your friends as leads?

Yeah.

R: Okay, the sadness you talk about, the faces you recall but don't recognize, and the weariness about making new friends because you don't know how long you'll be around, from what part of your life is that? The foster home part, or later?

Well, my first foster home we moved 3 times when I lived with them. And after that, moving was just one of those things that just happens. But even though, every time you move, it's never the same way. Because there is always different people, a different place. And you can never get used to it.

R: Yeah. And you mentioned earlier that you were with your sister in your first foster home, but then she stayed...

Well, yeah. Like, she was with us when we went through the one where they went on holidays and stuff. But when I was about 7, turning 7, the first foster home placement had a baby girl and they were telling CAS that I was going to be like my father and molest her. So they quickly removed me from that situation. And I was moved to my last foster home placement, and my sister stayed there for roughly another two years, and then she moved to a separate foster home placement. I guess that's when I lost contact with her for a little while.

R: But now you plan to find a place together?

Yeah.

R: Talk a bit about how that plan came to be.

Well, she's, we're both making pretty bad incomes, so we figure if we put it together and share it, we can get more out of it.

R: But your paths were separate for quite a while, and...

But we always had contact with each other. Like I'd go over and see her at her foster home placement and stuff. So we were separated but we never had no contact.

R: And did you also maintain contact with your mom and step-dad as well?

Yeah.

R: And you said that they were, for you, something to fall back on, gave you moral support. Could you spell that out a bit, how it changed over time, whatever.

Well, not really my step-dad, but mainly my mom. And I guess for me when I was going through foster care, I didn't really have that much contact and I didn't really acknowledge who she was. But over time, as I spent more time with her, actually getting to know her, now she's trying to make up for lost time. That she didn't have, didn't spend, with us.

R: And your sister also found her way back into contact with your mom?

Yeah.

R: Any differences in how that happened for her and for you?

For her, I don't really know. That's pretty much her life. I don't talk to her much about it.

R: But for you, how did it happen?

Well, I guess there's pretty easy, like when I asked to stay there, my mom was all for it, like actually having some of her family back. And I don't really talk to my step-dad that much. I sorta avoid him at times. But we do get along, mainly when he's not drinking. But he drinks all the time, so...

R: I had another question quite a while ago, about thinking that you were going to be out of care at 16, but still now being on extended care. Whose idea was that?

My worker's. She thought it would be best for me to stay with the CAS until I get a good foundation going, when we both thought I was ready to cut all sever's with them. I can do it at that time, or I dunno, when the maximum age for it is.

R: 21, so far. That might change, depending on Mr. Harris...

R: How did you feel when that offer was made, after being on your own, and it sounds like a little scared, for awhile?

Well, at first I didn't want to go for it, because I thought maybe another placement somewhere. Because she was recommending a group home down in Toronto somewhere. Which I've lived in the country all my life, so I'm used to the slow traffic. But then I actually started thinking about it and realizing the benefits of it, and it wasn't really all that bad. In that I didn't have to, if I didn't want to, move down to Toronto. Which I didn't choose to. And I guess the other thing I didn't really want to do at first was sign a contract. But it pays off in the end.

R: How so?

Well, it's got me used to living on my own, being able to manage.

R: Okay. You talked about being alone being part of what was hard in making this transition. Could you expand on that a bit?

Well, I don't think it's really alone where there's no one to talk to. I think it's alone inside, that you can't trust anyone, that it's just you against all odds. And you can only rely on yourself and not others.

R: Thank you for putting that so eloquently! Do you think that you might get over that eventually, or do you think it's with you for life, that sense of being alone?

I think it will be with you for the rest of your life. I think that for everyone there's a little bit of loneliness, but as you settle down and get married you tend to not realize it because you trust your wife. You don't notice it as much.

R: Do you think it might make it harder to trust someone enough to marry them or whatever?

I think it will, because through my life a lot of people have lied to me, deceived me, and in a lot of people, I have very little faith and rely solely on me. Because I don't want to take that risk of getting hurt the way I was in the past.

R: Is planning to live with your sister an experiment in some way of trusting a bit more?

Um, I guess I have the most trust in her because I have gone through quite a lot with her and she's the only one who was really with me all though life, well, up till now. So I don't know if it's a matter of experimenting in trust or not. But I guess in some ways it is.

R: Yeah, some hope that "blood runs thicker than water", do you know that saying?

Yeah.

R: Looking back, can you see anything positive in your time in care?

Well, I guess my time in care, though it had its problems, I can honestly say that it would be better than living at home, actually, scared to go home for fear of being beaten. So in that aspect, I would say yeah.

R: But I don't get any sense that you felt like you belonged in any of the homes you were in, yeah?

No, I didn't because I knew they weren't my family and when they started planning other things around you, moving you around when they're planning a holiday, they can say you're part of the family but in actuality you're not.

R: Yeah, that was a hurtful event, yes?

R: If you could tell them --CAS, whoever -- what they should have done differently for you, what would you say?

I think CAS did what they thought was best, and in our interest, because I guess at 3 years old, what are you going to know about placements and what's best for you. I guess a lot of people ask me if I would change anything in the past. Well, I look at myself now and I wouldn't. Because now I've gotten all these experiences that a lot of people hadn't, I figure I'm better equipped to handle what's ahead of me, the challenges I will encounter.

R: What do you see in your future?

Hmmm. Well, I hope to be a successful chef. My goal is to own 3 restaurants, placed in different parts of the world.

R: One more question that I forgot earlier. You said that maybe the transaction about leaving the foster home and being on your own took longer than you remember but that perhaps you put it out of your mind until it was time to start adjusting to that reality. Could you talk a bit more about that?

Well, I guess when I first left my home, then I guess that's when the feeling of being alone actually took place. And I guess, struggling, trying to fit into a different environment, a different home. And I guess because you are trying to fit in, it is somewhat like being on your own, because you're trying to fit in with a family, and when you're on your own, you're trying to fit into society as a working unit.

R: So you're saying that the journey of being on your own started when you were 3 and first left your parents' home?

Yeah.

R: Amazing. One of the things that workers think about is how to get kids to think about

what they'll need when they move out on their own, earlier, while there's still time to work on it. I'm wondering if one of the reasons why kids don't see the moving out in the same way the adults do, is because for the kids, it's one long story of moving out and this is nothing new, so why treat it differently. Does that make any sense?

Yeah.

R: Did you ever feel like you had any control over where you were placed or what happened to you?

No, I pretty well was in the hands of CAS, wherever they wanted to move me or whatever, and that's what was done. I guess that's why when I was 16, that's why I was so anxious to get out. That way no one could tell me what to do. A lot of them called it rebellious, but I just called it freedom to do as I wished.

R: So, would you go as far as to say that if CAS wants kids to negotiate about the process of becoming independent, being on their own, they'd have to start much earlier on to give them some input, that felt real and powerful, into the decisions that were made about them?

Yeah. And not just wait until 1 or 2 years before they have to leave.

R: Thank you. That's a very useful statement of something that has not been well said, to my knowledge, before. Like, one of my findings so far is that of the kids in care at 16, a high percentage left then, not waiting till they were 18. And that is not much commented on. They just don't count them once they're gone, so it's not a problem. That's my editorializing, at any rate.

R: Okay, anything else?

Not that I can think of.

R: We've got another kick at it next week, in any case.

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### **ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF DOMINIC**

*September 6, 1995. This meeting also took place in a room in the arena.*

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND: Several pages added

Q3. THE FORM

The beginning is...when I first came into care.

The middle is...when I started moving around from home to home.

The end is...when I left at 16.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS

1. First came into care.
2. Moved into first foster home.
3. Moved again (while they went on vacation)

4. Moved again (back to first placement)
5. They had a kid.
6. I was moved to my last placement.
7. School
8. Was there 9 years.
9. Turned 16 and left.
10. Lived with friends.
11. Lived with family.
12. Lived on my own.
13. Living with family again.
14. Hopefully soon, on my own with my sister.

Q5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

1. First came into care: +1 because it was better than the situation I was living in.
2. Moved into first foster home: -2 because I moved away from my family.
3. Moved again (while they went on vacation): -3 That was pretty nasty of them to call us their family and then ship us away when they went on a family vacation.
4. Moved again (back to first placement): -3. We didn't really want to go back to them. Well, me and my sister anyways.
5. They had a kid: -3 because I got shipped out of there. Whoa, that was more like a +3 because I wanted to get out of there anyways.

R: But maybe the right thing for the wrong reason?

Exactly.

R: Can I just butt in and ask about the rationale; you said they thought you were going to be a molester like your dad?

Yes.

R: Who had molested your sister?

Well, people, but I don't give out their names.

R: Not your step-dad?

No.

6. I was moved to my last placement: 0 because it was neither good nor bad. I didn't want it but I had to deal with it.

R: Do you remember what you DID want?

No. I knew I didn't want to go back into placement.

7. School: It wasn't the greatest high point in my life, I'd say +1. I didn't want to be there, but I had to.

R: Was there any sense that you belonged there, even if you didn't particularly in the foster

home?

Yeah, more so than the first placement.

R: And school more than home?

No.

8. Was there 9 years: +2. It helped me get on my feet. Not to say the people in there per se, but the actual placement stopped me moving around.

9. Turned 16 and left: +3. I just finally actually got to do what I wanted to do and make my own decisions.

R: Even though you were scared and things were tough?

Yes.

10. Lived with friends: Was there for awhile, not for a long time. I guess it was +2. It gave me a place over my head anyways.

11. Lived with family: Went to live with my sister (not the one I'm going to move in with) It was +3 when I first moved in, but it went way down to -3. We were in the same family, but two different people.

R: How long were you there?

Year and a half, but I don't talk about it that much, because it wasn't exactly the high point of my life living there.

12. Lived on my own: +3 I could have anyone over that I wanted, when I wanted. They could stay as long as I wanted them to. And all around peace and quiet.

13. Living with family again: I'd give it a +2. Everything is working out right now, so far.

R: Strikes me that lots of people might not assess it that way, given what you were saying about your relationship with your step-father.

Well, I just ignore him. If you ignore the problem, sometimes it just goes away. And besides, he's got sclerosis of the liver and the doctors say he will die before Christmas, so...sometimes the problem goes away. Not nice to say it, but...

14. Hopefully soon, on my own with my sister: I couldn't rate that now, because it's future content and I can't tell the way the future is going to hold. Or what hand it holds for me. But hopefully it will be a +3.

R: For 9 years?

Maybe.

Q6. 6-4-2-1:

1. First came into care.
2. Moved into first foster home.
3. Moved again (while they went on vacation)

4. Moved again (back to first placement)
5. They had a kid.
6. I was moved to my last placement.
7. School
8. Was there 9 years.
9. Turned 16 and left.
10. Lived with friends.
11. Lived with family.
12. Lived on my own.
13. Living with family again.
14. Hopefully soon, on my own with my sister.

6 = 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11

4 = 1, 3, 5, 11

2 = 1, 5

1 = 1

Q7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? Well, I guess what the story means to me is that not all kids have it fine and dandy when they're growing up thorough life. I think everyone in life has the same problems. Maybe not be to the same extreme, but anyone faces it in their own way, and it may be as tough for them as what I went through was for me. Because it was their challenge, or one of their challenges, in life to overcome.

*Dominic didn't attend the focus group discussion. He had gotten an old car working to provide transportation and was just starting a job stocking shelves in a supermarket near his mother's house, and didn't want to jeopardize it by asking for time off.*

**THE STORY OF HUMPHREY**

*April 7, 1995. Humphrey was living in a small, crowded, untidy apartment with several adults and a couple of children in the process of getting up when I arrived mid-morning. The apartment belonged to a young woman whose husband had been killed a week earlier in a car accident. I had known her husband well through earlier work but had been out of touch for several years. I was quite taken aback by the news. Humphrey and I were eventually assigned a bedroom in which to meet with privacy, me sitting on the floor with the computer on a chair, Humphrey lying on his stomach on the bed looking over my shoulder, both of us surrounded by mounds of laundry.*

I'm terrible with stories, any stories, it doesn't matter.

This goes back in time. Well I was living at 'Smith' Youth services, I lived there I guess 4 or 5 years, I can't remember. There I went through ups and downs, I guess. I made friends and I made enemies. Well, not exactly enemies. But at the time it seemed like they were doing wrong. But not everything. But as I grew older, I started to realize that some of the things they did were right and some of the people that I thought were enemies back then could be good friends right now if I had acted different. But I still think that some of the things that happened were wrong. And kinda makes me upset because it kinda felt like the whole world was my enemy at one point. And in some cases it still happens.

So when I was living there, I moved out on my own at the age of 15, where I had to buy my own groceries, pay my own rent. At first it was pretty easy. And then I started getting to know lots of people. And then I got introduced to drinking. And I was getting into more trouble. And I didn't know why I was getting into the trouble because I didn't like what was happening to me. Even though I was getting into the trouble, it didn't feel like I was doing anything wrong. And people were stealing off me and using me for money, whatever, and I didn't know why they would do that to me, especially when I haven't done that to them. Because I didn't know them all that well.

And now I still get into a little bit of trouble, and it feels like I have no control over my actions. Because I still do petty thefts and drink on probation: that's no good, eh? Many times I've moved from place to place. It's almost like living on the streets. It's not like calling any place home. But it's all taught me who my true friends are, how to look after myself, plus my girlfriend and my kid. Shorten it up: "streetwise".

I haven't had much focus for school, but I still want to get it done so bad. I'd like to some day have a house of my own, possibly two kids, and have a good full-time job, one that I'm happy with. I'd like to just live a comfy life. But every time I try for something like that, it seems always that the doors are closed in my face.

Makes me wish that I took all the help and advice from when I was a kid. And now I wish there was someone there to guide me, like when I was a kid. Now I'm living on my own with a daughter and a fiancée, things are sorta looking up for me. I hope to go back to school next semester, finish school and go to college and hopefully find a good job. It's kinda funny because right now where I'm staying has felt pretty stable. Not many places have. Because I always had that feeling in the back of my head, someday I'm gonna move. Basically I've been staying with true friends that I know won't steal from me, use me, or abuse me. I'm running out of story.

R: Could you t...

I've been good at condensing things. I've never really been much of a story writer. I've been used to taking a sentence and using half of it to make people understand what I say.

R: Why is that?

I don't know, that's the way I was brought up, I guess. I was always making things short so if you had all this work, find the easiest way to do it. I guess you could say that's what I'm trying to do now with my life, find an easy way out. Slowly but surely it keeps showing me the hard way: there is no easy way out. I just wish that those kids out there that have good parents who show them all this before they find it out themselves, that I could have had someone to show me.

R: You said you hadn't used the "help" that was offered earlier when you were in care. Can you say looking back what of what was on offer then might be useful to you now, or that you would use now, if it were offered?

Yeah, if I had some good offer. But it always feels like money is going to get you by in the world. Actually, I've grown quite upset with money. It seems that you can't get by without having some sort of money, and money I don't have. I think it's a sad way of sorting people out from others, you know people look down on you if you don't have money or certain ways of making money. Some people have to steal for a living, to keep their baby fed, or scam. And I'm kinda confused right now what is right or wrong. Because they're doing basically what a hard-working person does, brings food home for their kids and their wife, keeps a roof over their head. And so I figured if I had some kind of help, money management, anger management, just someone to show me the right way out of the mess I've put myself into. I'm not in all that deep. I've been smart enough to keep myself fairly average, meaning not making life-long regrets. Some things that I would like to change, but nothing drastically serious. So I figure now if I had some guidance, the way I would like. I think putting me in a group home was a little far-fetched because bottom line is group homes feel like jail. But if someone came to my house, was my friend, not someone that I'd have to worry about, I'd probably use that advice or direction in the right way. Because at the time that I got the right advice and direction, I was too young to know what was going on.

R: What effect on your transition has being a partner and a father had?

Um. I dunno. It's kinda settled me down. I used to be reckless and carefree, I guess. Now I have to keep in consideration that I have to be able to direct someone else in the right way. And if I don't, I feel that it's all my fault. I shouldn't really feel that way, but I do. And the action that's been taken now, with my daughter, I think went a little too far. Because nobody should really need to lose their kid, unless it's something really serious. And sometimes I feel that we've lost her because of me being in CAS practically all my life and CAS itself doesn't feel they did a good enough job with me, so they have to watch. And I think that says a lot. I also know lots of other people from CAS that are going through the same problems that I am. And what makes it worse is my fiancée's mom is not helping her or me in any way, shape or form. We're not satisfied with CAS for putting her there, for the reason being she does drugs and drinks all the time. Now I don't disagree with drinking and doing drugs because I do it on occasion myself. But never around my own daughter. Because I try my hardest to make sure she doesn't go through the same life that I went through. So I hope she gets a much better look on life than I did. I think I saw the worst half of it.

R: You were in care before you went into group homes. Does any of that part of your life have an influence on this transition?

Yeah, I kinda, like I wish that I was in a foster home or was taken up for adoption and had parents, you know? They said that I was taken out of foster homes because I was a bad kid. But what could I do so terribly wrong from the ages 3 to 7 to mess that up? Like nobody was hurt. I wasn't self-destructive. I was quiet. I always thought that I was a good kid but I was always told that I was bad. And I would rather have been in foster homes or be adopted than be in a group home. For the fact that so many people being there, some people you agree with and some you don't, because everybody is different and throwing them all into one house is wrong. Because there I got into lots of fights Basically it teaches you how to steal and be real sneaky and do things wrong. Because

that's the main part. That makes it feel like jail. And then on top of that, they don't have all the time that should be spent with you. They have to split with 2 or 3 other kids, possibly 4 or 5, depending on how many staff are working. When living with parents, it's usually 1 on 1, with one of your parents or both. The thing that gets to me is it's my life, even when I was a kid I thought this way, that if I could forgive my parents, why couldn't whoever took me away forgive them too? And give them a second chance. From all the documentaries on my life that was written up for me, they didn't seem all that bad. They seemed like people, like myself, that just needed guidance. It's not like they abused me or hit me or tried to kill me or anything. They just didn't know how to do it right. And that's not something that they should be punished for. Because taking someone's kid away I feel is the worst kind of punishment.

Just now I'm working hard for a living. I'm proud of everything that I bring home. You know, I'm proud of my daughter, and my fiancée. I think they're both very special. Because, like me, they've had to go through the same thing. Not exactly, but close enough. And I give them credit for sticking by my side and still being able to help me, with all their troubles. And I think that the feeling is mutual with them. So I feel that it's this kind of bondage that makes for a good strong relationship. And I just hope that I'm right. Because I just don't want to see another divorce case.

R: You mentioned that alcohol and anger played a part in trouble earlier. Is that still there? Changed?

Um., Sometimes it likes to come up. I've been doing pretty good with controlling my anger. I still lose it now and again. Um. I think that there's still a fair bit of work that still needs to be done in those areas. I like to drink, but I don't like to get mad. So I gotta make a choice or learn how to separate drinking from thinking. Because it's usually when I have time to think that I get mad. So generally I find myself pretty busy because I don't like thinking of my past and sometimes my present. Just thinking about all this scares me. Because I've had a rotten past, what's my future going to be like? So I do like to drink and that happens and the odd time I get mad when I'm drinking. But I feel that I should quit drinking until I have good control over my anger. And if I can't get control, then I guess that I quit drinking forever. Because I'm not happy with what I do when I get upset while I'm drinking. Drinking never really meant all that much to me. I always liked to be able to sit down with my good friends and have a good time. And that's all it would be. And it's affecting my social life as well. Because whatever I do when I'm drinking affects my social life and I like my social life. I like to be able to have my friends around all the time, get lots of different advice from them. I like being able to help them out as much as they help me. I figure if I'm not helping someone, then I'm not playing my part in life.

R: When did you first notice that anger was a problem?

Well I noticed that anger was a problem while I was still in the group home. Because I would get mad and destroy my stuff, or punch walls or hurt other people and it always made me feel bad because I didn't like hurting people or losing my stuff or hurting myself. So I decided that I would look for different ways to channel my anger so I wouldn't take it out on other people or my stuff. I found some ways of doing it but it doesn't completely wipe away my anger. And I find when I have my blow-ups they're getting worse. But fewer.

R: Anything more?

Not really. I'm not much for talking. Probably gonna fall asleep on you. Don't like talking, don't like typing, and sure as heck don't like talking.

R: Coulda fooled me!

## **ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF HUMPHREY**

*April 17, 1995. Again we met in the apartment but the emotional climate was very tense. Humphrey was just getting up as I arrived. We met in the kitchen. There were a number of interruptions, including an altercation between Humphrey's fiancée and the young widow whose apartment it was about Humphrey having cooked the last of the bacon for breakfast for his fiancée. They had been given eviction notice for non-payment of rent, in spite of Humphrey having paid his share. Humphrey was pre-occupied with events of the week (further charges) and a court date the following day. It was quite difficult for him to follow the protocol instructions, (and difficult for me to make stronger demands on him). At one point, he put his hands on mine on the keyboard to stop me typing and said "Let's get to know you a bit better: what do you think I should do about this situation?" The most pressing issue was getting his child back from his fiancée's mother's care and CAS supervision, a plan that was undermined because, with the impending eviction, they were once more without stable housing. I quit typing and entered into a substantive discussion --counselling -- about the situation. As his anxiety eased, I scribed some more material, but it seemed unreasonable, or at least insensitive to fairly clearly-stated priorities, to try to insist that he follow the protocol.*

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND:

Well, that story pretty well summed it up.

I'll tell you what happened, about a friend of mine in Toronto who died. I ordered a pizza, and the guy that came over turned out to be my friend. So I invited him in and we talked for a couple of minutes. I got his phone number and address and stuff, you know, to maybe have further contact with him. I said when I left I didn't have much contact with my friends. So I walked him out to his car, and there he got shot. Outside. Apparently he was in the drug business, or he owed some kind of money, because he was in too deep.

R: So what effect did that have on you? How did it change your life or how you thought about life?

I dunno. I was just showed me that people don't care.

R: How old were you when this happened?

15.

R: When you were first living on your own?

Yeah. It was pretty hard on me. Because I was scared. You know, always wondered what would happen to me. Because I too had sold a little bit, and I guess that was my turning point, when I said to myself that it was time to stop. Haven't started since.

Q3. THE FORM:

I felt that I was just kinda thrown out. Kinda like "here's the real world: go see it!" That was the beginning, short and sweet, they didn't take much time saying "Get the fuck out."

The middle, I would say, I went through a lot of changes. Felt like I changed into a totally different person. It was like I didn't recognize myself. Some parts of myself I liked, and some I don't.

The end? Still lots of work that needs to be done. Always had the pride of myself that if I don't

accomplish at least over half of what I intended to do, then I'm not satisfied with myself. I'm into the goal-setting deal. I set very high standards on myself. And hope that I get even half-way there.

I didn't really start being in tune with myself until not too long ago, maybe a year or two. I just took a look at myself, at how my life was going -- it kinda hit me one day. It hurt because first of all, I was too proud for welfare. And eventually I went on that. And just seemed that I turned into the person that I despised. And I kinda wished that I was like a kid and not realized any of this because I wouldn't feel that pain.

It's really hard when you're down. Like people say "life is great" but I bet they haven't had down days like I have. Because when you're down, it's hard to get back up. I've learned that other people don't get you up, you have to get yourself up. And people look down on you when you're down, and think less of you, and that makes it even harder. Because if people expected more from you, they should try and help you instead of giving you the cold shoulder. It's important to hear gratitude when you do something right. My fiancée is pretty good at giving me gratitude when I do something right, but you don't know if it's just her obsession about me, or if it really is about me. It would be nice if other people said something too.

#### Q4. LIST THE EVENTS\*:

1. My life book: I've been taken around to many places, ever since I was a kid, and they always had some sort of excuse, like it was my fault for moving out, I was a bad kid or something. But I've thought about how I was, and it just doesn't seem as bad as I thought it was, because when I was a kid, I thought I was this terrible kid. I always tried not to be, but kids make mistakes, that's a part of learning, and so they used that as an excuse to move me around. Make me think it was my fault. So I ended up moving around to about 10-11 different places by the time I was 9. That's a lot of moves for that age. It just seemed that I couldn't trust anybody, that I feel that I didn't have the same life that someone with their parents would have. It seemed that every time that I met someone, I felt that it was going to be short-term. I couldn't have a relationship until I settled down. It seems that nowadays, what this has the effect on is my social life. Even though I want my friends to last forever, some of them are short-term. They still end up moving or we get into an argument and sometimes it ends up not being a friendship any more.

2. Being in group homes

3. Being thrown out. They threw me into a boarding house, and they handled my money. The only time anybody came by was when there was money involved. Like they never came by just to see how you were, or to give you a hug if you felt like you needed it. I had like \$40/month to spend, and when you're living on your own, that's not much. Like if you want to go to a movie, that's \$7 a shot. I found that I went to the movies a lot; I was around a bunch of people, plus it took my mind off things. Or I was renting movies. I still do that a lot; when I'm watching a movie, the rest of the world can just go away.

4. Meeting my fiancée

5. Living on your own

6. Drinking and getting into trouble: my whole history passes through a little brown bottle.

7. Being in tune with my feelings, or not being in tune.

8. Feelings of blame toward CAS/group home staff.

9. Losing my kid to CAS

10. Relationship with my fiancée's family

11. My fiancée's rough life: she was raped by next door neighbour's kid. He was I would say 16 at the time, maybe 14, but anyway. She told her mom and her mom laughed at her, saying quit joking at me. And her dad abused her for a year. Sexually abused her. Her mom was always threatened to be killed by her husband. Like he told her once to go get a knife, and when she brought it, he said it wasn't big enough, get a bigger one. And when she did, he said it was to kill her mother with. And it just seem like her mom wasn't there for her either. It's like my fiancée tried to raise herself by herself. Like even nowadays, with my kid. Grandparents usually help out, they try to give you some direction, but she's not. She [grandmother] wants to do it herself. The way we see it, is if she wants another kid, adopt. There's lots of needy kids out there that need the care that she might have to offer.

R: Why do you think she'd do a better job, or a different job, with another kid than she did with your fiancée?

I don't think she would. Because at the age I think it was 13, guys were taking advantage of my fiancée, because around the area she was in, she was like the little sex toy. People would use her and get rid of her. Now if that's proper parenting, then I don't know what is.

R: Was CAS ever involved with your fiancée around the care she was receiving?

Once they stepped in for a little bit. Her mom had to get a job to get her back. But it seemed like to me, she got a job and soon as she got my fiancée back, she quit.

R: How old was your fiancée then?

Um...I think she was 6. And just seems to me that the time that they took her out, she should have been placed in adoption. For people that would grow to love her and raise her right.

Q5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

The whole story is -3. Because if I was raised properly or had the right guidance for most of my life, I wouldn't be where I'm at right now. And that's the way I see it. I think to some extent, that I do make decisions, but I think it's your past that rules you out. I really think that, because my life is some ways is a replay of my history. Like what happened to me is happening to my kid. I have to be focused; I'm way over here, and normal is way over there. But then again, what's normal?

R: Or maybe the question is how you and your fiancée can achieve normalcy for your daughter, when neither of you has had a normal upbringing yourselves?

Like I say, I watch a lot of movies, and I try to pick the good stuff from it, like what is normal from the movies, and I pick out what the right thing is from it. I want to be right to my kid, and 15-16 years down the road, have some showing from my work. Like all those years I spent trying to make a good human being, and raise her the way she deserves to be raised. Because she hasn't done anything wrong, harmed anyone or anything, and she deserves a good life. And I want it to me who gives her a good life. And my fiancée.

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. My life book:
2. Being in group homes
3. Being thrown out.
4. Meeting my fiancée
5. Living on my own

6. Drinking and getting into trouble: my whole history passes through a little brown bottle.
7. Being in tune with my feelings, or not being in tune.
8. Feelings of blame toward CAS/group home staff.
9. Losing my kid to CAS
10. Relationship with my fiancée's family
11. My fiancée's rough life

6 = 8, 6, 2, 4, 9, 11

4 = 8, 6, 2, 4,

2 = 8, 6

1= 8 because that's kinda taken its toll on me.

#### Q7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

My story is about my life, how it started, where it's going, where it's gonna end. That's pretty well it, eh? Bad as I want to drag people down for the blame that I feel, I do want people to know that there is forgiveness--in this anyway. I just want justice to be served on everything that I grew up that was done wrong to me.

*Humphrey attended the focus group discussion in September 1995 and took a very active and positive role. He announced that he hadn't had a drink for four months, made reference to his fiancée and child but seemed not to be living with them. There had been discussion about re-engaging him with CAS through extended care, but it was decided that there was nothing to be gained since he was getting similar financial support through welfare and had a longer and closer relationship with his probation officer than with the CAS worker on whose caseload he was (awaiting closure of the file).*

**THE STORY OF JASON**

*I met with Jason on May 17/95, in the dining room of his group home, a specialized home for adolescents and adults with physical and intellectual handicaps. The foster mother worked in the kitchen within earshot as we talked. Because Jason's literacy skill was quite limited, I spoke the words as I typed them, both mine and his. Jason was pre-occupied with a recent medical assessment.*

I'm trying to think about life. Like yesterday, like the day before yesterday.

R: When do you think that you started the job of beginning to be on your own?

When I was first, when I had, they kind of took me off the city bus, the wheelchair project lift bus, because of my seizures.

R: Let's start with you talking about these seizures and what they mean to you about being on your own.

That's tricky. It started back when I was on the trip, and one of my foster brothers noticed me doing that, and since then I still have them. And when I have them I stand up, lie down, and they go on. Like I had one today selling chocolate bars.

R: So what does that mean for you, about your daily life?

R: Sounded like maybe it meant a change in bus?

I'm on my bus again, back on my bus. I used to go on the city bus. First I went on the school bus, then I went on the city bus, and now I'm back on the school bus. I should tell you about tomorrow. Tomorrow, right after school, I'm going to see the doctor about my seizures. And see if I have to, I'll probably have to, take pills and stuff. Sometimes I don't like pills, but I might have to take them anyway. I used to, since I got operated on (my leg), I am still wearing lifts on my shoes, but next I won't be wearing lifts any more. And then if it does happen, I won't, but if it doesn't work, I'll probably have to wear them again.

R: Let me ask you a question, about who you feel is responsible for you, for your welfare? For looking after you.

'Sam' and 'Rose'. I first came in May. I was only 14 then. And then I used to sleep downstairs, and then when I had my surgery I had to sleep down here. But now I'm in one of my foster brother's old room, and he sleeps downstairs in my old room. They still are. They look after me. They take good care of me. They give me food, clothes. I am happy about that. I get told off for not taking a shower, I don't anyways but I try to. And I go to school. That's one thing. I go to school still, until I'm 21. I have 2 more years of school left, because I'm 19 years old. And I have friends who...and my teacher and my teacher's assistant looks after me when I'm at school

R: How does the assistant look after you at school?

If he has, or if I have seizures or that, he tells the teacher and then he kinda tells me to go lie down. Though I would do that anyways. Because last Thursday, I had one at school and I asked my teacher if I could lie down, because they were cooking, so I could watch them cooking. So when I get home, I tell Rose I had a seizure when I was at school, or when I'm away as well.

R: Can you imagine living anywhere else but here?  
I wouldn't mind living in Florida.

R: With Rose and Sam? Can you imagine living in Florida without Rose and Sam?

Yes. Try to.

R: By yourself?

Yes.

R: Could you see yourself living by yourself here, in Waterloo?

No. Not really. Because I would have to have someone beside me so I don't do anything wrong and stuff. Or do other stuff, like throw around stuff, not make my bed. So I kinda...I do get in trouble somewhere else. And at home I get in trouble. But I did good.

R: So if for some reason you had to leave Rose and Sam, what would you look for in a living situation?

Probably a house. Or a motor home.

R: Who would you look to live with you?

If I was married, my wife.

R: When do you think you will be ready to be married?

When I'm okay, and told I can be on my own and stuff

R: Who would tell you that you were ready to be on your own?

My foster parents.

R: And what do you think they would expect you to be able to do before they would say that you're ready to be on your own?

I think they would say, are you able to live by yourself.

R: And how would you figure out what is the answer to that question?

I would say, not really. Tricky. Because it would be tricky to live on my own. Trying to find a house to live in. It would be tricky to find a girl to live with in a house. That's all I can think of.

R: What do you imagine your life will be like when you turn 21 and are finished school?

I'll be working, for school still. I would be on a school job, co-op jobs, or if I have a good job, I might do something good, like ask for a full-time job. Like if 'Captain Bligh's' is still open, I'll ask them if I can work there for good. That's where I have a school job right now.

R: What do you do? What's your job?

I do the windows on the doors, I do the bathrooms, and I do the tables, and if my worker would want me to do something else, I would do something like the ice and stuff like that. And if there's nothing else to do, I sit and wait for my ride.

R: Your friends. Tell me about them.

They're nice to me. One's in Florida right now. And then she'll be back before we're ending our jobs.

R: Do you know her through work?

No, she goes to the same school as me. She's a student.

R: Other friends?

My other friends...I'm on the same bus as a friend of mine. I sit beside her on the school bus. And I like it. Oh yeah, and yesterday, I was playing, we have this game--Monopoly for Juniors-- and I kinda beat my friend yesterday in the game. We had a good game. And today, a friend of mine beat all of us in the game. She had more money than us, I forget now. I had \$31. Because Monopoly for Juniors has this small money, it's an easier game to play.

R: Sounds like most of your friends are girls?

No, one's a boy. There's 3 girls and me and another boy.

R: Do these friends also have physical disabilities?'

Yes.

R: Do you have any contact with people from before the time that you came to live with Rose and Sam?

No.

R: Okay. So just to be clear that I understand what you are saying about becoming independent, being on your own, you don't think it's gonna happen for quite a long time, and until then, you're happy to stay where you are, with your life pretty much as it is now?

Yes. I'm happy. I might be getting a computer.

R: Anything else you want to say?

No.

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### **REVISITING THE STORY OF JASON**

*I met again with Jason on May 25, 1995, in the dining room of the foster home with his foster mother and her daughter, visiting home from university, working in the kitchen. I decided not to ask Jason to go through the analytical protocol, because I didn't think his analytic skills were adequate. Instead, I opted to ask him to flesh out his narrative.*

R: I wonder if today you could take your story further back in time, before you were at Rose and Sam's?

That's going to be tricky. I know where I was living before. First I was living with my parents. After when my dad threw me against the wall, they moved me.

R: How old were old were you then, when you left your parents?

(Asks Rose) A year or a year or 18 months. And then from home to home to home until the 'Smith's'. They kind of picked me up and I was starting to live there.

R: How old were you then?

I dunno that.

R: Okay.

They were gonna adopt me but then Children's Aid came and picked me up to move into (asks Rose, "What would I call 'ABC'?" ), an institution. And then after ABC I moved from there to the 'Jones' (asks Rose, who defers to him). And then after that, they didn't take good care of kids, they had kids sleeping two, a bed here and a bed here, in the same room together.

R: So is that you were moved from the Jones?

Sam and Rose came to see me at the Jones to see who I was, and then I slept over once only and then they told me who they had, like a daughter, and other foster kids. And when I came, I had a driver to drive me down here. His name was 'Joe'. He drove me down here from Toronto. First we stopped off at MacDonaldis, then we came here and we slept over, once I think, and then started to live here.

R: So why do you think that you moved around so much when you were little?

That's tricky.

R: If you don't want to answer any of these questions, just don't.

I just say they're tricky.

R: Because I wondered if tricky means complicated and you need a minute or two to collect your thoughts.

Collecting my thoughts? I don't have a good memory like somebody I know.

R: Okay...So did you think it was good to move, or bad?

Good.

R: Why is that?

Because I don't have to put up with other children or kids.

R: So, just to check that I understand you right, you don't like foster homes where there are little kids around.

Yes. I was the oldest one. Except for ABC. There were a lot of other kids there that I liked, I knew, they knew me. Because on our last day living there, they gave us a, we couldn't go into the room because they gave a goodbye party. And always when I leave, I cry. Always. I don't know why, but I do.

R: So you left ABC because they were closing the place?

Yes, there were closing it down.

(Reminisces about ABC)

R: So would you have preferred to stay at ABC, if you had a choice?

I would, yes, but since they closed it now, it's tricky. Because I miss my old friends in there.

R: They are probably around. Do you ever ask about getting together with them?

No. Mom yes, that's one person. Dunno about my dad. But my mom is married and has other kids and I don't know if she told them about me. Because my mom could put her name on a paper under my name and try to find me, look for me. Because I have 3 different names. My first name is English, then my second name in French is j---- and in Portuguese is j----. And I have my dad's name is A-----.

I know my mom's name. E---- R---- P.

R: Do you have any memory of her?

I don't think so.

R: No, you'd have been very young.

I don't even know my dad, or I should just call him A----- because my parents weren't married. My dad's name is hard to say.

R: But he was your biological dad?

Yes.

R: How was it explained to you that he threw you when you were a baby?

I guess when I was living at ABC, they told me that. But actually I knew too, because he was in jail for that.

R: How did you know that?

And also, I know what happened when my dad threw me against the wall, they say my mom was cooking. I don't know if that was true or not. I can't think of anything else.

R: Okay...Let's talk about the future instead of the past. You said that you thought it would be tricky to live on your own. Do you worry at all that you will have to leave here?

I'm not worried.

R: Why not?

I dunno. It's not tricky to me at all.

R: So do you have anybody from your past that you keep in touch with, no foster parents, no foster kids, no social workers, nobody????

No. Not even my mother.

R: So she's the one that you would like to get in touch with.

Yes, ma'am.

R: Why is that important to you?

That's...Oooh. That's kinda tricky. I wouldn't know.

R: Maybe because you'd rather know than not know.

I'd rather know who she is, who my mother is, whether she's married or not.

R: But it sounded like you knew that she has re-married.

I don't know about that.

R: I misunderstood then.

I don't know if she's married or not.

R: So you're a man with a mystery?

Yes, ma'am.

R: Does having a mystery in your background bother you on a day to day basis?

A little bit, yes.

R: Talk a bit about how?

Well, sometimes I kinda want to write the Smith's a letter. They weren't a foster home, exactly, I don't know what there were. They had foster kids, that's why they called me Jason because they had too many M---s. But when I went to ABC I asked to flip my name back because they had another Jason.

R: Must be confusing to change names like that.

I asked to.

R: But back to about how having a mystery bothers you.

Doesn't bother me, not now.

R: I lost what you were saying, about wanting to get in touch with the Smiths.

I'm going to try and write them a letter, because then if I write them a letter I can give it to my social worker and then she can give the letter to them.

R: Yeah. And what would you want to happen?

Well, to see if they can write me a letter and say how they're doing. Because I was living there, at the Smith's house, and I moved to ABC, and they came to visit me at ABC, because I was in Joe's

office and then I was talking to them because they were living somewhere else, because their son burnt half the house down because he was cooking dinner for himself and burnt the house.

R: So just to see if they're still okay and what's happening in their life?

I want to write a letter and see if they're all right and stuff. On a computer. I think that's a good idea. I know their address because I used to live in Alexborough and Mr. Smith used to work in Braetown.

I don't know if I can think of anything else.

R: How have you felt about doing these sessions with me?

Good. I enjoyed doing it with you.

R: Did it make you uncomfortable at all?

No. Not really. Not when I get \$20. That's all I can think of now.

R: I haven't got any more questions anyway.

And I don't have anything more to say.

*On my way out, Rose mentioned that she was disappointed or a bit hurt that Jason was grateful to ABC and to the Smiths (who were a potential adoptive home that didn't work out) but seemed to take their home for granted, even though they offered him a much better and longer-term alternative. They are negotiating for him to remain with them as an adult.*

*Rose transported Jason to the focus discussion group and was prepared to remain during the session. She re-joined us for lunch and angered one of the girls (Marie) by suggesting that she wasn't really independent because she and her son were supported by the government through welfare. Jason did not take an active part in the discussion but seemed to enjoy himself (and was glad to receive the \$20 stipend).*

**THE STORY OF JOHNDOE**

*I met with Johndoe on October 12, 1995 (i.e., after the focus groups had met) in my home office. The appointment had been scheduled to take place in June in his basement apartment, in a house belonging to friends, but when I arrived, the house was locked and a notice that it was in receivership on the door. Neighbours delivered a message to the friend who eventually passed it on to Johndoe. He apologized for missing the appointment and reported that he'd been in jail and then crashing with friends. Johndoe's literacy level appeared to be quite low, as evidenced by how he managed the Census Questionnaire, so I carefully read everything aloud as I typed it.*

About the age of 15, I was living in a group home called 'Christopher House' and I got into a job for modelling, and it made me feel pretty good about myself. I was cooking around the house for independence practice through the group home because I wasn't going to school, and I knew this was something I was going to have to do for my goal of going on my own by the age of 16.

R: Maybe think about what led up to you forming the goal of going on your own at age 16, that might be part of the beginning...

Okay. Through all the times that I lived in the Children's Aid, I've always had a rough time, so I was just trying to get out of there. And I knew that there were certain things that I had to do to show them that I was capable to get out of the custody of the Children's Aid. I'd always run away from the Children's Aid, pretty much about 80% of the time I was in with them.

R: Maybe the other things you knew you needed to prove to be able to get out. Cooking plus not running plus?????

Plus I had to change my attitude for them. Because I had a really bad temper. And...I always had regrets about my parents for things that they had done to me for the reasons I was in there, and I had to get over these regrets. That's why I was seeing social workers and psychiatrists while I was in there, to get over these problems I had. For a bit of the time they had put me in a crisis centre because they thought I wanted to kill myself. At one point in time. But I didn't say that, I said that I wanted to kill my father because I was mad at him. They gave me this type of medication for my temper, it's called Stelazine and Cogentin, and that would make me dizzy and drowsy. And I think it gave me loss of memory. That's why I'm having problems going through this, because I can't remember so much of it.

But I asked the doctor about the side effects, and he said it didn't give off side effects of loss of memory or migraines, that's what the doctor said. But then I asked him what would cause this, and I got no answer. And that was the Children's Aid doctor. The clinic at *the main CAS office*. I had even went back to the crisis centre to talk to one of the psychiatrists who had prescribed the drug to me, and asked him what side effects should I be getting from this, and he said just drowsiness and loss of energy. After that time, I went to a training school for a crime that I did, and I was getting really sick there from the medication, and then I had the doctor there take me off it because of the sickness and the illness I was getting through the days in there. It took me at least a week after the medication to clear out of me, and then I felt a lot better and able to take part in the (basketball) courts and the school for the rest of my time in jail.

And then I got out from there. I went into another group home through the crisis centre. It was a group home up in the crisis centre called House '18', and they made me stay there for 2 months until they could find me a full-time group home. But I ran away from there, and I went to Maintown, and I stayed with a friend for about 3 months until she had to go to hospital for a seizure, and that was the last time I seen her. I stole a car from the hospital to get to my mother's and I got busted before I got to my mother's. And I got charged with stolen property and reckless driving, that was at the age of 15, 14.

You want to ask me a question?

R: Yeah. How old were you when you first came into care?

11 years old. I was at school and they were noticing some bruises and marks on me, and me being scared to go home, so they called the Children's Aid. And Children's Aid went to my house and talked to my father, and told them the school had noticed these things, and they were going to be doing a report on this. And then they asked me if I wanted to stay with him or go to the Children's Aid, and I said the Children's Aid. From there they put me in my first group home, it was 'Horseshoe House'. And then I met my social worker. I ran away the second day that I went there for 3 months. I went out to 'Kevinville' and I stayed with a friend and their uncle. And then her uncle called the Children's Aid and he told them I was out there, after she found out that I ran away. And then the cops came and grabbed me from his house and brought me back to the group home. But after they left, I had left again.

R: To where this time?

I don't remember.

R: Did you ever ...

I hardly went to school so I felt like I got my education by the street. I stopped going to school at grade 10, but I did go to a Future's training school for a course of child welfare, but I didn't last too long there. I could never get along with the teachers or the principals. Or even just sitting in one spot for any long period of time.

R: Were you "hyper"?

Yes. I was always in a fight every day when I was going to school. I did take self-defence in the martial art of Ninjazo for about 5 years, from the age of 9 to 14, 15. I had achieved my brown stripe and then I had to quit. But I had good times there. Went to tournaments, earned plaques and trophies. And my father put me in Ninjazo: he thought it would control my temper. But it didn't. Until I turned about 17 years old and I started learning certain things about life, and I started to control my temper on my own, by taking long walks and counting to 10 and ignoring people. But sometimes people can push over the point, and it's too hard to ignore.

R: Was school a problem from a learning point of view, or just because you weren't...

too interested? And I had problems with my reading, and problems with teachers trying to help me. I was never the motivated type, to get into it.

R: Pre-occupied with other things, maybe?

Umm, I was in a gang, a posse called the 'Flamingo' posse. And I did a lot of bad things with these guys, like a lot of bad drugs with them. Did b&e's (*break & enter*), stole cars, did time. But now I regret it. Most of it. I know I still go out and I'll end up grabbing some rims or something off a car, because I'm having trouble with the way I'm living off of welfare, and it's hard to get a job in this community. And crime is what I know best, so it's like a little fall-back when I need something. Sometimes you get caught and sometimes you don't. But I always expect the consequences if I do get caught. Most of the times me and my friends would go out, go to a club, have a couple drinks. We do drugs, take a hit of acid or mushrooms, and just be the party type.

R: From what age?

What age? From the gang until now is pretty much from the age of 14 until 18, 19. Maybe even younger. I was always the bad little kid.

R: From the time when you were still at home?

Umm, not so much, no. More when I went into Children's Aid, because I had to do more for myself than my parents would do, because they weren't around for me. Sure, the workers at the group can help out, but they can't help out with certain things. And I don't really like asking for help. I like trying to do things on my own so I can feel like I achieve things. Might not be the right achievement. But it's better than none.

R: You said you came into care because of bruises and your choice. So things were likely not all that good at home, and then they got worse?

My father was an alcoholic, and he used drugs too. And he had a lot of stress, he had a bad back, he was working in his own little business doing dry-wall and he had bad times so he took it out on me, because I was the only one there for him.

R: Your mom?

My mom, how to explain it? My mom and my father were just a 1-night stand. My mother has 3 more husbands. She's getting divorced from them now, and is getting married again. And she had 3 more kids, 2 boys 1 girl, and they all live with their fathers. So I always consider my mother an unfit mother, and that's why she never even had any of my brothers or sisters to stay with her, and my mom knows that herself. But my mom is pretty much getting her life back together now. She has 2 part-time jobs and she has a nice house over her head.

R: What do you attribute that to, her getting her act together?

She doesn't fool around as much any more, and she doesn't drink any more. She was quite a drinker and she quit now. She's trying to be there for my sister and brothers because she really lives for us, we're the only kids she'll have now.

R: And your dad?

My dad I don't talk to any more, so I don't have anything to say about him. I haven't talked to him for 4 years now.

R: Do I remember that at one point you stayed with relatives, an aunt or something?

Yes, I did. That was my aunt 'Maggie' and her kids. But that only lasted for a month. About 6 months, actually. And that was up in 'Johntown'. Another area that I took part in another ghetto.

R: A gang?

Like a gang. But it's bigger than a gang, it's like a turf of an area.

R: I'm getting the picture that family has always been disappointing, and you turned early to peers which involved partying and criminal activity. Yes???

I suppose so. It's not a life that I like to live, but it's the only life that I know how to live right now. And I'm still young. I'm sure I'll get over this thing soon. I've already had my mind going for a course in bar-tending. I just got to come up with some money for it.

R: So home was not good, school was not good, the neighbourhood was not good, CAS was not good. Was anything good?

I don't know. I like the things that I did. It was like, an adventure. I'm still sure it's going to go on.

R: There is a profile of the young man who frequently goes to jail. It says he's high energy as a little kid, doesn't settle into school, loves adventure and things that make his adrenalin race, likes fights and later parties, sex drugs rock and roll and criminal activities, for the adrenalin rush as much as for the goods. And drugs and alcohol, too, for the buzz, the rush. Does this feel like it fits you?

Yes. But I don't know, I'm pretty sure I won't be doing this forever, it's not something you can live a life on, I know that. But I'm still young.

R: So what has to change to get you started on a different kind of life?

What has to change? The environment. Pretty much, more like the way the government handles things.

R: What changes would you like to see.

More jobs. Easier ways to go about to get them. Because not everybody has transportation to go to see them, interviews. Even change to make phone calls. And put the welfare back the way it was *[this is 2 weeks after a 22% decrease in welfare rates introduced by the Harris government.]* And you can see that I'm not the only teenager that sees life the way I see life, because we're not getting too much of an opportunity to see another way.

R: Can you see yourself ready to do the boring stuff that is the majority of school and work?

Umm, not with a crowd of people.

R: Individual?

Yes, pretty much so.

R: Why?

Because I'm very impatient, and I get very aggravated when something goes wrong and I can't really put my mind to it. I get frustrated when I get confused or lost. So I just give up and usually throw a little temper tantrum or something around that point.

R: When you were being treated like a person with psychiatric problems...

do you want to know how I felt when I was in there? When I was in there, I felt like I didn't belong in there. There were people in there that were looking at me, and they more or less wanted to kill themselves and it made me in a position, nervous and sorry and guilty. The way I looked at those people, I knew that wasn't me, but I felt very sorry for them. And I felt the guilt for the reason I was in there was because I wanted to kill my father, and it was the opposite. Like I was the opposite person that was in there from the others. Like it was creepy in there, and no one got along with no one. I didn't talk to myself, but I seen some people in there were. When I was in there, I felt like I was getting packed up, claustrophobic wise, because I had a little tantrum. Because I wanted to get out of there and they put me in a little room and I started to throw a chair around, so they came in and tried to give me a needle to calm me down, and so when I seen the needle, I started to get even madder and started to get more freaked out. And ended up throwing one of the guards through the

window into the office. And the next day I was out. I had to call my lawyer to get me out of there. So she could prove that I wasn't immensely insane like they thought I was.

R: How do you find your time there, compared with the times you've spend in jails?

I find the time in there longer than it runs by in jail. I find jail actually better, you've got freedom, there are places where you can walk around and get a breath of fresh air, whereas in there you can't even have a breath of fresh air. There's nothing in there for you to exercise. You have to sit on a couch and watch tv or sit in your room. When you have a group session and you talk about your problems, but my problems didn't fit in with their problems.

R: Just fill me in on the sequence. Had you been in jail before you went to *the crisis centre*?

Yes, once. 311 Jarvis.

R: Briefly?

Yes. Wasn't even a week, 2 weeks. It was like summer school in there. Like all you can do is go to school and play ping-pong. And in there you had to go to school, so I had no choice but to go to school.

R: It sounds like you don't really mind jail.

Sure I do, I don't want to go back to jail. But when you go there, I've been there enough times now, you don't even want to whine about how long you're going to be there, why you're in jail. So now I'm just used to doing the time and that's it.

R: So it's not wonderful but it's familiar?

Yes.

R: Okay, on another subject, you seem to have always valued your social network...

what do you mean by that?

R: Well, some kids are basically isolated, the cat that walked alone type, and others seem to be comfortable when there are people around. And you seem to be someone who mostly had a gang of people around.

Yes.

R: So my question would be how that social orientation, valuing the gang,

They treated me like family. They were always there when I needed them. So I had to be there when they needed me.

R: Do you think that CAS could have done that for you when your family couldn't? No. They can't show the love and affection that a child needs. The gang can't either.

R: Were there any good people or good times while you were in care?

I never took the time to get to know any of them. I'd always be out of a group home from the time I'd wake up until time to go to bed. Sometimes I've been to movies or bowling with them, but that was

always on group night and then you'd have to go.

R: In retrospect, looking back, could they have done anything to make being in care a better fit for you?

By putting me in a foster home with a family. But they'd always say I was too old to go into one. That's why I've always been chased around from group home to group home.

R: When you agreed to come into care at age 11, did you think...

That I was going to a foster home? Yes.

R: So in a sense you got false advertising?

Yes.

R: I know...Girls. You haven't talked about the importance of girls in your life.

I had about 8 girls in my life so far. I've had pretty long relationships. But I always had bad times with them. Well, not always bad times but differences, so it wouldn't work out. And at this moment I'm not dating no one. It's hard to find the right woman that's supporting and confident. But I do go out and try. And I do meet a lot of nice women at the clubs I go to.

R: In your future, what do you see?

I don't know. I don't think I've ever really looked at the future. I don't really want to get married and have kids until I'm at least 30. See all these teenagers get married and have kids; I don't think I could handle it right now. Because I don't know where to start with raising a kid. Or a child.

R: It sounded like maybe doing modelling was one of the better things that happened to you.

Yes. Because I like to act and show my physical body. I was hoping I'd get somewhere with that. But my modelling agency went bankrupt and they went back to Paris. The name was 'Best Talent'. Before they went back, they owed me money which I never seen, ever since. And they took my portfolio with them, so I never got into another agency because I didn't have money to pay for my portfolio.

R: Just following through a bit more on something you said, about doing crime fairly routinely to augment welfare, and that this would get worse with the cutbacks. Talk a bit more about that.

It's true, my welfare cheque now is \$520 a month and I pay \$400 for rent, and that leaves me \$120 for some food and personal hygiene things. And through the months there's always other things I need, like transportation. Run out of things like bread or milk. And I never have money from welfare so I have to do something illegal to see me through. I think the government expects this, that's why they took the increase off the check and are putting it into more jails.

R: Mr Harris has been saying that the shortfall on cheques can be easily met by getting a temp job a few days a month. You ever tried that?

Yes, but there's so many people in this economy that there's never an opening, such a big lineup. So everybody is just saying forget that and they're trying things their own way. Sure, you can find a little bit of work that's under the table that's real work, but it doesn't even pay for the food that goes on the table, let alone the bills.

R: Okay, I can't think of anything just now. You got anything more

I can't actually think of anything else either.

R: Okay. We've got next week to add things that come to mind.

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**ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF JOHNDOE**

*I met with Johndoe in my home office a week later, on October 26, 1995.*

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND:

R: You were saying that things were getting tough on quite a few fronts just now. Like what, specifically?

I can't understand what you're saying.

R: Okay. Let me set this up for you by reviewing how I understand your story. What I see/hear is a kid who never got much from his family, and then went to CAS hoping to get a family, but instead got group homes and running and lots of reason and opportunity to do "bad" stuff, or stuff that got you into trouble. And now that you're out of CAS, it's still the same in some ways, no place where you can get what you need to build an adult normal sort of life.

True.

R: So what I'd like to understand is how you see that came to be. Like, where or how did it miss what you wanted or needed? Or what should they have done differently way back then, and now. Because really, it seems like it's the same problem now as then: not enough of anything, not enough love and affection, stability, material things, opportunity to do things the right way. Just always pushed to the edge in some way. Is that a fair picture?

Yeah.

R: I'm not sure what my question is. It's trying to understand how things might have taken place that would give a better outcome.

If they would be more civilized with me. By listening to the children and what they have to say if they've done something wrong. I remember when I got sent to my room, I was running up the stairs to my room, and as I was running up, I ended up grabbing the railing on the stairs and it broke off, and it hit the switch to the light and it broke off, and then the staff wouldn't listen to what I had to say about that. They went and called the cops and charged me with mischief. It was an accident, I told the cop, but I still got charged with mischief. They didn't release me back into the group home, they just took me to 311 until court the next day, and then they bailed me out and I went back to the group home.

R: Do you think that you were born to be a criminal sort of guy?

I don't know. I look at the way my mother was and my father was, and what kind of way they've got

along, the kind of relationship they had, and it wasn't too much, so I guess I say, why not?

R: Do you think that you slipped into criminal behaviour because there was no reason not to, or because there was good reason to do so. Like were you attracted to criminality...

No.

R: Did it out of anger???

Anger and need.

R: What kind of need?

Need of money, respect.

R: Can you remember times when you tried to get respect, at least, other ways, and what happened?

In a way, yes. This just happened not too long ago. I was playing tennis with some friends and I thought I'd take off my pants because I had some track pants on underneath. And I thought someone had stolen my wallet from out of my pants. And there was only one guy sitting around, so I asked him if he'd taken anything out of my pants, or he'd seen anyone taking anything out of my pants. And he said no, but two other guys told me that they seen him in my pants, going through it. And so I went up the guy and asked him again, and he said no, and I was just about to lose it. I took out my knife and I held it to his throat, and I said I wanted my wallet back, and I've been told by two of my friends that you took it. And then two of my friends pulled me off of him and then a guy that I sold some stuff to came back that day and gave me my wallet; I'd left it in the car. And in the area that I was from, that was how they'd call respecting you.

R: Pulling the knife?

Showing the knife, showing what I'd have done if he'd had my wallet. Showing that I had no fear for someone that is 3 times bigger than me. That's respect. That's strange.

R: And dangerous.

It happened in '94.

R: Is it part of the deal that friends will intervene just in time so you just have to show you could, but you don't have to go all the way in these displays?

No, if they were true friends they would intervene and help me find the true way. Or if not, they'd be in as much trouble as I would be at the same time.

R: So it's 'all for one and one for all', the old Muskateer's motto?

Kinda. I have a partner that does things with me. He wanted to come up (here) but I told him no, so he dropped me off. He's been in the Children's Aid too, so he knows a lot about me.

R: Okay, I gotta ask some more about this girl thing. Because when I re-read your questionnaire, you mentioned that a girl got you into big-time trouble around a drug bust.

Yes, it is true.

R: So what are girls in your life..

Nothing but trouble. (laughing) It is true with me, nothing but trouble.

R: Tell.

My first girlfriend was 'Tina Delearo' and I was dating her for at least 4 years., She was my very first girlfriend, and we'd broken up for 3-4 months for a time for 3-4 times. And one time that I was selling a lot of dope up in 'Alexborough', and she wanted money for something and I didn't approve of it; she wanted to buy blow, and that's a drug I never use and I would not advise anyone else to use. So I went to a party with friends and I took a pound with me, because I had to go to a school and meet someone there that wanted it. And Tina Delearo knew that and because I wouldn't give her no money and that, she had one of her temper tantrums and called the police and told them that I sold dope and where I was doing it right now, told CrimeStoppers, and they came and busted me and CrimeStoppers were trying to tell me it wasn't her that told, but I knew it was because she was threatening my friends where the party was that she was going to call the cops. And when it went to trial, I got all the police dope and it just so happened that it was her that gave the information to the cops. And then I got charged with \$220,000 worth of marijuana that day.

R: What would have been fair?

I guess I should have given her her money in the first place and started to leave. She made me lose out a lot of money in my life.

R: Let me ask a naive question. When you lose drugs like that, are you still expected to pay for them to whoever you bought them from.

I wasn't. It was given to me, and I saved me a guy in the Jamaican posse his life, in Flamingo Park.

R: So it was a gift.

It was a reward. That was the last time I ever seen that guy, though.

R: So are girls a necessary--what do you call it when you carry--an accessory, something that looks good on your arm? Or are they good company, somebody who values you, loves you, wants you. What???

That's what I want, but I haven't found someone like that yet. The lady that I'm seeing right now is actually my best friend-- well he's not my best friend -- but his ex-girlfriend. That's the one that does the dancing, and she lives up in 'Northtown'. But me and her are not doing too well now because I hear that she's been fooling around with everybody up there, so I don't think she's one of those womans that I want in my life. She's down this weekend and I didn't call her for a whole 2 weeks when I came back from Northtown, and when she came down she asked why I didn't call her, and I told her. So she asked me if we were still going out, and I think I said we'd try again. And she went to work last night and she came home with my friend. Which really doesn't bug me because I'm just going to play her as she is until I find something better.

R: Where will you look for something better?

You don't look; you wait until it comes. When I look, I look in all the wrong places.

R: What would help?

A job, a steady place. A job always helps; women are money-hungry. Sorry about that (*to me*).

R: Well, at the stage of life that you're getting into, money is necessary for a...

...all things. Nothing is free in this world. Can't even walk on your feet; gotta buy shoes or you'll step on a needle. That's an old saying my father used to say.

R: The other little thing that I was reminded of when I re-read the Questionnaire, was that your mother is aboriginal.

Indian, yes.

R: Was that a big deal at all?

To what, me? Yes, because I'm half breed and I still don't get the things that my family get.

R: Did you ever try to get registered as status indian?

No. Dunno why. I thought it would be a lot of trouble, because there's not too many generations left in my mom's side of the family.

R: So you wouldn't have many people to vouch that she was your mom.

I got people to vouch for that, that she's my mom.

R: What, then? What would you need more relatives for, if you wanted to get your status?

I don't really want to get my status. I don't even want to be part of that family. I don't use my mother's name, I had my name changed to my father's. He's not that bad, but he still doesn't talk to me and I don't talk to him.

R: Why?

I don't want to get into that. I don't want to have nothing to do with my biological family.

R: That bad, eh?

Yes!

R: Okay. Anything else that you thought of that you want to add?

Q3. THE FORM:

The beginning is...coming into care at 11, Horseshoe House.

The middle is...about the drug charge.

The end is...the last bit I said today, about the girl and my friend.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS:

1. Modelling:
2. Crime
3. Running away:
4. Cooking:
5. A little bit of school.

6. CAS
7. Crisis centre:
8. The time I got busted for mischief in the group home.
9. The big drug charge.
10. Love war between me and my friend and the middle girl.
11. Saving that guy's life (the Jamaican posse guy).
12. Living in the car for 2 months, and in a tent:
13. Recently charged for possession of stolen property.
14. My parents.

5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

1. Modelling: +3 because I was making money good at first, and I was getting somewhere. And then I think it's a -3 because they went bankrupt and robbed me, pretty much.
2. Crime: At first, 0, and it's going to stay that way. It's nothing exciting, nothing unexciting.
3. Running away: +1, It was good to get away from the group home and get relief. And I'd say -3, because the cops kept bringing me back because I was AWOL.
4. Cooking: +3 at first, when I had my job and I was enjoying it. Now it's probably down to 2 or 1. I still like to cook. I always like to cook.

R: Maybe that's what you should try to get some training in.

I had training in it. I could have gotten my degree for junior chef but I didn't go for my graduation. That was at the PARC (*a preparation for independence program*).

5. A little bit of school: No kid is going to say anything positive about school!!!! So I'll just give it a 0.
6. CAS: I gave it a +2 at first, because it was something that was going to save my behind for a bit. Now I find it a -3 because I felt they screwed up my life.
7. The crisis centre: I find that -3 when I went in there, and a -3 when I got out. I did not belong there.

R: Was there an additional piece about that, being called crazy?

Yeah. But I'm not crazy.

R: How long were you on meds?

Two years.

R: You weren't a guy who followed orders very much; why did you take drugs that you hated for that long?

I was pretty much forced to take them until I went into jail. They saw I kept on being sick from them. That's how I got off.

8. The time I got busted for mischief in the group home: At first it was a 0, because I thought it was all a misunderstanding on their part. But now it's a -3, because I have that charge on my record for the rest of my life.

R: But it's small potatoes compared to the other stuff that's there?

Yeah. Now it is, but then it wasn't.

R: Was it the first charge?

No. Probably my third or fourth.

R: Was it the first one you didn't think you deserved?

Yeah.

R: So that's the salt in the wound?

9. The big drug charge: -3 to a -3! That put me in a hurting unit for part of my life. Because I had to start my life over again from nothing.

R: I don't understand what you mean by that.

I wasn't allowed to go back to the house, grab anything. They took all the money out of my account because they thought it was all from the drugs. I wasn't on welfare at the time, I was working, and I lost my job. So I had to start my life over again. And I was going to school at the time. I was going to 'King School'.

10. Love war between me and my friend and the middle girl: At first I thought it was about a +2, because I did take her off him at first, but that might just have been for her to get back at him. And now I find it about -1, because it's not making me feel any good about it. She's giving me more problems.

R: Is this a guy you live with?

No, he lives next door to me, though, and I've known him for probably 2-3 years. But he was only going out with her before she was going out with me for 2-3 months.

R: But it strains your friendship with him?

Yes.

11. Saving that guy's life (the Jamaican posse guy): I'd give that about +2, because...it made me feel good about myself for saving his life and getting all that dope. Now I'd give it about -2 because it all led down to a bunch of trouble.

R: Had you been selling this quantity of drugs before?

No. A lower quantity.

R: Do you think there was any intent to get you into trouble by moving you into big times too fast?

No, because since that time, since I was busted, it's been at least 1 1/2 years and I've been doing good with it.

R: Do you worry that life in the drug business might end up with you being in jail, getting hurt, killed, that kind of stuff?

No. Drug business is like you're the doctor and it's the cure. So you don't really have too many problems with it. And you can't really overdose on marijuana.

R: And you only deal marijuana?

Yes. I don't any more, though.

12. Living in the car for 2 months, and in a tent: The story here is...not much of a story. This is about when I got kicked out of my house and just got out of jail.

R: Is this the big drug bust?

No, this is when I got this possession of stolen property. And it was me and my buddy and the dog that had to stay in that car. For 2 months. And in the tent, too, in my friend's back yard.

R: Hold on. You said you got kicked out of your house. This is the house where I interviewed you the first time? Did you get kicked out before the bank took it over again?

No, that's why we got kicked out, was because of the bank.

R: So getting kicked out of the house had nothing to do with getting charged?

No. I'd say it was +1, and stayed at +1. Why? Saved up a lot of money when we were staying there. And we moved into a new place after.

R: And it was summer, so you didn't freeze your buns off!

13. Recently charged for possession of stolen property. I'd give that -3 because I tried selling to someone, and the wrong person I tried selling it to called the cops on me. I'd keep that at a -3 because of the charge on my record again.

R: What was it, the property?

It was an Alpine CD tape recorder and car radio. Worth about a grand. Store value.

R: But you mind having the charges on your record more than you mind doing time for it?

Yeah.

R: Why is that?

Because it never goes away and it doesn't help you when you need references. It holds you back from certain jobs where you can't have a criminal record. Like if I had a stolen possession charge, I probably wouldn't be able to get a job in a computer store or something like that.

R: Whereas jail finishes and it's over.

Yeah.

14. My parents. I don't want to even bother with them. Give them -1. No a +1 for bringing me into this world anyway, and then I'll give them a -1 for not holding on to me and bringing me up properly, just abandoning me.

R: Why not a -3?

They're my parents, there's always going to be a little love there.

R: And forgiveness?

No. Because if they ever asked me for my help, I'd never help them.

R: Do you fantasize...

Having another family? No I don't.

R: Actually, I was going to say, getting it together big time and going back to rub their noses in the fact that you did it in spite of them, not because of them.

No, because if I ever did, I wouldn't want my son knowing who their grandparents are.

R: Sorry to push this, but...you sounded like you were softening up a bit on your mom as she got her act together a bit.

I didn't felt like I did. I was just telling you how she was doing with her life now.

R: Glad I asked.

Q6. 6-4-2-1:

1. Modelling:
2. Crime
3. Running away:
4. Cooking:
5. A little bit of school.
6. CAS
7. Youthdale Crisis Centre:
8. The time I got busted for mischief in the group home.
9. The big drug charge.
10. Love war between me and my friend and the middle girl.
11. Saving that guy's life (the Jamaican posse guy).
12. Living in the car for 2 months, and in a tent:
13. Recently charged for possession of stolen property.
14. My parents.

6 = 1, 4, 5, 11, 10, 12

4 = 4, 1, 12, 10

2 = 1, 4

1 = 4.

Q7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? I want people to learn to always think about what they do before they do it. And a child is something that you bring into this world to carry on your soul and your family name, not to throw away to Children's Aid. The way I see this, the child is the most precious thing in the world, because how we grow up children is the better way for the future. And the reason I wanted to do this was so that people could see the way I was brought up and that it's not the right way.

*John Doe called me quite urgently several months later, in June 1996, to tell me that he was living with a woman five years older than himself and engaged to her.*

**THE STORY OF PIANIST**

*This young man met with me in my home office on May 18, 1995. He attended a high school in the area. He was unkempt and had a strong and strange body odor. He apologized for not taking off his shoes as he came into the house, because the sole was coming off and his socks were wet from walking in spring slush.*

I don't know where to start.

R: Start where you think the story begins.

R: If you start in the middle, we can always go back and fill in the beginning. So start wherever comes to mind.

Well, I moved out on my own last year, so I've been dependent on other people all my life, so I can't really tell a lot about the child. That's the story. I don't know anything about my childhood. I was in care all the time. I don't know when I got in, but I got out in 1993. I moved in with my mom, so I was dependent on her. And I just moved out by myself last year.

R: Perhaps talk a bit about those three moves, out of CAS and into mom's, maybe that first.

Well, I was happy when I got out of CAS, and I wasn't so happy that I moved in with my mom. It wasn't that good. So I finally moved out last year.

R: Talk a bit about how you remember the decision being made for you to move out of CAS.

That was already decided. It wasn't my choice. Because Quebec had crown wardship, so it was their choice.

R: So, you had to leave CAS because your wardship ended?

Expired, yes.

R: And how was the decision made for you to go to your mom's?

That was my decision.

R: And how did you come to that decision?

Just did.

R: What other alternatives did you consider?

There were no more.

R: So it wasn't a decision, it was necessity?

Because I was in Quebec, and I wanted to get transferred so I could move in with my mother, so that was my choice. I could have asked for another foster home, but then they would have had to tell them that I tried to kill my last foster parent's cat, which is not true. I love animals. I want to get a dog. A Rottweiler.

R: Could you tell a bit more about that incident, the cat incident?

I don't remember it. But I was pissed off that they accused me of something, so I don't remember all that I said. But I do remember that I wanted to move out, saying that I wanted to move out.

R: Was that before or after the thing about the cat?

Same time, same day as the thing with the cat. That was way back in 1990, let me see, what day was it? November 4, 1990.

R: And....?

And what? I don't know.

R: Okay. So did this feel like it was part of becoming responsible for yourself, this move?

No, because I got moved into an emergency foster home, so I was still in care. Okay, that's all I remember.

R: Okay. Maybe could you talk a bit about the next move, in with your mom.

Didn't like it. She made me do more stuff than she made my brother do. And we got into arguments constantly. That's most of the time I lived there, so there's no more to tell about that.

R: Okay, and then the next move was out of your mom's and into, where?

Hostel. That's when I felt, still dependency, but not as much. And then a few months later, I moved out on my own, and that's where I am now.

R: Looking in the future, do you see being independent as more of what you have now, or different in some way?

I'm looking for a part-time job, so I can get off student welfare.

R: More?

No.

R: This is a very abbreviated story. Talk to me about your dreams and aspirations.

What's an aspiration?

R: An aspiration is a goal.

My dream is to become an actor. And my goal is to become a writer. That's the only two dreams I have.

R: What about music?

I don't think I want to be a musician. I didn't start early enough. I haven't got any more. I'm all storied out.

R: For a writer-to-be, this is very short. Takes me weeks to think of an idea for writing.

R: But your life has been very colourful, full of many strange events, from what I recall of what you told me last time.

I don't even remember half the stuff from last time. I haven't read that thing.

R: Why do you think that you have trouble remembering events of your life -- or is it that you choose not to speak of them?

I don't remember most of them.

R: Why?

I don't know. I could be at...sometimes my mom would ask me to go to a store for a 7-up and a straw, and I would go and forget to get the straw. I only got good short-term memory, and not good long-term memory, and sometimes that doesn't work so good.

R: Has it always been this way?

Yeah. I once forgot my last name. Now that's embarrassing.

R: Yeah. Do you think that your memory will get better?

No.

R: It's messed for good?

Yes.

R: So do you think that this disability, can I call it that? will stop you from becoming independent, or limit how independent you can be?

No.

R: What does it mess up, for you?

What does what mess up?

R: Not having reliable memory?

Schooling. I can't remember times tables, or English, where to, how to make proper sentences. Anything in school.

R: But at work, this is not a problem?

It was, when I had to do, for adding and subtracting for selling ice cream.

R: Did you develop a way to get around the problem?

No.

R: But you still had the job, yes?

Yes.

R: How did that work?

What?

R: Having trouble making change but still keeping the job? How did you do it?

I don't know. I did make change, but it took me a few minutes.

R: Talk a little bit about your living situation. In a boarding house, if I recall.

What's a boarding house?

R: It's a house where people who don't know each other to begin with rent rooms from the same landlord and share kitchen and bathroom and stuff.

That's not a boarding house. A boarding house has lots more people than two. This is more like an apartment. They usually make your bed and breakfast in a boarding house. This is more like an apartment.

R: Yeah, talk about how you manage this living situation?

I do. I'm out most of the time, I only usually go back there at night. I go to my mom's on the weekend.

R: Are you out this much because you don't like the person you share the apartment with, or some other reason?

Want to explore Toronto. Don't know all of it yet. Still have to walk on Liberty Street, like I did on De Grassi Street. (*Corrects my spelling. De Grassi Street is the name of a youth drama on TV, and I think Liberty Street has similar TV connections.*)

R: Okay. How about weekends with your mom?

I go there because she has a better TV than I do, so I can watch cartoons and stuff and I can watch whatever movies are on. And that's basically it.

R: And eat her food?

Yes, and eat her food.

R: And do you argue, still?

No.

R: Who else lives with your mom?

No one.

R: What about the brother?

Children's Aid. They've got him now for crown wardship for 6 months, and that just happened last month. I did manage to get to Massey Hall.

R: For the choral concert that you asked me about?

It wasn't choral. It's called Sounds of Toronto, just schools in Toronto. It would be good if they had Sounds of Toronto for the GTA, Scarborough is part of Toronto and so is Etobicoke and everything else that is in Toronto. You know what I found out a few days ago? I was looking in an atlas for Canada and the world, and I was looking at a thing for Quebec, and in the town where I grew up, just outside of Huntington is a town called Athelstan. And it's in the county of Huntington and Huntington town is the main town for that county and I just found that out. There's also a Chateaugay county and Chateaugay is the main town for that county, and I just found that out a few days ago.

R: Why is that interesting to you?

Because, I never knew that.

R: Can I go back to your family situation?

What family situation?

R: That your mom now has no one with her at home, that your brother is in CAS?

She hasn't had my brother since, oh, 1993.

R: Does it bother you or embarrass you or sadden you that your family has come apart like this?

No, because I don't know most of my family anyway.

R: When you first came to live with your mom at age 18 or 19...

No, 16.

R: Tell me how that felt to you.

Different. I didn't like it. Because she was still mean to me and nicer to my brother.

R: The brother that is now in care, that one?

Yes.

R: You said the last time we met, that you got her cut off welfare.

It wasn't welfare. I got her cut off mother's allowance.

R: Tell me about that. How? Why? Whatever.

Well, she was collecting for nobody so it was fraud so I just called one day and told them.

R: And what did they do?

Cut her off. Because they probably checked it out, if I was telling the truth or not.

R: Was she mad at you?

I don't know. I wasn't there.

R: But when you visit now, does it ever come up?

No.

R: How does she support herself now?

Welfare.

R: This is like pulling hen's teeth. Ever heard that expression?

No, first time.

R: What do you think it means?

Hen don't have teeth.

R: Right. So?

So? So what?

R: I mean that it's like trying to get a story from you when you don't think there's a story to be had. Hen don't have teeth, and you don't have a story. Yes?

It would take me weeks to think of something to say. It always does. I haven't been thinking of anything but Ontario Place opening up this Sunday. I'm going to be the first one there, hopefully.

R: But this surprises me, because when we met last time, you talked like a tap.

I don't remember what I said last time. I better read over my thing. That's if you wrote it down, which I think you did. I've had things to think about, people to see, places to go.

R: If your memory is unreliable, I might think that having your story written down would be good, so you could find it when you wanted it.

Only one long-term memory I've got is going to my first wedding. But I don't remember being there. I have the memory but I don't remember being there. I was 3 at the time. I was there but I don't remember it. My mother said I was there with her and there was a freak snow storm, which was impossible in the middle of summer. I was with the foster family at the time of my birthday party, so that's why I know I wasn't there, because I was at the party all morning and all afternoon.

R: So maybe you mom is mistaken?

Yes I think she is, or she's lying because it doesn't snow in the middle of August. The only kind of freak storms you get in the summer are rain, tornadoes, hurricanes, um, that's all I know. But you don't get snow. Too close to the sun for that.

R: Do you have any idea why you have this problem with your memory?

No.

R: Anybody ever given you an explanation?

No.

R: Ever asked anybody?

No.

R: Why not?

Don't know.

R: Because it seems to me that it might be reassuring or something to know why that part of you doesn't work like it does for other people. Am I all wet, here?

What does all wet here mean?

R: It means, does that make any sense?

No, not to me.

R: Okay. I'm worn out. I don't have any more questions to try and drag this story that isn't there, or that's under lock and key, out of you.

Maybe it's under lock and key, but it's not my doing.

R: Who's the villain?

Who knows? The unknown soldier, maybe. I wonder who the unknown soldier was?

R: Good question. Better than mine, yes? Your questions are better than mine. Or safer, maybe.

Hmmmm????? Very funny!

R: So (corrects my punctuation) anything else you want to have on the record?

No.

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**ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF PIANIST**

*We met in my home office on May 29, 1995.*

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND: Pianist suggested that we import the child welfare details from his questionnaire, as follows:

I'm unsure about the details, but I came into care when I was very little, in Quebec. I got put into a place at social service 'de Roger' when I was very little. I remember a particular foster family, with whom I still keep in touch; I left them at age 7 and went into a group home called 'Jamescroft in Montreal, and I stayed there for 4 years. I went to a hospital for awhile, and then to a unit at another hospital, but not to stay yet. I went into a place that I don't really like, a hospital sort of. I lived in a unit with teenagers, mostly, the youngest was 12 maybe, from Sept '88 to Sept '89. And then I moved into a foster family again, in Chateauguay, and stayed there Sept '89 to Nov 4/90. I went to an emergency foster home and I don't know how long I stayed there for, 2 weeks. I wish I would have stayed there longer, they were nice. Then I went to 'la Opera'. Actually I stayed there longest

of most of the residents. It was a place where you stayed if you had to go to court, but I wasn't there for that reason. I was only there for placement, but I stayed there longest of anybody I knew. Then I went to 'Crossbridge', which was open and closed custody place, had 2 closed custody units and the rest were open. I was in a closed one called D.A.R.A. (Decision to Accept Responsibility for your Actions). I was there for 2 years, til '92. 10 months, no choice, closed custody, because my friend got me into trouble. I went there for placement, and then I got into trouble and I had to stay. Then I asked to get transferred and it took a while. In March '92, I moved to 'Gordy Howe' (*a closed custody setting with psychiatric capacity*) in 'Mapleville', which is named after a hockey player for the Toronto Maple Leafs. I stayed there til Aug '92 and that's when I moved into 'Entry House' which is run by the 'Sam Hill' centre. And I left there in Jan '93 to move in with my mom. I was in Catholic Children's Aid when I was a kid but when I moved to Gordy Howe I was with Metro CAS because my mother hated CCAS (Catholic Children Aid's Society).

When I was 7, I was staying with my mother's friend for the night, she was baby-sitting me, and my aunt came to pick me up and she called the CCAS in Toronto. We lived in Toronto at the time. I was in some foster homes here, and then my old foster mother from Montreal asked me if I wanted to come back, and I said yes, so I got transferred. Feb 5/84 I stayed with my foster family for Christmas and then I went to Jamescroft.

### Q3. THE FORM

The beginning is...When I came back to Montreal at age 7, to the foster parents I knew from before.

The middle is...probably the first paragraph above.

The end is...can't tell. It's still going on, I'm still not used to living on my own yet, fully.

### Q4. LIST THE EVENTS:

1. Returning to care at 7, going back to Quebec
2. Time in Jamescroft
3. The hospital
4. The Chateauguay foster family
5. The cat incident and leaving the foster home
6. The emergency foster home
7. La Opera
8. Crossbridge/DARA
9. Gordy Howe closed custody
10. Entry House
11. Mom's place
12. Hostel
13. Moving into apartment

### Q5. Value the events:

1. Returning to care at 7, going back to Quebec: +3 because I liked going back to Quebec because I knew that place, and I didn't know Toronto.
2. Time in Jamescroft: I liked it sometimes because they were nice but I disliked it sometimes because they were mean, so that's why I ran away a whole bunch of times. They call the cops to find you, and I don't think you want to know what I did to one of the cop's computers in the station. I liked the positive part, what I did to the computer. Wonder how many files I dumped? Don't ask how I did it.

3. The hospital: -3. Didn't like it because just didn't like it. Some of the staff were nice, particularly one who took me to a movie every time he worked on the weekend. There were 2 staff I liked there. One was named 'Luigi', I don't know what nationality he was. And the other was named 'Bob'.

4. The Chateauguay foster family: +3 to a -3. Liked them until they accused me of doing something.

5. The cat incident and leaving the foster home: -3.

6. The emergency foster home: +2.5. Because I liked them. It was a nice quiet area. What town was that in? It was in 'St. Helene', I think, but I don't remember for sure.

7. La Opera: +2 because I think, therefore I am, that's my philosophy.

8. Crossbridge/DARA: liked it and disliked it. There was one staff I really liked there, because he brought me places, brought me to my first comic convention and I haven't been to one since. Because they don't have many in Toronto. Brought us swimming when we went into group on Sunday night. Brought us into movies. Didn't mind what we said when we got off property. We could start making jokes.

R: What did you dislike about it?

I didn't like Crossbridge so sometimes I'd act bad and get put in the quiet room, and sometimes I'd deface the quiet room.

9. Gordy Howe: didn't like it at all. There was no staff at all that I liked. Well, there was one staff I liked but he got hurt and had to be away from work.

10. Entry House: liked it, even though I got put into the quiet room a lot there too. Putting a 16-year-old in the quiet room! I was the second oldest there. The first oldest was 18, but they just deal with kids now, which is stupid I think. I go there to visit sometimes.

11. Mom's place: +1.5 Because she's got a good TV, better than the one she sold me. And she's going to get cable. And she's going to get a color TV, so I can watch cartoons in color. I was just there today, on the weekend. She made a bet with me that I couldn't stay up til 4:00, a \$10 bet, but she kept making up different rules so I said the bet was off. But I showed her, stayed up til the movie was over.

12. Hostel: +1.5. Because it was okay. On the weekend we got to stay up till 1:00. Had to be back by 1. And on weekends and holidays. And there was a person there who I used to hang around a lot and he got me, he was 23, into a you know, um, one of those, um, you know, those places, I'm not going to say it...

R: A strip joint?

Yes. I gotta go again this summer when I turn 19, because it will be legal age. Gotta go get my age of majority card, too.

13. Moving into apartment: +3. Because I finally got my own place.

Q6. 6-4-2-1:

1. Returning to care at 7, going back to Quebec
2. Time in Jamescroft
3. The hospital

4. The Chateauguay foster family
5. The cat incident and leaving the foster home
6. The emergency foster home
7. La Opera
8. Crossbridge/DARA
9. Gordy Howe
10. Placement house
11. Mom's place
12. Hostel
13. Moving into apartment

6 = 1, 2, 4, 6, 10, 11

4 = 1, 2, 4, 10

2 = 1, 2,

1 = 1

Q7. What does it mean? It means I didn't have a good life, like most people. Because I was moved around so much, I didn't get a chance to stay in one place for long, sometimes.

*Pianist attended the focus group but didn't make any contribution, nor did he seem to mix socially during lunch.*

## THE STORY OF RAQUAN

*I met with Raquan on May 11, 1995, in his room on the second floor of a new suburban home. His room, like the house, was very neat and nicely furnished. Raquan was particular that I take my shoes off at the door so as not to track dirt in. His landlord had been very protective of him in passing on my request to meet. They were not at home on this occasion.*

R: Start wherever you think it begins...

Started off when I was 16 years old. I started thinking about what am I gonna do when I finish high school, where am I going in life. And then I just realized that I have to take control of my future so I started to start meeting the right people that I have to know in order to proceed.

I was sort of leader of the pack, in a way, and sometimes I wasn't because I was influenced by others. It all depends on who was more, um, courageous, more outgoing, who wants to prove who's better. So I said I'm going to prove that I'm better so I can get ahead of all these people. So that I could proceed to get ahead and progress.

So last summer when I was with my 2 roommates in an apartment, that was the first time that I moved out, and I said that I was going to try to live on my own from my foster parents, because they were kinda trying to push me out of the place. Because I wasn't profit for them any more and they just wanted another kid, so that was when I first moved out. And I said that in order to be more independent, I have to move out on my own, I have to have my own rules, my own unique advanced train of thought, mostly reacting on what other people do and other people say, so that I would know what to do in those cases.

One of my goals were to finish more credits for school, but I didn't get that last semester, because when I moved away from the apartment, I was kind of angry at why my room-mates, Paul and Jim, stiffed me for like, rent and the phone bill and I had to find a place of my own. So that I had my own place, it was my headquarters, and I know what I'm doing, I can come home and know exactly what I have to do for the next day. Because I have to be the king of myself. I can't just live with others who are going to influence me and make me do something that I don't really want to do.

The reason for this is so that when I'm a step higher, I have better moves than them, and I'm going to basically come out the best person from all of this. I gotta think about my future and what's in it for me. I'm already planning ahead of what I should be thinking, like going to college already, working out how I'm going to budget when I get money, and trying to finish high school at the same time, is ahead of what I'm supposed to be doing. I just turned 19, so now people that I do hang around with, they think that since I'm 19, since I get to enjoy what adults get to enjoy, I must be a step higher because I get to stages like, quicker than them. But I have to think over sometimes what I do in order to make sure it's the right decision.

School is kinda tough. Like sometimes I'm persuaded not to go by my peers, and it's kinda hectic because most of the time like going to school, and the rest of the time they're out enjoying themselves and I get kinda jealous because they're doing something I'd like to do. So that's the reason why I skip sometimes, just to enjoy what others are enjoying. Because when I'm on my own, and I have no one to enjoy what I have, then I don't really feel like I'm enjoying it. I like to hear someone else's feedback instead of always just thinking of things on my own.

In the future I will be more productive in thoughts as I was in the past by completing my goals that I have already set, and making sure that I'm on my way to something better than I have now. For example, before when I was 12, I was already thinking about driving a car or having my driver's licence. But I didn't think I would get it that quick. But I held in through the years and it always stuck in my mind, and since I've always moved around, mostly my family, basically caught information

from different angles, from different view points, valuable information was all around me. I just needed to know how to record it and use it in a proper manner.

My grandma said to me that like she couldn't take it any more. She couldn't take my problems. Because I always had problems with shop-lifting. I was always getting fined, going to court for petty shop-lifting. Because I couldn't afford what I wanted so I stole it. She finally said, "You're going to go to Children's Aid. I'm just going to tell them to take you if you don't stop this." I persisted on stealing because I still didn't get what I needed or wanted. Then one day when I came home, the Children's Aid worker was over and they said that you're going to go to a foster home. And it's over, you're not living with your grandma anymore.

Right there I knew that I was away from my family, because my grandma was the biggest link to my family. Sure, I called her once in a while, but I just wanted just to make contact, to let them know that I was okay and no hard feelings.

When I was at the foster home, it was a whole different matter. I was sleeping in a room with someone else that I didn't know. I felt that I was away from home, away from my family, and now I'm finally on my own. Now I have to sort of make myself my own man. My mom died when I was 1, and my dad took me to Jamaica, and then I was passed around through the family so when I showed up at the foster home, I practically said, "This is just another move, but this time it's my turn to move." At first I wasn't keen on what was the purpose of me being there. I felt like I was sort of a prisoner. Because I was being practically owned by other people that I didn't know. Arguments happened here and there and finally I ran away.

I tried to contact an aunt of mine, for guidance. But instead she turned me in. She told them where I was. And I got captured by the foster dad. He brought me back to the house and I slept, because I was tired, because I was out all night the night I ran away. And I woke up in the morning they were saying, still, you gotta do this, you gotta do that. I just said, "No I'm not gonna do this, you gotta forget about me doing that. Like you don't own me. I don't really know you, so why am I going to do what you say?" They knew I was going to run away again, so they said, "Go ahead, run away, because it's raining outside. What are you going to do, run away in your pyjamas?" I said, "Sure, I'm not so scared as you think."

So I ran away. I went to Toronto, and then told Children's Aid, "I got to move from that place because it's getting too hectic there. I can't take how they're acting and we can't reach an agreement on anything."

My social worker agreed that it would be wise for me to move if I couldn't handle it there. But one twist: the foster parents told my social worker where I should be moving to. It was a group home in Braetown and at first when I moved in it was all nice, because the kids looked all happy at first. And I found out they get allowance and I was saying I want to get an allowance too. But there was staff and there was a point system for your daily progress.

The point system included behaviour, doing chores, going to school, basically that was it. There was levels; at level 1, you would just be confined to the house, you weren't able to go anywhere without staff. Level 2, you were able to go outside with permission, for example, go to the store or something, but not too far. Level 3, you would be able to sign out, stating what time you would be back, but before a curfew time like 10:00. Level 4, you had the freedom to do easy things such as use your clothing allowance to go buy your clothes, because you were trusted enough. Level 5, this is where you have been in level 4 for a month and now you're on independence, to the next side of the group home. For many, this was the first chance at independence. But there was still a limit on how far you could go. There was a supervisor, the supervisor of the other side. He was in charge of both sides, and he would be able to see that you succeed or fail at getting to the other side, where the independence was.

A week later, after, I was held at the group home because I had signed agreements saying that I liked where I was living, because I was persuaded by the way things looked. But later, I found out that the staff really didn't care what your needs are. They were really interested in what they were getting paid. Some of them were college placements, as part of their behaviour studying of individuals. There was a doctor, he said that I was already ahead of what I should be thinking because I wasn't like the other boys in the group home, and I knew this because I knew I shouldn't have been in a group home in the first place. I knew the reason why I was here was because of my foster parents decision on where I should go, not where my social worker thought was the most wise place for me to go.

The staff tried to act like they were your parents, but they weren't there when you were going crazy and you didn't know what to do. They kept changing so you wouldn't be able to attach to a certain staff. The head staff person, the supervisor, his name was Bob. He would always counsel the other staff members to not be sympathetic to the children. If you couldn't sleep, then they would just restrain you and bring you down to the basement and they used to lock you down in the basement. This group home was mostly just for delinquents that couldn't handle home life any more. Some were in for attempted murder. Some were in for as small as their parents had drug problems. But I was in because I was always shop-lifting.

At that moment, my family was thinking he practically went away to jail because they didn't see me any more. But I knew I had to get out of there, some way or the other. I tried to do it their way, through the point system, but just because one time I didn't want to do a favour for the supervisor, I was held back and others went before me. From then on, I just decided that I didn't want to go over to the other side, that it was just all part of a con game, putting hopes in your mind of going to the other side, but it's all just the same kind of prison.

My family contacted me at the group home, telling me that my aunt in New Jersey wanted to have me back to live with her. I remembered that she was the one that dropped me off in Canada after she took claim of me from my other aunt that was in New York. That was before...First my dad, then my aunt in New York, then my aunt in New Jersey, that's who I lived with for some odd years, I can't remember how many. I forgot about my dad's side of the family because I was living most of my life with my mom's side of the family. My aunt who was in New Jersey decided I should go on a summer trip to Canada to see my dad's side of the family, so for the first summer I saw them, and had a fun time. And then went back to New Jersey. Then the next summer came around, and my aunt decided that it was time for me to go again to Canada. So I came over to Canada again, where I was originally born, and by the time it was time for me to go back to New Jersey, my aunt said that she didn't want me no more, and I just saw it as just another hand-off sort of, to my family. But anyways, that was just to catch up on old memories that happened in the past.

She said that she wanted me and that she would provide for me instead of letting me live in the group home. I agreed and the group home and Children's Aid got my papers together to go across to the United States to live with my aunt. But when I got to the border, I didn't have the right papers, so I was rejected and I went back to the group home. I didn't feel so good, not being able to get out of the group home, because the supervisor was practically laughing at me, saying, "Ah ha, you're back". But at the next time I saw the owner of the group home, I had sort of sobered up to what I really wanted. Because I was persuaded by older kids of the group home that had moved to an independent program with a supervisor that I knew from before, who I had confidence on him guiding me where to go. Then the next staff meeting, the owner asked Children's Aid if I could be moved to that independent program, and this was great because I was finally getting higher in independence. This was a break from staff being on your back, signing out, signing in, curfew, being in a place (the group home) where whatever you had was always stolen, it wasn't around for long. There were 10 guys just trying to get at what you had, and each one of them had success at me, when I first came to the group home.

I was finally able to try to get a job, building my own social skills, knowing how to act in front of people, in front of my peers but mostly, at the time being, respectable adults. That's where I started thinking since I'm being around so many adults, more than people my age, I should start acting like an adult. Although I wasn't of age. I was in that independent program for about half a year, until I started arguing with someone who I had previously met in the group home. The owner of the program basically said, "He's been here longer, and you've just started being here. One of you has to leave if these arguments and personal battles don't stop." The battles continued, and the owner came back saying, "Okay, he has only this amount of time to finish the program, and you look like you don't know how to handle being in the program, so I'll just put you in a foster home, but it will be an independent foster home."

This was, like, a different place to be in, because I was living with a family, not like the first foster home family I was living with. They were Eastern European, and I was black, so what was I doing here now? I said to myself, what the hell, might as well get along because you've moved around so much you should know how to adapt to certain circumstances. So I just tried to start proving to my family that I was reliable, I was starting to teach myself how to be my own man. I told them of my goals, that I wanted to get a job. I wanted to finish school. Most of this information I was talking to my grandma about, because she was like the head connection of my family, and whatever I would say to her my family would know. Because I thought if I start to succeed, they will think different of me, rather than thinking of me as a thief. And that's when I started not stealing any more. I didn't see any point in it any more, because I was finally where I wanted to be, in a family environment where I would be able to depend on the foster parents for support, and get to know who they are and know their children, just so that I can improve my social skills, just a little bit more. Because when you're going to be on your own, you're going to have to know how to get along with different people.

Three years I was with them, and then my 18th birthday finally came around, and they said you can stay one more week, and then you have to move along because since we're not going to get supported, then we can't allow you to still stay at our place for free. They weren't necessarily greedy, they were just trying to say, you gotta go sometime and this is the time.

At first I thought they were gonna have more sympathy than this, but what could I expect? My social worker, my foster parents, and I already went over what was going to happen months before I was supposed to move out. I saved up just enough to move in with my former opponent at the independent program that I was in before I was at the foster home. And said, let's not fight anymore. We mutually agreed and stopped arguing to each other. I found out that he was now living on his own and he was independent, fully. I saw that since he was more likely to be a future room-mate than my friends at school, I decided to move out with him to an apartment, where I tasted another freedom. And that was to fully be on my own, no supervisor, no foster parents and no staff. I was budgeting on my own, because I learned that through that independence program that I was in, the stuff that I needed to know in order to operate in the future. I was going to school, making sure that I went to most of my classes, doing homework, and handling my money that I was receiving from Children's Aid.

It turned out not to be what I thought it would be, to move out on your own. Because my roommate turned around and stiffed me out of our place by siphoning money off me monthly because I didn't know how to write cheques. He was paying off his loans or payments for products that he received from various department stores. The landlord decided to kick us out because we had not paid some bit of rent, because of my room-mate's actions. Another mistake I had made because I assumed it was a wise decision to move out with this person before finding out who he really was.

Right now, I'm living in a 1-bedroom and it feels great, because no one is there to hassle me. I'm my own person. I have no parents who say you have to be home at this time, have a curfew or that.

So when my friends see me, I'm the one that's higher than them because I'm the independent one. They have to go home earlier than I do, or I can even say anything at all. I control what I want to do.

Whether or not if I want to go to school, I can decide on that, but recently I decided to stay in school, because in the future it is a wise choice, that should have been made in the past. Instead of thinking day to day where you are going to come out with money, you could go to school and learn how to get a job and work for money without worrying about the next day. That's what I'm looking for in the future. That's my goal that I have to strive to get, until I reach it.

But I realize that I have to finish my grades first, then try to go on to college. But I'm not all that rich as others. When I see them drive by, I feel like I want to drive that car. Because I don't have a car and they do, and I feel poor that way. But I just try to live day to day and try to be smarter, try to know what is better for me.

These are sort of mini-goals in my mind that I know I'm going to have to take care of. Although I'm getting some support from Children's Aid, I know since my parents aren't around and there's no one to sign their signature for a car loan or whatever, so I'm going to have to work reallllly hard to achieve what others can simply get because their parents are around. I'm not sure if there are many kids like me, with how I've been moved around so many times, and I'm not sure they have been as lucky, but so far I seem to run into luck wherever I can find it. So in the future, I'll probably get a job that I can work at, and receive more money so I could achieve that kind of goal, like have car insurance, or a car. Basically, I have to think ahead of everyone because others have people to think for them. I'm on my own, so that means that whatever is next comes from what I'm thinking. I just have to obey the modern law and try to see how to proceed in my success.

R: Let me just see if I have the sequence right: born in Canada, mom died at 1, taken to Jamaica by dad to live with him...

And then he said he couldn't provide for me, and that's when I went to New York and then New Jersey for quite some years.

R: When did grandma enter the scene?

Right after my last aunt, because she said next summer you'll go over and you won't be back.

R: So this is dad's mother?

Yes.

R: Why do you say that you have no parents when your dad is still living?

I feel that I have no parents because I haven't seen my dad for a long time, about 10 years.

R: Is he still in Jamaica?

My family really doesn't know where he is, and they're sort of worried. They hope that some day he will contact some one of our family because he's my grandma's favourite son. And she wants to see him before she passes on. I feel guilty that I don't know where he is, because I used to write him letters from when I was living in New Jersey, until I was living in Toronto. And then all of a sudden I stopped sending letters to him, because I wasn't that close any more.

R: So you were the tie that bound him with the rest of his family, and when you lost contact, they lost contact? Is that how you see it?

No. It was between my grandmother and him.

R: School: how close are you to getting your diploma?

Right now I have 23 credits (*30 are required for a high school diploma, usually achieved over 4 years*), and I'm working hard to get these next 4 credits from this semester, go to summer school this summer and go to co-op (*a work/study assignment*) next semester to finish school. I should also add that I've already hit two birds with one stone by taking co-op. I hope that when I choose the right field in co-op, I'm already choosing what I want to do in the future, so that's my starting point for my career.

R: Any idea what it might be?

Yes. Since I was a youth, I've always had abilities working with my hands, and my family always commented on how I seemed to fix things and that's what persuaded me to get into a field that has something to do with my hands, and that field is fixing computers. Or anything to do with computers, such as programming, setting up the data base for computer software.

R: Who do you consider your family, when you use that phrase? Who are they?

I consider my family those who give me the best advice and show interest in me and see that I have a chance to succeed if they give me a chance to prove myself.

R: So, your grandma, your New York aunt, your New Jersey aunt, anybody else?

I consider my last foster parents to be part of my family, although we had rough times. Not everyone gets along in the beginning. Also those who I have good memories of.

R: How much contact do you have with each of these people, day to day?

Contact is not day to day. It depends on how I feel. Because I have a certain principle of my own, "If they don't call you, why should you lift a finger to call them?" This is mostly what happens with some of my aunts that live in Toronto, because when I get around to call them, it's usually after awhile, because I have been waiting for them to call me, to show interest or if they care if I'm still around.

R: The ex-foster parents?

Since I moved, I haven't really gotten much time to see them. Only if I plan a day to go see them, will I be able to talk to them because I like to be formal with them. I have to work around their schedule, workwise.

R: I'd like your thoughts on an idea that people have offered, that the feeling of belonging, what I think you mean when you talk about your family, is more a state of mind than a matter of physical contact or even talking on the phone or whatever. Do you miss not having somebody like family to come home to after school, or when you're having a rough day, or whatever. Or is what you have patched together from your moving-around life enough for you for now?

R: In a word, I guess, are you lonely?

I'm not lonely from not having family contact as I did before. Because I have personally selected the people who I consider to offer the same qualities as a family. It's sort of like a surrogate family. But

when you move around enough, as I did, you can adapt, using the knowledge from previous experience.

R: So it's a skill you learned from your life?

Yes it is a skill that I learned, through all the places that I've been, from arguments from the past. It's all my previous experiences revised so that it benefits me.

R: Could you identify a particular time when you stopped being the kid that got passed around and became the youth...

that turned adult

R: yes, and took charge of where and with whom and how you lived?

I'm going to relate to the narrative, that I've said I first tasted freedom when I moved into the apartment with my room-mates. Because that was the only time that I was able to sign things for myself. I was my own guardian, no one else.

R: You said so many interesting things, that I'm wearing out following up on them. But the one was about choosing your previous enemy, opponent, you called him, as a roomy because your other friends wouldn't likely be available. Because they still lived with...

They were still younger.

R: Are most of your friends from regular families? Still going to school? Etc.

Yes, most of them are from regular families and are still going to school. That's how I met them, through school. That's why I decided to make sure I had a stable family environment too, so that I would be able to not be known as an outcast. I have a lot of friends, in fact, and most of them I knew since I was living with the last foster parents. I had no fear of telling them that I was in a foster home, because that was sort of the test for me to see if they were caring enough or they would just treat me like an enemy because I wasn't from the same situation as them.

R: You haven't mentioned your current landlord/lady. How would you describe your relationship with them?

I picked this apartment because they seemed like a nice couple that would understand what I was going through, like my friends. But unlike my friends, they are older and wiser and they know things that I'll need to know in the future, that I should get to know now. They're sort of, like, my parental advisors, suggesting their knowledge of what are the wisest moves.

R: And you haven't mentioned anything about girlfriends?

Okay. Um. Since I became independent, I have, like, a girlfriend that understands me, that's why I chose her. It's hard to find, like, someone of the opposite sex to like you because they're scared of you and you're scared of them. And they don't know who you are, but you're hoping they'll find out. If it wasn't for my budgeting, I wouldn't be able to "afford" to have a girlfriend. I was always joking about that, when some people said, "How come you don't have a girlfriend?" I always said, "I can't afford one." It is true, though, I have come to see. But I know she loves me although sometimes I can't afford to buy her things.

R: Anything else?

I'd like to add that most of my decision-making is generally from what I feel is right. For instance, my role model is my grandma and the reason being is because she has always given me the best advice and it always seems to work out in the end, using her advice. For example, I know a lot of people have heard this many many times from different places, and from different people: "Treat people like how you want to be treated. If you treat people bad, you'll get treated bad. If you treat them nice, then you'll receive the same." That's another principle that I keep on using because it gets me ahead.

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### **ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF RAQUAN**

*This meeting also took place at Raquan's home, on May 23, 1995. He was almost an hour late, but his landlord insisted that he had been delayed for a good reason and would arrive, and almost refused to take a note asking Raquan to contact me to arrange an alternate time. Raquan arrived out of breath: he'd forgotten that I was coming and had gone out with his friends after school, but raced home as soon as he remembered.*

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND

Q3. THE FORM:

The beginning is...that I keep thinking about getting to my goal, for my career. I have to get my credits, do the best that I can so that in the future, I just have the quickest way possible to reach my goal. When school enters my thoughts, I just think that's the key to my independence because if I keep on going, it will benefit me in the end. Because that's where my knowledge will come from, and in the end, that's what my career will be built on.

The middle is...trying to deal with my peers, because while I'm still planning, I have to plan to have some time of enjoyment, to enjoy life instead of having it just pass by. They're the ones that I enjoy my time with, if I need something, if I want to do something, they're there. If I'm just on my own, I have to plan it out myself. It's more fun having someone else to plan something with.

the end is...a lot has happened in my life time, more than what the average person my age can handle probably, and I've still got more adventures to take care of in the future, mostly what I outlined as my career goals.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS

1. Mom dying when I was 1
2. Dad taking me back to my paternal grandmother in Jamaica
3. My grandmother talking to me, relating to me
4. Moving to maternal grandmother in Jamaica
5. Moving to New York with (maternal) aunt
6. Moving to New Jersey with another (maternal) aunt
7. Moving to Canada with my paternal grandmother
8. Problems with shop-lifting
9. Moving to a foster home/ grandmother couldn't take it any more
10. First foster family
11. Running away
12. Self awareness; having to think about where I was going to move to if I ran away
13. The decision to put me in a group home

14. Making the statement to my social worker about staying in the group home
15. Family re-involved to initiate plan to move to aunt in New Jersey
16. Turned back at the border
17. Trying to move to another place
18. The "good" independence program; quitting shop-lifting
19. The last foster home
20. Turning 18 and having to leave
21. Choosing 'Paul' and 'Jim' as room-mates in apartment
22. Getting stiffed
23. Finding my own headquarters

#### 5. VALUE THE EVENTS

1. Mom dying when I was 1: -3 because I didn't grow up to have a mother, someone I could seek comfort in. Not being regular like all the other kids, because they had mothers and I didn't.
2. Dad taking me back to my paternal grandmother in Jamaica. 0 because it really didn't matter at that time. I was young. I didn't really know what was going on. Just that I was moving around every second. I didn't really get to meet who I moved in with, only if I stayed with them for a few years. Like my aunt in New Jersey.
3. Living with my grandmother: +2 because that's where I knew where my family was, felt closest to these relatives because I got to know my dad, more than my mom, and at that time he was a link with my true family.
4. Moving to maternal grandmother in Jamaica: 0 because I really didn't get to know her. She was a smoker and she really didn't do normal things that people would do, like walk around or enjoy life. She just sat around her house most of the time, and I was left on my own in my own world as a kid.

I left when I burned the house down. This was when the movie "Captain America" came out, about a comic super-hero that fought crime and bad guys. And I was watching it on TV and at that time, I used to like playing with fire, because the flame always caught my eye. My grandmother used to smoke DuMaurier's, she'd send me to the store to go buy them, and when she didn't have money, she sent me to tell them she'll pay them tomorrow, whatever. But she always had matches around, for her smoking. And just for a moment, I used to light up the matches and watch the flame, and I like to burn little things, sort of curious. And that day, that I was watching the movie, I went into a separate room where there were curtains, and I was playing around with the matches, by accident, the flame that I was making caught the curtain and it started to smoke and I just left the room, I don't know what's going on, and I just went back to watching the movie, and then the next thing I remember my grandmother coming in and trying to put out the fire, but she couldn't do it. The house got burnt down.

R: Was there a sense of loss of the "good grandmother" at that time?

Yeah, I remember how the whole family was there at my "good grandmother's" house. I seen all my cousins and I got to know all my aunts on my dad's side. We always had fun. I couldn't believe all of us could fit into her house, but we did. We got along well, although there were a few family squabbles.

5. Moving to New York with (maternal) aunt: -2 because I was separated from my dad's side of the family, which I grew up most of my life with, and now I was living with the other side of my family that I really didn't know, actually. They were different on my mom's side of the family, but I got to meet them just like how I met my dad's side of the family, by moving around. In a way I forgot all about my dad's side of the family and me and my cousins, because we lived in Jamaica for awhile

together, I still have memories of living in Kingston with my cousins.

6. Moving to New Jersey with another (maternal) aunt: +2. This is where I finally settled down rather than living in temporary place, temporary home. I lived with them for a couple of years, and I was just feeling like I was part of the family.

7. Moving to Canada with my paternal grandmother: -2. It felt like I was dropped off like a sack of potatoes, like I had no worth for the time being, because someone just decided not to have me around any more. That's when I started remembering about the other side of my family again. I started to get to know them, because there was no other family placement for me in the States.

8. Problems with shop-lifting: -3. This hindered my success in thinking of goals for the future, because every time that I got caught, I was always depressed about what the family was thinking I was, "a thief". That's why later on, I decided to quit.

9. Moving to a foster home/ grandmother couldn't take it any more: -1. I was separated from family that I just started to know and then I went into an environment that was totally different from the environment that was established by my family.

R: Was this foster family of Caribbean culture?

No, the dad was mulatto and his wife was white and their son was "half-breed" I guess.

R: Born in Canada or immigrated here? That family.

I don't doubt that they were not born in Canada, because of the way they talked. They didn't have an accent or anything like that. They seemed like the basic Canadian couple to me.

10. First foster family: This is one of those that I'm going to have to grade as positive in the beginning and then turned out to be negative in the end. The reason being was I knew them for quite some time, and then they assumed that I went to their room and stole something of theirs. That's why I decided that it was time for me to make a move. Move out of that foster home. I didn't want to be around people who thought I was only a criminal, or criminally-minded.

R: How strongly negative and positive?

Strongly positive in the beginning, +3, because they looked like a fun-loving couple that didn't mind having another adolescent around. Negativity balanced off as much as positivity, because when I first came there, it looked really nice to be in, but when I was accused of stealing something, I felt really negative, because that's what happens when something goes off-track. Decisions just totally flip.

11. Running away: 0. I just didn't know where to go at that time. I just wanted to break away from the rules. I couldn't handle the stress I was going through in that first foster home when they assumed that (I) stole something of theirs. The purpose of me running away at that time was when the foster parents decided that the cheque that I had worked all summer for, at a YMCA placement I got through a summer training program, WOW, would suffice for what I had stolen from them. They said it was a necklace he gave her; at the time to me it was just a scam for more money, because although they were supposed to be taking care of me, the foster dad took the clothing allowance I was getting monthly from CAS and used it to buy video games. I was too young at that time to know that I got assistance from CAS. I thought the foster parents were my legal guardians now and they were going to take care of me, but I guess I was wrong.

12. Realization of having to think about where I was going to move to if I ran away: -1. This was a

big decision that I had to make because I knew that the environment that I was in had to be changed. I couldn't stay in that routine or else I know I would have went crazy. There were other kids in the house a little bit older than me, in their later teens. They seemed like they adapted well to their environment because they were sort of brain-washed, in a way, by the foster parents. Basically the foster dad allowed you to be out in the community as long as you wanted because he was going to go out somewhere and he didn't want us to be in the house when he was gone.

13. The decision to put me in a group home: -1. I wasn't really happy that my social worker decided to follow what the foster parents told him, where the wisest place for me to move is.

14. Making the statement to my social worker about staying in the group home: This was actually a "sweet deal" that went sour. Moments after I had agreed to live at the group home, I found out it wasn't as good a place as I had thought it was in the beginning. It was like a mirage at first, then turned nightmare. Looks can be deceiving.

15. Family re-involved to initiate plan to move to aunt in New Jersey: +3. I thought I was going to be separated from the group home type of system and be on my way to living with my family again, since now it was vice versa. I now knew my paternal grandmother and her family and I had forgotten about my mother's side of the family. So, I wanted to live with them and remember who they were and what part they played in my life.

16. Turned back at the border: -2. As soon as I got turned back at the border and knew I was going back to the group home, I said to myself, "I know things are going to work out better than this. My life just can't go down-hill from now on." And that's when I reached back to the group home, and the owner said I could move to the independent program. So that was the instance where it was negative at first but I knew it was just going to turn out in my favour.

18. The "good" independence program; quitting shop-lifting: +3. When I showed up, it was just like the group home except there was less kids and you didn't have a point system, no signing in or signing out, but coming in at a respectable time. Before 1:00 at least. The staff only consisted of an older gentleman who was the supervisor. He lived in a room of his own in the house. We lived in separate rooms -- there was about 4 guys. We all took part in the daily routine of cooking, buying groceries, household necessities, etc. This is where I first learned how to budget. It was stimulating to me the way how you could know exactly how much money you're going to have and how much you could spend, instead of just scraping money together each day and not being organized.

19. The last foster home: +2. At first we had our ups and downs because we didn't know exactly how each person was like. Their knowledge of me was basically gathered from the reports sent by the group homes. In a way they always thought I was a...not mean, but criminally minded, because at the group home the point system was like a psychological outline of your character. When they saw different reports, they were cautious, but I knew how to handle myself well in a family environment. They just had to give me a chance to prove myself. Over the years, we began to understand each other and we just had more fun times, did things that at first we were cautious to do in the beginning. For instance, at first I was always in my room, not really socializing with the family. Then later I became more tame, in a way, and decided to participate in family activities like celebrating holidays or just going out on family outings, say to go pick apples. I just wanted to have a sense of what family life is.

20. Turning 18 and having to leave: +2. When I turned 18, I had already talked in the preceding months about where am I going to move to, how much do I think rent is going to be, how you're going to budget your money so that you could be independent. Leaving their home I felt like it was my home too, because I had been with them approximately three years. I thought they were going to give me more time than a week, but after that week was up, they gave me an ultimatum to stay with them and pay rent or to just move out on your own. And I decided to move out on my own,

because I didn't want to still have some of the hassles I had with them if I was going to be renting from them.

R: Just to clarify: because you were going to be paying rent in any case, you thought you'd rather have total freedom than to continue as a family member?

Yeah...I thought that moving out on my own would prove if I could be on my own totally, instead of making mistakes and having someone around to correct them.

21. Choosing Paul and Jim as room-mates in apartment: +2. I didn't really pick them for long-term room-mates, because I knew one of them wasn't too sure about being independent, and the other didn't really seem like the type of person that I would like to move in with. At the time, I was thinking just to go to school, and these two looked like they were going to do the same thing, so I perceived it as a wise decision at the time being. Because they were the same age as me, and I was thinking the same things too.

R: But you seemed to be suggesting in your story that you didn't really have a lot of options to choose among, that you didn't know many people who were ...

in the same situation as I was, moving around. Moving out to be independent.

R: Just seems to me that we sometimes talk as if you could choose anyone you wanted, but in fact the pool of people to choose from was quite small, and had in it people who also had difficult life experiences.

Not necessarily difficult life experiences. Just different perceptions than what I had. Different goals. While I was thinking of my own goals that would get me ahead, they were just the closest options for me to pick to move out, because my school friends weren't of age.

R: Did you ever consider living by yourself?

Yes, I did.

R: But at the very first moving out, could you have imagined living by yourself alone?

No I couldn't imagine that. It would mean no contact, basically, with anyone that I know. I would have to go to see someone far off. It would in a way screw up my social life, because I would just be seen by myself, not with anyone else. Now, that's a different story. I enjoy being by myself because I am a separate individual rather than everyone knowing everyone. When someone says my name, it's not sort of pertaining to everyone else, it's just me only, as the individual.

22. Getting stiffed: -3. I felt, How could this happen to me? I thought everything was going to go right when I chose my past opponent to become room-mate with me at the apartment. Because he seemed like a person that you could trust. But like a viper, he had a poisonous bite that you weren't aware of.

23. Finding my own headquarters: +3. This was a great idea. The reason why I'm living in the 1-bedroom apartment right now is because living by yourself, you don't have to worry about people around you because there is no one unless you choose to be around those people that you want to get acquainted with. You're less vulnerable to bad influence. "Don't join the crowd." Plus, unlike the apartment, you don't have to pick up after anyone but yourself. You have a chance to progress at your own rate, or just watch life pass by you.

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. Mom dying when I was 1
2. Dad taking me back to my paternal grandmother in Jamaica
3. My grandmother talking to me, relating to me
4. Moving to maternal grandmother in Jamaica
5. Moving to New York with (maternal) aunt
6. Moving to New Jersey with another (maternal) aunt
7. Moving to Canada with my paternal grandmother
8. Problems with shop-lifting
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19. The last foster home
20. Turning 18 and having to leave
21. Choosing Paul and Jim as room-mates in apartment
22. Getting stiffed
23. Finding my own headquarters

6 = 6, 8, 10, 17, 20, 23

4 = 20, 8, 23, 17

2 = 20, 8

1 = 8, Problems with shop-lifting

R: I gotta ask you how you understand why you shop-lifted all those years, and then stopped. You talk in the story about not being able to afford what you wanted or needed, but I wondered if there were two parts to that, material need, clothes or stuff, and emotional need, like belonging as a matter of right rather than being pleasing enough to the particular care-givers of the time.

What do you mean by particular care-givers?

R: Whoever was caring for you, family or foster people or whoever.

There was material need, more than there was emotional need. Because other people had things that I didn't have, and it seemed hopeless at the time being because my relatives really didn't want to get a job to work, because they said I was too young, but I wanted to get a job to afford things. But later on, when I got older I had a job working at a fast-food restaurant plus I was getting an allowance, so I just decided why am I going to steal a simple little thing when I could afford it. It would be more civilized than just hoping to possess something for nothing.

R: But you also said that you look with "lust" on cars now. So what stops you now from stealing something that you want, could convince yourself you need, but have little realistic hope of affording for quite a while. Why don't you steal now?

I don't want to steal now because I know I could work out a plan, I could find a way to save up money to possess what's just beyond my grasp. Sure, it will take some time, but when you go through that sort of time-wasting period, you know you will reach your goal eventually and it's very

rewarding in the end, sort of like finding a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

R: And one final question about sequence and timing, because your life is very confusing to someone from outside. So what age were you at these various times?

Like 18 to 15, second foster home. 15 to 14 1/2, "good" independence program. 14 1/2 to 12 1/2 in the group home. 12 1/2 to 12 in the first foster home. 12 to 10 with grandma. 10 to 6 with the New Jersey aunt. 6 to 5+ with the New York aunt. A bit more than 5 to 4 with paternal grandma and dad and family. 4 when with maternal grandmother. From 3 or a bit more to 1 with other paternal relatives in Jamaica.

*(All these times are retrieved using TV programs as cues, from Jamaica where there was one channel only, to more elsewhere and later.)*

Q7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

This story is basically how life was for me when I first was beginning to understand what you need to do to get ahead, either hinder or success in life. This is a true story, because it is my life, the way how it happened, what I had to go through. So anybody that reads/hears this story can relate to it because it does contain certain aspects of becoming independent.

*When I called to invite Raquan to the focus group, his landlady said that he had 'gotten in a bit of a scrape' and no longer lived there.*

## THE STORY OF SPIRIT

*Spirit met with me on April 11, 1995, in my home office. His living situation had ended so I could not initiate contact; nevertheless, he was very diligent about making and changing appointments. He seemed always to be accompanied by friends, but after the first appointment, they didn't come into the house. He was under pressure (from probation?) to enroll in school, and I referred him to a local support program for young people leaving care.*

I'm not sure where to start...Like I have no clue where to start. Give me an idea.

R: Start at wherever this story begins for you, when the change from being someone else's responsibility to being on your own began to happen...

Okay, do I have to start when I was, say okay, when I just got into care?

R: If you want to...

Really I have no idea of what to say. Okay I have a question. Is whatever I'm going to say, you're going to type on the thing?

R: Yeah.

Okay...I think my foster parents when they took me in their foster home, they take up a big responsibility. By having me there. Because I give a lot of trouble. And when I just got there, the foster home that is, I pretend that I was the sweetest person there is. And I didn't give no trouble for a long while. Because I was trying to change. Just to change for them, but not for me. And I found out after a while that it didn't work. So I began going back being my normal self. Started giving trouble, coming in when I'm not supposed to. And fighting. Got suspended from school. Starting to tell lies about where I am when I'm not there. Until I got kicked out of the foster home. That's for the first time.

Then I went to live with my aunt and uncle in Maintown. When I went there, I started doing the same thing. Started skipping school, tell lies, don't listen to whatever they say to me. Then one day I run away from home. And I didn't come back until about 5 days later. Then I went to school after that, and the next day my worker came to school and get me. He brought me back to the same foster home that I was at. And I started being all nice to the foster parents again. Because I promised myself that I would change for the foster parents and for me also. And I tried doing that for a long while. So I started doing what I used to do, being my whole self.

And that's when they decided they had had enough of me. And they told me any time I go out again, and stay out and don't call to let them know where I am, or if I don't come in at the time they tell me to come in at, they gonna kick me out of the foster home. So I guess I made the decision to listen to them or do what I wanted to do.

So I went to roller skating when I was supposed to be grounded. And they said if I went to roller skating I wouldn't come back to the house, I would just come for my clothes and leave. And then I think roller skating was better than the decision that I had to make, which was either stay or go to roller skating. So I went, and I slept at my friend's house the same night. And then the next day, I told his mother what happened, and she said I could stay there. And I went to pick up my clothes over by my foster house, and I brought them back to my friend's house.

When I was at my friend's house, we were able to go out and come in at a reasonable time. Then everywhere I'm going, it was always me and my friend. So we started going out and staying out later and later until my friend's mother said we had to stop doing that. And we did stop doing it for

awhile. Until I started going out and sleeping out at night. Spending the weekends out and nobody know where I'm at.

(Sigh) So she told me she do not appreciate me going out and coming in as I please, because her kids are not doing that. I should call and let her know where I'm at. And I started doing that sometime when I go out. And sometime I don't bother. So I went away on a weekend and I did not let her know where I was at. And when I got back, she told me to call her at work, or I should say left a message that I should call her at work. And I called and she said she was worried about where I was at because she didn't know what happened to me. And I went away and didn't tell her where I was, so she thinks the best thing for me to do is go and live where I was at for the weekend. So I didn't say anything to her, I just said, "Okay, that's what I'll do."

So I went to my cousin's house and I told him what happened. So he said I should sleep over for the night and I slept over there that night. And I went back to my friend's house the next day. That time he was staying with his girlfriend and his girlfriend said she was not allowed for us to stay there, only one person, either me or her boyfriend. So we decided if I wasn't going to stay, he's not going to stay either. So we went away to find a place to stay for the night. And my other friend said I could stay there. And I sleep over my friend's for a couple of nights. And then one night I went to sleep at my cousin's girlfriend's house and then my cousin moved in with his girlfriend (because before they weren't living together, but lived separate places). And so my cousin said I could stay with them until I get things straightened out.

And I stayed there and called my aunt in Florida and I explained to her what happened. And she said for me to go to the agency and see if I could get a plane ticket to take the next plane from Toronto to Florida. And that's what I did. There was no available flight, so I had to look about the other options. So I called the train company and the bus company and I found out that the train fare was cheaper. And I bought myself a train ticket and I left on a train for Florida. It took me 3 days to get there on the train. I left here on a Thursday, that was March 30th of '93. And it was also on my birthday. I guess that was my birthday present. Takes a day from there to New York. When I got to New York, I had no place to go because the train was going to stay overnight until the next day it started again. So when I got to New York City, I called my aunt from there in Florida because someone was supposed to pick me up at the bus station. But they didn't show up. Because the bus station was too far away from where they lived. So she decided that I should rent a hotel that night. And that's what I did. And I went to get something to eat and I have some problems with the money. Because I didn't have enough money on me to pay for the room. So we talked to the hotel manager about the money and he said she could fax him the cheque in the morning. And he said okay then and let me stay overnight and fax him a cheque in the morning. And she would fax some extra money for me to buy whatever I want on the train. So the fax got in late and I had to catch the train so I had to left all the money at the hotel. And that was it for New York.

And I board the train, I was on my way to Miami. And I slept and I woke up and I started sleeping again and then I finally reached the train station in Miami. When I got there I called my aunt but she was at work. I said for her husband and my cousins to come and pick me up. So I waited there until they came. I went back home with them and I got kinda lonely when I was there because I left all my friends here. So I called my friend, but the phone bill was kinda expensive to call back and forth. So I stopped calling my friends and I only called my girlfriend. And I also write her sometimes. So I decided that I want to come back.

So that's what I did, and I'm here now. When I came back, I lived with my cousin again. (Long silence)

Then we lived there for about 6 months and then we moved. My cousin and his girlfriend broke up but my cousin was still living with her. And they always fight. And whenever they fight, they always put me in the middle. Expecting me to take sides. I always end up staying out of it. So her mother

decided that if my cousin going to stay there, and they broke up, he cannot have any other woman staying there. So my cousin decided that he was going to move out. So he said for me to move with my other cousin, and he'll go live with the girl he's dating right now. That girl is also pregnant for him. So that's what we did.

And I didn't like the idea. I went and stay with my cousin for a couple days and I saw how his girlfriend was, so I decided that I wasn't going to stay there and I moved in with my friend. Then when I moved in with him, I decided that I'm gonna try and make something out of my life. So I promised my girlfriend that before she turn 16, I'll buy her a car so she won't have to walk wherever she's going. And that's what I did. And then I started getting in trouble with the law again. And (big sigh, long silence)

Basically that's about it for right now.

R: This last move that you describe is since we met a couple of months ago, yes? And the trouble with the law is also recent???

Yeah, that's recent.

R: Would you care to talk a bit about what kind of trouble, how it was different than earlier trouble with the law?

Okay. Sure. I got in an accident. My car got out of control and hit a fence. And then I couldn't get the car out of the fence because it was stuck. And then I jacked up the car and drove the car off the jack and I got it out of the hole that it was stuck in. And then I parked the car and went back to fix the man's fence, and then the cops came when I was fixing the fence. And the man started telling them things that wasn't true. And then I got mad and jumped in the car and drove away. And they came after me and then I stopped. I get out of the car, the cop drove the car straight into me and hit me. And he hand-cuffed me and he searched me and they took away the car keys from me. And the girls that was in the car went and called my friend and they came and was talking to the cops. And they brought me to the police station and said that the reason why they arrested me was I didn't have any identification. And they said that after they identify me, they going to charge me with a couple of charges and they did that and sent my car to the pound. So I went to my friend's house the same night and we were all there, joking about the accident. And then my car was in the pound about 3 days, and then I went for it yesterday, that was on the 10th of April.

And when I got back with the car, the cops were searching the neighborhood, watching to see us driving the car because we weren't supposed to drive it. And we just went and park the car, and went away to my friend's house. And then last night when I came back, my friend and his sister were fighting and she went and called the cops on him, and he came for me and my friend. And they kicked me out of the house and told my friend that he had to leave or else they're going to arrest him. And my friend went outside and he started running, and I run him down, and they started running after us. We had to hide from them. And then when we came back, they were across the street hiding from us so that we couldn't see them, I guess they were waiting for us. But we saw them before they saw us and we turned back. This is what we did for about 2-3 hours, and then we ran back to the house. And then his sister decided that she still didn't want him there and she went back and called the cops and they came again and said he had to leave. And he said he wasn't going to, but they said that if he doesn't leave, they're going to charge him with trespassing. But he said they can't because he's paying rent also, but his sister said no, she's the only one who's paying rent there. He's paying rent for a room upstairs in the same building. And then the girlfriend told the cop to call the landlord and see if he's really paying rent there, and so they called the landlord and she said yes and they said okay, then I guess he can stay there and they try to work out their differences. And that's what happened, he stayed and the cops went away and we all went to bed. When I was there I got about 4 hours sleep.

And then I heard the door knock and my friend told me to put on my clothes because the cops are looking for me. So I put on my clothes and went out and they started asking me questions. They wanted to know if I saw a friend of mine because they heard that a person was staying with me. And I told them no. Last time I saw that person was on Sunday. And then I told them that probably that person was at their friend's house. So they said okay and they left. Said if I have any information or I saw the person, I should call them. Basically, that's what happened from that time until now.

R: How did you manage to get this car? Did you buy it or get it some other way?

Truly, yes I did buy the car.

R: Where did you get the money? Because last time you said you only had what money your cousin gave you.

Oh, my friend lend me the money and I said I would work and pay him back the money whenever I have it. And that's what I did. And sometimes I work and give him the money that I have.

R: Can I ask some questions about further back, when you first came to Canada. When, with who, etc.

It was in 1990. And I came up with my three sisters. One, my older sister and my sister that is the same age that I am, and my other sister that is younger. We all are the same father, but the three girls of the same mother.

R: Did you come to the care of somebody here? With your sisters.

Yes I did. My father was the one who sent for us. When we got here we and him didn't get along, so we all moved out and left him.

R: Did they come into care too?

Right now my little sister is in England, my other sister is living in Alexborough, the one that is the same age as I am. And the older one now is living in Maintown.

R: Do you see them at all? Would you consider living with them?

Well, I don't see them until once in a while. My little sister from the time I leave the house, I never seen. Neither have I seen my bigger sister. The one the same age as I am I saw her sometime because she live in the same neighborhood as I used to live in. Would I consider living with them? No not really, because we didn't grow up together, I just know them for awhile.

R: Would you ever consider going back to Jamaica? To your mother--is she there???-- Or someone else?

Oh yes, she is there. And about going back to Jamaica, it all depends what you mean when you say going back. If you mean going back to live, no I wouldn't, but if you mean going back to visit, I would consider it.

R: Why would you...

Because it's a very nice country. And beside that's where I grow up, spend most of my life.

R: But why would you not return to stay?

Because I have a lot of friends over here, and I find life much easier over here.

R: In what way?

And if I go back I'd have to make new friends.

R: In what way is life easier here? It sounds a bit hard to me, as you describe it.

Well, I'm the type of person that likes to do things on my own. I'm not the type that like when people do things for me and then say I'm the reason why you have this or whatever, if it wasn't for me you wouldn't have whatever. I like to do things on my own. So if I make mistakes, I learn on my own. And so far, I think I'm doing pretty good.

R: What are you most satisfied with, of your accomplishments?

Um. So far, my education. And the fact that I'm getting around staying out of trouble, I least I say try to stay out of trouble, and I have something to show, to say that I earned something of my own, without anybody helping me. Or I should say, any family members helping me.

R: It seems that the friends you've made are more important to you, or maybe more useful, than your family? Is that so?

No, not exactly. I wouldn't consider having a family, really, because I never really grow up with any. I always moving around. It's hard for me to say I spent time with my family, because I always live in with different people.

R: Even in Jamaica?

Yes. Most of all in Jamaica, I didn't really stay with my close family.

R: Who did you stay with? What kind of connections?

When I was smaller, I stayed with my mother for about 6 years, from when I was born to when I was 6, 7 years old. And then I stayed with my grandmother's husband, second husband, that is. Until I'm about 10. And then after I moved and I stayed with my mother again. Stayed there until I'm about 12, 13, and I moved with my aunt. And then I stayed with my aunt until I'm 14. Then when I was turning 15, I came to Canada to stay with my dad. And we didn't get along, so I didn't stay with him for long. I went to the foster parents I stayed with.

R: At the beginning of this story, you talked about being good as a change. So when you were in Jamaica, moving around, were you in trouble quite a lot?

Actually, no I wasn't. I got in a little bit of trouble, but just little small things like probably staying out or I got in fights or those things.

R: Did you live in a big city? Kingston? Or in the country?

When I was small I was in Kingston, when I was a baby. Then I left to live with my mother in the country. Then we left to live with my step-grandfather in another country, then I went back to live with my mother in the city. And then I moved to Kingston, which is a pretty big city, to live with my aunt.

R: So you've pretty much always been a wandering man. Do you think you will ever settle down?

Well, yes I think I'll settle down pretty soon. Just as soon as I get a good job. Because right now me and my girlfriend plan to settle down and make a family.

R: How old is she?

16.

R: Okay, that's all I have for today. Have you anything else you want to say?

No, not really.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF SPIRIT**

*This meeting took place on April 18, 1995, in my home office.*

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND

R: I'd like for you to tell for the story about your girlfriend, what you were telling me after we stopped scribing last session.

That's fine. Okay. She's a very loving person, to start with. And I love her a lot. And I been with her for almost two years now. And it's kind of funny when I met her. I didn't like her at first. Because she was being all rude to me. And then after a while when I get to know her, I started falling in love with her. So she has been a very special part of my life because I always move around and she's always there whenever I need her, I know where to find her and how to get ahold of her. And whenever I get into trouble, most of the time she tries to look at it from my point of view. She's always given me advice and she changed my life completely, I could say.

R: How did you first meet her?

Well, I was at a party with a girl which was my girlfriend at the time, and she left to go home early, and my friends started talking to this girl and I decided to join in and do the same thing. So that's what I did. Started talking to her, asking her her name, her age and so on. And at the time, I didn't really want to go out with her because of the age difference also, but when I got settled down with her, it comes to me that age ain't nothing but a number. She's a bit more than 3 years younger than me.

R: What do her parents think about your relationship?

Well, her mother at first did have a problem with it, because she thinks I'm too old for her. And then she kinda learned to deal with it after a while. And after she started talking to me and find out that I'm not such a bad person after all, she welcomed me to her house and to her family. For her dad, I really don't know what to think, because at first when he used to hear about me, he didn't like me then. Plus he thought his daughter was too young to have a relationship. But from I met him, I haven't heard anything about it after that. He's always talking nice to me, and does the same thing as her mother does, I should say, because he always says hi to me and talks nice to me, so from my point of view, I guess he likes me.

R: You said they were Jamaican, but your girlfriend was born in Canada. And they live in Hamilton. Right?

No, not exactly. Her dad lives in Toronto, at (*a tough part of town*). And her mother lives in Hamilton with her step-dad.

R: And she lives in Hamilton with her mom?

Yes.

So which father is this that you described? Her father or her step-father?

The one that I was talking about is her real father. But from I met her step-father, he's been nice to me from then until now, so I guess he likes me, doesn't have no problem with me.

And I mentioned earlier on that she changed my life. I was looking forward for you to ask me a question right there, but I guess you didn't.

R: What question should I have asked?

How did she change your life?

R: How did she change your life?

Okay. When I met her, I used to run around with the wrong set of people, get into trouble with the law, smoking, drinking, selling drugs. Selling guns. And she found out that I was in love with her, so she said if I love her I should promise her this one thing, that I'll put down the guns and stop doing drugs and try to change just for her. And I said okay, I'd try my best. I'm not promising or anything, but I'll try my best. And she said to me that's all she's asking of me. And I stopped doing all those things that I used to do. For more than one reasons.

R: What other reasons?

Well, first to start with, I stayed out of trouble. Second, as a younger person, I didn't expect her to come up with such a thing. I would figure that she would want me to promise to buy her a ring or something like that. So when she came up with something like that, it really surprised me, so I decided that I would give it a try and see if life would be better. And then after I started doing it, I started drinking less and I get rid of the guns and stopped doing drugs. And when I start doing it, I thought I would be worse off than I was before, and in a way I was, actually, because a lot of times I stayed home, having no money, and when I wanted to go places, sometimes I don't have money to take the bus. Where before that, I used to have money. So when Christmas comes, sometimes I don't have the money to buy her things, but it didn't really matter to her. I guess that's because she's not a materialistic person.

R: But now I have to ask about this car, that you said you got for her. Why would you do that, or why would she want that, if she's not materialistic? Plus, I have to use my imagination about what kind of work you will have to do to buy the car: not likely legal, I'd guess.

Well, she is not the one who asked me to get the car, to start with. I decided that I want to give her something that I didn't have, which was the easy living. And the second question: not really. Because the way I got the money for the car, I could get it done, pay it back, in a year's time.

R: Okay. But I still don't understand how you are making money, because the first time we met, in the questionnaire, you said you had no source of income, not even welfare. So has that changed?

No. Um. I got a job between that time, so I do it sometimes, and sometimes I don't. But whenever I do it, I give the money to my friend whatever it is, and he pays like \$200 each time I work. So some months I get even \$600, like usually \$200-300 per week.

R: Can I ask what kind of work? You don't have to answer if you don't want to.

Okay. Um. It's factory work. You make carpets and sometime you pack, sometime I count or whatever they give me to do. It's all different types of thing. And I find it all easy, too, so it's not a problem.

R: Well, I have to say that I have been very impressed with how reliable you have been in making and keeping these appointments, even when there have been a lot of changes and worry in your life. So I can see that if someone would give you a job, I would think you would be a good worker.

R: I have one more question about your girlfriend and her family and their influence on your life. Do you think that the fact that she is part of what sounds like a fairly together and solid family is why she can be "solid" for you and give you such mature advice? And do you think that her family, in addition to her, have any direct influence on you, like recognizing, as you said, that you're not a bad guy.

Okay. Um. About the fact that she has a nice family and all. It's kinda hard to say, because she like to have her own way a lot of times, and she don't get along with her mother sometimes for that, because she wants to have her own way and her mother won't let her. So as for me now, I think that I should let her have her own way, I think that's my responsibility to let her have the things that she want, or try to get her whenever she wants to stay out late or whatever. Because when I ask her mother, she lets her stay out with me if she knows that she's going to be home on time. And sometimes we both have the same trouble with families, so as an older person now, and her boyfriend, I think it's my job to try and lead her in the right way. Because she's saying that she wants to leave home, and I've leave home a very long time and I wish I had a home to go back to, or a parent I could ask to do something for me, now, so I say to her she should try and stay in her parents' house as long as she can.

R: So now you're giving her good advice, when she's about the age you were when she gave you good advice.

Yup.

R: Okay, that was long, but thank you for filling that in. I think it is important information.

Q3. THE FORM:

It's kinda hard, though, because it's kinda complicated to figure out which part goes where.

R: Let me ask: where do you think the story about you coming to be on your own starts?

Right after I left my foster home, and then she (girlfriend) will fit right in there after that, right in around there. Because right after I left the foster home, she has been there for me, right up until now, when I was going through all that.

R: The middle?

I guess that would be what happen when I was at my friend's house. So that's part of this (first) part and part of that (today's).

R: The end?

I don't think it ends. I think it continues, because I haven't died yet. And I think it continues until I die. So if there's gonna be a book, there's gotta be another part.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS:

1. Being able to keep her as my girlfriend for so long
2. Be able to survive on my own
3. The car
4. Trying to stay away from the drugs and all of that
5. Trying to put on an act for the foster parents
6. The trip through New York to Miami
7. Coming to Canada
8. Going back to foster parents the second time

Q5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

1. Being able to keep my girlfriend for so long: +3 because she's good-looking and a lot of guys would like to have a girl like that. And she's very understanding when I'm going through all of that trouble when I was living with my guardian, my friend's mother.

2. Be able to survive on my own: +3. Because I always wanted to do that, wanted to go when I pleased, come when I pleased and not get into trouble for it. The 0 in that would be that I had nobody to help me, even though I said that I don't like people to do things for me. There's a lot of times that I wish that I had somebody's help or advice about what to do. And the negative part about it is that I end up losing my family.

3. The car: first I have to start off with that was one of my goals, something that I want to reach for and I end up doing it, so I kinda feel proud of myself for doing it. The 0 about it now is that it takes a lot of money out of me. The negative 3 would be instead of me having fun, I ended up getting in trouble with the law because of the car.

R: Can I ask a question about that? Did they charge you for driving without a licence? You said identification, and I realized later that I didn't know for sure what you meant.

Yeah, they did actually charge me with that. And for insurance also. The funny thing about it is that it will be easy for me to get my licence, because I can remember all the questions in the 365 (*the written test that must be passed before one can take a driving test for a licence*) in about 5 minutes time.

R: What about driving experience?

I'm a very good driver, from my point of view and others. From my point of view, I don't think it takes a licence to drive. It only takes skill and experience to drive.

4. Trying to stay away from the drugs and all of that: I don't know where to start off with this one. Positive 3 would be that I reached my goal, I guess, and my goal was to try and fulfil my promise that I made to my girlfriend, to not do all of those stuff, or try not to do all of those stuff. The negative part of it now would be that there is no money when I need it most of the time, and those

type of things.

R: Can I ask you to give some details about what kind of drugs you were using, selling, whatever. And a bit about the guns, too, for people like me who have to use their imagination and might make mistakes in understanding correctly.

Okay. Drugs, first. Different types. Selling. Marijuana, crack and coke, heroin. That's about it. The only one I used though was the weed, smoking and get high. Guns? Well, I never really used a gun for my reason yet, I never really used the guns. I just buy them and sell them. I always thought they would come in handy some day, if I get in a fight or something. So in other words, there would be a day come when I would have to use it.

R: Are we talking big-time deals here, or smaller deals in the community? And did you work by yourself, or as part of a network?

Okay. I don't know how to say because I never really...I guess it would be business, part-time business, I would guess. Sorta on my own, because I do my own thing. When I sell it, I keep the money for myself. Or if I get someone to sell it for me, I give them part of the money.

R: So are you the top of the business, the middle, or the bottom?

Well, I guess I'd be the middle.

R: Was this new to you when you came to Canada, or did you have related experience at home?

No, it was all new to me when I get here.

R: And which was the most important part of your trade, drugs or guns?

Do you mean which one you get more money off? To me, you get more money from guns, because if you sell one, you could get \$600-800, but if you sell a dime, that's \$10, so you have to sell a whole lot. But I didn't have a lot to do with the money, I just use it to buy food or clothes or jewelry or whatever, and then I end up just giving it away. I never gave thought to put any away for the future, so I could use it for a car and so on.

R: Was selling guns that much more risky than selling drugs, for the difference in profit?

Well, no, selling guns wasn't as risky as selling drugs. Because you get more customers for drugs, and you always be thinking if it's undercover or someone trying to set you up or whatever.

R: Did you ever get charged for drug or gun-related activity?

No, I never did. But then I thought I could do anything and get away with it, but I guess I was wrong. Because I sell a lot of that stuff and I haven't got caught and nobody said anything to the police.

R: Did you have other kinds of charges?

Yeah, I had possession over. That was something I hadn't done, I was just in a stolen car. I didn't steal it, but I decided to take the risk of going for a ride in it, and I got pulled over and charged with driving it. And I got in a fight one time and I got charged for assault. But then again, that was dropped. That's it.

5. Trying to put on an act for the foster parents: the lesson that I learned from that is that it is

always better to be yourself. If someone doesn't accept you for what you are, you go your way and they go theirs. There will be someone who will accept you for what you are. Because when the person do get to know you, it's not going to be very nice.

6. The trip through New York to Miami: the positive part was that I was moving away, far, and get to spend a lot of time by myself. And the middle, now, was that I have to leave all my friends and go. The negative part was I had to leave my girlfriend over here and all my friends. My friends and my girlfriend play a very important part in my life and I kinda feel when I have to leave them. My best friend since I've been in Canada, 'Brando', plays a very important part in my life. Whenever I move anywhere, he always has my number and we always get ahold of one another. Even when I was in Miami, he called me long distance and I really appreciated that. And even now, if I need money, he'll give it to me, or borrow it if he has to. Or if I have car problems, he'll come and look at it and try to figure out something.

R: Is he your age, or older?

Yeah, he's my age.

R: I wanted to ask about your cousin that you lived with; was he important to you, and/or in what way?

Well, he was important. And he is important to me. Because I look up to him as an older person and as my cousin. Because he did things for me that other members of my family didn't do, or didn't want to do. Trying to help me to get an education, trying to lead me in the right direction.

7. Coming to Canada: I didn't want to leave my aunt and my mother, that was part of why I didn't want to leave. And the middle part about it was, I guess, kinda excited that I was going to another country because I never been to another country before. But not really, because I was leaving my family, the family I never had. The positive part is that I was leaving to make something out of my life, so I was told, and to see if I could help others in the future.

R: Can I ask a question about how the decision was made for you to come. Did you have any input?

Well, yes I did. It's not like I have much of a choice, but then again, back there you don't need much of a choice. Because if you have the chance to go, anybody that has a chance to go to Canada or America, you really look forward to going.

R: Another question: do you feel obligated to make something of yourself in order to help out in the future? Do you think you owe anybody anything, and if so who/what?

Okay. I don't think I have to do that, but as a Jamaican, at least speaking from my point of view, what most Jamaicans do is try to make something out of their life and help others.

R: So, no personal obligation, but a cultural expectation?

From my point of view, yes.

8. Going back to foster parents the second time: okay, um. It was very nice knowing that I was going back, but it was even nicer when I knew that I was going back to the same foster parents, because I was very close to them and they liked me. But when I knew I was going back to the same foster home, it made me feel even better because I would be going back to the same set of kids and the same family as before.

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. Being able to keep my girlfriend for so long
2. Be able to survive on my own
3. The car
4. Trying to stay away from the drugs and all of that
5. Trying to put on an act for the foster parents
6. The trip through New York to Miami
7. Coming to Canada
8. Going back to foster parents the second time

6 = 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7

4 = 1, 2, 4, 7

2 = 1, 7

1 = 1

7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Well, it's about a person that like to be on their own. And trying to make something out of their life. And as a Jamaican, help other members of his family.

*Spirit called by my house a few days after the focus group to pick up his copy of the photograph of himself. In November, he called from an adult detention centre, to ask if I could post \$2500 bail for him. He didn't mention what the charges against him were. I regretfully declined but offered to arrange for legal services that were sympathetic to youth in/from child welfare to contact him. He planned to ask his old foster parents if they would post bail. They later called me to say they'd also declined, and to ask if I knew what the outcome was. I don't.*

## THE STORY OF STEVE

*I met Steve the first time on July 12, 1995, in his bachelor flat in a run-down house renovated into a series of flats, in 'Autotown'. It was sparsely furnished but reasonably clean and comfortable, looking out on a main thoroughfare, within walking distance of downtown.*

Well I went into Children's Aid when I was 9. I was there for 6 months, then I went back to my mom, and then it didn't work out, so I went back into care. Then my mom had a decision to either I come back to her, or go to a foster home, if she's not ready. And she wasn't ready for me to come back to live with her, so I went into a foster home. I was in a foster home for...I went into a foster home when I was around 11, and I moved out of the foster home when I was 13, and I was in Halcion Youth Services. I lived at a group home for 1 year, and then I went to another group home that was in Halcion Youth Services, because the people that were in the group home were more or less my age, and I wasn't fitting into the group home that I was in before. So I lived in the group home called Halcion Allanville for 4 years until I was 17 1/2. And then I moved out, when I was 17 1/2.

I moved out on my own in July 15th of 1994. I had some problems starting out. Because being on my own, and me being responsible for myself and my own actions, it kind of went to my head, so I made wrong decisions sometimes. Like, one of them was deciding to go to school. I didn't. My attendance was very bad.

And I also hanged out with the wrong crowd. I got into trouble with the law. It was the night actually, that I got out of the group home. I didn't know anybody, so I went to the group home I used to be in, which was in Autotown (which is where my apartment is). Me and two guys, we went out. It was about 11:00, and we were walking around, looking at cars to steal. We found one and one of the guys broke into the car and started the car up with a screwdriver. Then he pulled out of the driveway, went down a block, pulled into a parking lot. And me and the other guy got into the car and we took off. We drove around for about 15 minutes and then we pulled into this parking lot where there was a building and we were planing on taking another car because the car we had was almost out of gas. Ten minutes went by and a car pulled up about 100 feet away from us and then turned off its lights. We thought it was a police car, like an under-cover car, so we jumped a wall. We stood there for awhile. Then one of us went up to see if the car was still there, and it was. So we got into the car again and we tried to start it. Then the car turned on its lights and came into the driveway, and another car was behind it. We saw the cars coming, so we got out of the car, jumped over the wall again, and ran into the woods. We came out to Rosalind Street, and we saw a cop car go by, and we started walking normally and the cop car went by us to the apartment building where we were moments later. Then we walked home and that was it for the night.

The next day, I went to the group home where one of the kids that stole the car was at and one of the staff talked to me, and he asked me what happened last night. I said, "Nothing happened last night." Then he told me what one of the guys told him, that we went out and we stole a car and went joy riding and were chased by the police. Then I said I didn't know the car was stolen, which I really did know the car was stolen. And then the staff said "I'm going to have to report it to the police." Then he called the police and reported it to the police and about half an hour later, the police came and asked me a couple of questions and then I was arrested and I was taken down to the police station where they made a report. I called my lawyer and I talked to him and he said not to say anything and I said okay. Then I wrote out this form and I signed it and the form said that I promised to appear at the station to get fingerprints. And then I left. I went back to the group home and the guy that told the staff was not there. I was really mad that he went and blabbed his mouth off, and I was wanting to beat him up. So I just hanged around with the staff that I'm very good friends with, from the other group home that I was at, and we rented a movie. I told him what happened that night and the day after. He was disappointed because it was my first night on my own, and I already got in trouble with the law. After that, we watched the movie. Then after the movie was finished, I went home and went to bed. The next day, I was supposed to wake up at

9:00, so one of the staff could come pick me up and I'd go visit the group home, which was Halcion Allenville. And I told him that the police were at my door yesterday morning asking if one of the guys that stole the car lived in this building, and I said no. And the staff said that his wife was driving by that morning and she saw a police car in the driveway. And I told him that was the reason why the police were there. So I went to the group home and I didn't tell them anything else because I thought I could get away with it still by saying I didn't know the car was stolen. A week later, after I got a lawyer, I told him that I did know the car was stolen.

Then I went to court, numerous of times, and I got a year's probation and 50 hours community service. And I was told if I ever got in trouble with the law again, and I was guilty of the crime, then I would go to (*an adult*) jail for 6 months and I would have to pay \$1000 fine. Pretty rough, eh? So I did my community hours and I'm almost finished my year's probation. And I haven't gotten into trouble with the law since that incident. That's it.

R: Can I ask some questions just to clarify my understanding?

R: So the sequence was that you were alone in your new apartment and went to the Autotown group home, met up with the guys, stole the car and all that, then went back home, and the next morning the cops were at your door?

Yeah.

R: And you said the person they were asking for didn't live there. And then they went away, and you went back over to the group home and was sort of tricked by the staff into admitting that there was something about a car, but that you didn't know it was stolen.

Yeah.

R: And that's when you learned that the guy who was waiting with you to join the guy that stole the car was bragging to the staff?

Yeah.

R: And then staff told you they'd have to report your part in this, and you went to the station and got charged, etc.

R: Did the other guys also get charged?

Yes, but they were charged numerous of times before, so they got more serious charges. I think they got detention or jail or something.

R: So that was your first week living on your own. How have you found the rest of the year?

You mean after this whole thing?

R: Yes.

I had a hard time getting by on my own. But I always got by, barely.

R: What was hard, or hardest?

Being on your own, like, you know, being in charge of yourself. Going out, deciding what is right and what is wrong, trying to find the right crowd to hang out with, and not making dumb decisions. And

learning how to manage your money. I guess that's it.

R: Tell me the story about the kitten, for the record.

Well, I got a cat. It was still very young. I had it for a week and a half before it died.

R: Why did you get the cat in the first place?

I wanted to have a pet while I was home. So it wasn't, like, lonely.

R: And when it died, how did you feel?

I was very upset. I didn't know what to do. So I went over to one of my friends and told him about it.

R: How did it die?

It plays around on the chairs and the table, and one of the chairs was almost broken and I guess the chair fell down while it was playing up there, and the cat broke its leg. It didn't move around a lot because of the pain, so I tried to keep the cat from moving around a lot, so I put the litter box very close to where it was and its food and water, and I thought that would help. I didn't have any money to take it to the vet, so there was nothing I could do. It didn't eat for a few days. I went out and when I came back, it was there lying on the floor and I thought it was just sleeping. Then I went back and it didn't move or anything, so I checked if it was breathing, which it wasn't. So that's when I thought it was dead. I went over to my friends and I told him what happened. They told me not to feel guilty because things like this happen sometimes. They asked me how long has it been away from its family or whatever. I said, "Not long, about a week and a half." And they said "Did it eat anything?" And I told them it didn't eat for two or three days, and that I tried to hand feed it, which was very hard, very hard! They told me that it sounds like the cat went through a stage called distemper, and they told me to put it in a box, then put the box in a garbage bag and put it out on the porch till tomorrow, and then call the Humane Society and then tell them what happened and ask them to come and pick it up. The next day, I did what my friends told me to do. Then they came and picked it up, and then they left. I called in a week to see the real reason why it died, and they said it had a broken leg and it died from not eating and stuff like that.

R: Talk a bit about what has been helpful, what or who, has been helpful to you over this past year on your own?

It's hard making ends meet, but I'm lucky that I have people that care about me. Like the people that are at 'St. Paul's Kitchen' and at the group homes, my probation officer, my mom, my social worker, and my group worker. And the friends that I've met over the past year.

R: Where did you find these friends?

I met them at St. Paul's Kitchen. Mostly all of them I've met there, because I've worked there a lot. Because it's hard to make money last, so when I have no food left, I go to the St. Paul's Kitchen and I volunteer and I get a meal after I finish volunteering. And they give me a little bit of food that's left over that day.

R: How did you first learn about St. Paul's Kitchen?

My probation officer sent me there to do my community hours.

R: Could you give a few more specifics about the kind of friends you've made there, how

they've been helpful personally?

Friends to hang out with. I've got some advice from them about certain amount of things. And problems I had over the past year.

R: You mentioned a few specifically. The guy who helped you with your bike?

Fix my bike, yeah.

R: And the guy who reads your tarot cards?

Yeah.

R: And who else?

I have a friend who's teaching me how to play guitar a bit. And the friends that I have here, they have friends and I was meeting them too, so I have a lot more friends now than when I started off on my own.

R: Could you talk just a bit more about how the decision was made for you to leave the group home and move into your own place, and how you found the place, and stuff like that. The decision-making part, in particular.

Well, it was time that I left the group home. I got some help with how to find an apartment, and then I talked to the people that owned the place and told them that I would like to move in. And they asked how I would get the money, and I told them that I was in long-term care with CAS, and they said okay.

R: So did anybody take you around looking at places?

No, I did it myself.

R: And why did you decide on Autotown?

Because one of the staff told me the farther you go away from Toronto, the cheaper it is for apartments.

R: You're anticipating making another move in the next week or so. How is this time different?

Because I've already done it once. Plus I'm also getting help from my lawyer, which makes it a little bit easier.

R: What do you think you've learned about what is important to you in your living space over the past year?

What's important? My own personal space. People I can talk to.

R: Somebody to eat with? Cook for you? Keep the place clean?

Yeah, I guess so.

R: Changing subjects a bit. You mentioned your mom as one of your supports. How often do you see her, and how would you describe the support she gives you?

Since I've been on my own, I've only seen her once. Because it's very expensive to get down to where she lives. It costs about \$120. And sometimes I can't afford it. Relationship, well, someone to talk to when I'm at her house about the problems I am having, just to get another suggestion on my problems.

R: Do you have any other family that you keep in touch with?

No, I just keep in touch with my mom and my brothers, but not a lot because of the cost.

R: Are your brothers in care?

One of them used to be in care, but he got adopted to my grandparents just like my brother that was born before me, but he was not in care. And my mom has two brothers who live with her, who is 12 and 6.

R: I don't think you've said anything about the circumstances around you coming into care, and I wonder if that has a part in this story about being the responsibility of someone else, the early stage of this journey?

R: Some kids think that they started being on their own when they left their family, because the CAS didn't take care of them the same way as a family might. So some kids talk about leaving their family as well as leaving CAS when they talk about the process of coming to be on your own. I'd be interested to hear, if you think that has a part to play in your story.

Yes, because I was sad when I left my mom. And the group homes I was in with Halcion Youth Services, I was sad to leave there too, because it was like a family to me too, like the staff. Because I've been in Halcion Youth Services for 6 years. That's why the staff were like family to me. As well as my mom and my brothers.

R: Did you have unpleasant experiences in care? Some kids have bad feelings about their care experience, but you seem quite positive.

Yes, I do.

R: So being in care for you was basically good, and people were good to you.

Yes, because I had no one to teach me to be polite, to manage my temper, and to teach me how to play sports, etc. When no one else taught me stuff like that.

R: Could you say a word about the future, what you see at the end of this journey of change, the transition?

I think the journey never ends for some people because you learn new things, you meet new people. And you try to be successful in life because if you get married and have kids, you want their life to be better than what your life was.

R: So a good outcome of this journey for you would be...What?

A better future for your family, if you get one.

R: You got any specific plans in that direction? A girlfriend in the wings?

Not yet. I'm still young. I'm just trying to get through school first, before anything else. That's my

first problem to solve.

R: And how close are you to that?

I'm pretty close. Just have to get my butt to school.

R: That might be easier in your new place.

Yeah.

R: Anything else?

I think we've covered everything.

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### **ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF STEVE**

*My next meeting with Steve took place early in the morning of August 20, 1995, at his new apartment, which was on the second floor of a small strip mall. The door to the stairway was locked and had no doorbell. When I sounded the car horn, a man came to the window and said that Steve wasn't there, that he was downtown last night and had met a lady and wouldn't likely be home anytime soon. As we spoke, Steve came running up the street and we met in the living room of the apartment. His room-mate, while going through his getting-up routine, was quite interested in what we were doing and interjected a few times, and talked non-stop while I was printing the transcript. Steve had not slept the previous night and kept dozing off while being interviewed.*

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND

R: You've moved since we met last. Would you put the details on the record?

I moved in with my friend who helped me fix my bike. We share an apartment. I changed my mind about the other place I was thinking about, which was living with a lady who rents rooms, and cooks for the people she rents to.

R: What influenced your decision?

I know 'Greg'. He's good friends. Plus I had no curfew, living here. And I have my own personal space. Plus, he's helped me a lot of times, and I just thought I could do him a favour because he wouldn't have to pay so much in rent, and I wouldn't have to pay so much in rent.

Q3. THE FORM:

The beginning is...When I went into care, that would be the beginning.

The middle is...Roughly when I went from the first group home to the group home in Allenville.  
The end would be....When I got here.

R: Or maybe it's a story that hasn't yet ended?

Yeah.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS:

1. Coming into care
2. Living in the first group home
3. Moving to the Allenville group home
4. Finding my own apartment
5. Stealing the car the first night
6. Doing community service/meeting St. Paul's Kitchen people
7. Getting a kitten and it dying
8. Having trouble with my landlord
9. Moving to this apartment

Q5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

1. Coming into care: at the time it was -3, but over time +2. Because...It's got my life together. It taught me how to control my temper, be well-mannered, etc.

R: The -3?

Because I didn't like it. I didn't want to go. It made me feel like my mom didn't want me.

R: And as you came to feel valued and loved within the care system, that feeling of being rejected or unloved by your mother went away?

Yeah.

2. Living in the first group home: 0 - because I didn't care, it didn't bother me.

R: But you didn't like it either?

No.

R: So I would understand that what was important to you at the time was that you were away from your home, and where you were was of no importance?

Yeah.

3. Moving to the Allenville group home: + 3. It was weird at first but after I got to know everybody, I got to like it. Plus we played a lot of sports and that's why I liked being there.

4. Finding my own apartment: it was good at the start, I didn't mind it and I liked it because I was going to be living out on my own. +2.

R: Was there a piece about feeling rejected by the Allenville group home staff?

No.

R: A bit of loneliness?

Yeah.

5. Stealing the car the first night: -3 because I got caught the next day.

R: So if you hadn't gotten caught?

A zero, I guess.

R: Why do you think that you got involved in criminal activity your very first night on your own?

Because I didn't have anybody...I was bored in my apartment and didn't know anybody, so I just went over there and got into trouble.

R: Okay, but you'd been at that group home before, and knew these guys for quite a while, and yet never gotten into trouble with them before. So why that night?

I knew them a bit, but didn't know them that well. Just got in the wrong crowd and did something dumb.

R: So none of your old "good" friends were available?

I just didn't do it.

R: No sense of "Screw it, they've chucked me out and I'll show them!"? Because here you are, never in trouble before, and never in trouble again, and only on your first night on your own do you seek out and carry on with criminal friends. So I want to know how to understand that.

I just felt like doing something like that. I thought it would be fun to do.

R: So some sense that that kind of adventure was what guys do when they live on their own in the community, yeah?

Yeah.

6. Doing community service/meeting St. Paul's Kitchen people: +3 because the more people you know the better off you are.

R: Would you have made their acquaintance if you hadn't been sent there for community service?

No. Well, depends. I'll say no because I wouldn't have learned about it as early.

7. Getting a kitten and it dying: -3 because it was my first cat and I failed in trying to have it be okay, take care of it so it doesn't get hurt and anything.

R: Was there anything positive in that experience? Did you learn something new or important from it?

Having it was good company. Taking care of it and stuff like that made me feel good about myself. It made me feel like I had some responsibility, something to take care of besides myself.

R: Knowing now that you were not to blame for the kitten dying, would you see yourself getting another pet?

Yeah. I guess so.

8. Having trouble with my landlord: 0 in between because it helps me understand things in life so if anybody else has trouble I can help them out. But bad because it's bad to go through. If I had to do it again, I wouldn't want to go through that.

R: What you do differently if you had it to do again?

Pay most of my rent. That's the main problem.

R: And how would you do that?

By using the money I have in my chequing account to pay my rent. I guess that's the only way I could do it.

R: Do you think you'll have any difficulties in this new place?

No, I don't think so, because I know what I have to do so I don't get into that kind of trouble.

R: Does it make any difference that you have a room-mate?

Yeah, because he's older than me and he knows more about life than I do and I'll be able to learn from him.

R: Do you pay rent to him, or do both of you pay to the landlord?

We both pay rent to the landlord. Or, either of us could give our money to the other who would give it to the landlord.

R: Did he live here before, and you moved in?

Yeah. Kinda.

9. Moving to this apartment: +3 because I got my life back. I'm back on track.

Q6. 6-4-2-1:

1. Coming into care
2. Living in the first group home
3. Moving to the Allenville group home
4. Finding my own apartment
5. Stealing the car the first night
6. Doing community service/meeting St. Paul's Kitchen people
7. Getting a kitten and it dying
8. Having trouble with my landlord
9. Moving to this apartment

6 = 3, 6, 9, 1, 4, 8

4 = 3, 9, 4, 1

2 = 9, 3

1 = 9

Q7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? There are a lot of things that I had to go through in life and I'm glad I had people around to help me get through tough times and guide me in the right direction. And give me good advice when I need it.

*Steve arrived at the focus discussion group five minutes before it ended, and asked if he could give his part to me individually over lunch so as to qualify to receive his \$20. I declined. He said he needed the \$20 in order to get back home to Autotown, as he'd transformed his bus fare into money and spent it. His room-mate Greg had been hospitalized in a psychiatric unit, after not having passed rent money on to the landlord, and Steve was evicted and living "with friends", more or less on the street. His extended care agreement was being discontinued because he hadn't followed through on his commitments.*

## THE STORY OF STEVEN

*I met Steven in his shared living accommodations on August 17, 1995. He quite proudly showed me around the house, and a vegetable and flower garden that he and the adult mentor in the home had made from scratch in the back yard, and introduced me to his room-mates. Although we met in the living room, Steven's room-mates were respectful of our privacy.*

I guess the start of it would be when I left my group home in 'Hillside'.

R: I'm interested in how you think about the things that happened in your life as you made or are making the transition from being the responsibility of someone else to being your own responsibility, being responsible for yourself, I mean. Like, what happened and what did you make of what happened????

So basically you want my life story? I don't know where to begin.

R: Maybe think about when you first felt like your life was basically your problem to solve...

I never felt like that. I've always had help with my problems.

R: So maybe talk about who or what was helpful...

Helpful in which way?

R: Whatever.

You gotta tell me exactly what you want to hear.

R: I don't know what I want to hear. I want to hear what you have to say about how you are solving the challenge of growing up and being on your own.

I'm just kind of taking it day by day. You can't really, I don't think you can just make the thing happen, the transaction, eventually it just comes.

R: So mostly it feels like life happens to you, but are there things that you do or others do that influences how life happens??? Or, talk about what life has happened to you.

Lots of things have happened to me.

R: Some kids do tell the story of their lives, starting from way back. There's no rule that that is what you have to do, but you can if you want.

You want me to start waay back? Okay. My dad left my mom when I was really small, maybe 5 or 6. I went to live with one of my mom's friends and we lived in a really rough neighborhood in Toronto. My parents are both idiots. My mom was just stupid, she had the brain of a friggin' 2-year-old. My dad was an alcoholic. My mom basically used to starve us to death. My dad was a real dick, he used to hit me. With a hammer once. Used to pick me up by my feet and slam my head on the ground. Used to punch me, slap me, kick me, everything. Like, I turned into a little idiot and stopped going to school, stealing all the time. I hooked up with a foster brother that used to live with us and he kinda got me into crime.

And then I went to a group home.

(*This part added later.*) I went to ABC, where I was sexually assaulted. I brought it up to my social

worker, but that was later, and nothing happened. I was about 8 years old. What happened was I ran away, went to where the big (*hydro*) power lines were, climbed to the top and almost had my hand around the wire, threatened to fry my brains out. And then after awhile they coaxed me down and we got back to the group home and they told me to get changed into pyjamas. I refused and they came in and stripped me of my clothes and dressed me in pajamas, which was a form of sexual assault. They're not allowed to dress you or undress you in any way.

And then King's Rd (*group home*), maybe for 2 months, and then I ran away. I was supposed to go to Hillside, didn't want to go so I ran away to my dad's. Police came and got me and took me to an overnight shelter. And then a couple days later they came and got me and took me to Hillside. Then I got out of Hillside, went to 'Blue Lodge', that was the last one. There's more, though, I know, I just can't think of them. I was in a lot.

The second group home, Hillside, was alright, it was probably the best one I was in. It still had its ups and downs, though. I stayed in that group home for 4 years, maybe a little over. And some pretty rough times I had. I kinda went nuts in that group home. Used to fight every day. Never went to school. Used to punch out the staff. That's where I got into smoking cigarettes. It was a rough 4 years. Some times were good. Probably that's where I learned to control my anger. When I was little, someone just had to look at me wrong and I would punch them in the mouth. Now, it takes a while before I get mad enough to do something like that.

Um...Now when I left Hillside and I went to Blue Lodge. I couldn't stand that place. The staff were just totally dicks. Kids were idiots. And then I got into a fight one night when I was there and they kicked me out. And then I went to live with my sister and my dad and my sister and my dad and my sister for a couple months at least, switching back and forth. And then I moved into the place I'm in now and I'm still presently living there. It's a pretty good place there. No one bugs you. Basically you're your own boss. Like living with a couple of roommates.

R: Is it time for me to ask questions?

I think so.

R: Okay. Your sister. Did she also come into care?

No. One of them did.

R: Okay. I'm trying to get a picture in my mind about your relationship with your family during the time you were in care.

It wasn't really a good one, not between my mom and me. I always hated my mom and I still do.

R: The stuff you described before you left your family makes it sound like your dad was the bad guy. So how come you hate your mother more?

I don't know. My mom just, I just can't be around her the way she acts, talks, just everything drives me flipping mental. I can't stand the bitch. Me and my dad get along a lot better now. Me and my sister got him to stop drinking. He thinks it gave him an ulcer, so we let him think what he wants, although beer has never been proven to give an ulcer. Let him think what he wants. Me and my sister encouraged him the rest of the way to stop drinking. And he hasn't had a drink for over a year now. And I'm proud of him and my sister is proud of him, and he's proud of himself. He used to drink 24-7 (*24 hours a day, 7 days a week*).

R: Is this the sister who wasn't in care?

Yeah. The one in care I can't stand either. She's fucking half nuts.

My relationship with my sister is better than when I was a kid. We used to kick the shit out of each other every day. She used to kick me in the head with steel-toe Docs. She was crazy.

R: Is this the older sister or the one in care?

The older one. She took my crutches from me one day, when my leg was broken, and beat me up. Man, beating up a handicapped person.

R: The picture I'm getting is that your younger life was filled with violence on all fronts.

Big time. Violence every day. Used to watch my dad fight all the time with his friends. I used to fight all the time. My sister used to fight all the time. Me and my dad used to fight together.

R: Where was your mom in all that violence?

My mom lived in a different neighborhood. And they never got a divorce.

R: How old were you when...

When this stuff was going on? About between the ages of 7 and maybe 11, between group homes and stuff, when staying with my dad for the weekend.

R: So let me be clear about this. Your folks separated when you were 7?

No, younger, 5 or 6.

R: And you came into care

when I was 7.

R: And you continued weekend visits throughout?

Yeah. Hardly ever went to school, though. Didn't stay in school. Just sitting in a classroom drove me nuts. I grew up pretty fast. I had to. I felt that I was more mature than all the other kids and just being around them made me sick. I don't like being around immature people for some reason. Everyone in group homes I find grows up really fast.

R: So are you saying that you were responsible for yourself when you were just a little kid?

No. But I never listened to my mom. Me and my foster brother used to sneak out of the house around between 2 and 3 every morning and used, in the wintertime, throw snowballs at the cop cars, raid people' garages. Used to steal fishing tackle, beer bottles, cars, stereos, everything. Used to rip off the Toronto Sun boxes, take the money out. Take the papers and give them to our friends, I don't know why.

R: Were you ever involved with the court system?

Ever charged? Yeah, couple times. For mischief. And for auto theft. Almost got charged with arson, but that was my friend. He was lighting a fire on a roof and I was there. So I got charged with mischief, and he went to jail. And then when he got out, the fucker wouldn't leave me alone. Broke into my house, beat up people on my street, like older people. He was a real dick. Jail really screwed him up. The last I heard of him, he was back in jail for killing someone, something like

that. Don't need his company anyways. More fun on my own.

R: So school was never a go for you?

Never. Couldn't stand school.

R: So how much education would you say you have?

Grade 8, grade 9.

R: Is that a problem when it comes to getting work?

It hasn't been. I know I have to go back eventually and get my grade 12.

R: But you see your immediate future as working.

Yeah. Don't want to be no welfare bum. My mom was on family assistance, and when I grow up, I don't want my kids on no welfare. We went a week eating potatoes one time. Nothing but potatoes. Potatoes and ketchup. Potatoes and mustard. Potatoes and mayonnaise. Potatoes and tarter sauce. Potatoes and relish. Potatoes and anything you can find. My sister even did potatoes and sugar. Anything you want to put on it, you go right ahead.

R: So you were real poor when you were a kid?

I don't think it was a matter of poor, I think it was our mom just didn't know how to manage money. Our house was always dirty. I don't know why my mom was like that. Because my sister right now is on family assistance because her husband is not working, and she does fine with it.

R: Did your mom drink?

Nah, she couldn't handle her liquor. She was a wimp.

R: Do you have a thing with liquor?

Can't stand liquor. Hate it. Destroys your life. Some people get hooked too fast. I think I might so I don't even try it. Just on special occasions, I'll have a couple of beer. I've got drunk before. Puked all over my dad's girlfriend's place. I enjoyed that, though: she's a bitch.

R: What about your relationships with girls?

I haven't really been interested in girls. Too much of my life I've been interested in other things. I'm not gay, but...

R: no girls yet?

No, don't want to be bothered with them. When I'm ready, I'll go out looking, but I'm not ready for the hassles yet. Just the way my sister and her boyfriend go on, it drives me nuts. If I had to go through what my sister's boyfriend goes through, I think I'd kill her.

R: But you like living with room-mates?

Yeah. They're all pretty good. I live with a Newfie and 2 Jamaicans and an Irishman. Quite the mix. And a Bluenoser; I'm the Bluenoser.

R: Nova Scotian, right?

Yeah.

R: So your time in care was better than not being in care?

Yeah, I see it that way. I still hate my mom for putting me in care though. When I first went into care, they tricked me. My mom had a meeting with these guys and they asked me to go for a little ride and we went to this place, this group home, and had a big meeting there, and then they said goodbye to my mom. And I got up to leave with my mom, and they told me I couldn't go. So I got all pissed off. I was only 7 years old, but I broke one guy's nose and kicked the other guy in the nuts and put him in the hospital. But there was more of them than me, about 6 of them and 1 of me and they got me down. And then they held me and my mom left and I had to stay there. And then my mom used to call me every day. I wouldn't talk to her for 3 years and she called at least once a week.

R: And your little sister came into care?

Not my little sister, my older sister. Both my sisters are older; I'm the baby.

R: Okay. So only the one next older to you came into care, but the eldest was old enough to be okay on her own.

My mom kicked my oldest sister out when she was about 13, I think, and she basically stayed with her friends, her whole life.

R: How old is she now?

Almost 22. In September.

R: Any good people, good for you, while you were in care?

Yeah. Well, actually, a couple. This one lady, 'Ruby', and another lady, 'Isobel'. The one, Isobel, I think she was the greatest person in the world. The only reason I didn't want to leave that group home was because I had to leave her behind. She was the best. She was one of the only people I could ever talk to about my problems out of everyone I know.

R: Do you still keep in contact with her?

Yeah, I got her number and I call her every once in a while. Often she's out though. She just had a baby.

R: Was she at Hillside?

Yeah.

R: Anything else for today? We can fill in stuff next meeting too.

I could keep you here for 6 hours telling you stuff. I just did this all last night with one of my roommates, telling him my life story. I think one of the best times out at my group home was we went on a 400-mile canoeing trip around Algonquin Park. Took us a week and a half. Nothing but canoeing though these lakes, clear water, you could see right to the bottom, 1000 feet. I was in heaven. I'm a nature freak.

This group home they had horses. That's basically my life. I want to be a horse trainer or assistant

vet. Used to ride horses every day of my life. Stole a couple horses. I was going to ride them right into Toronto. They had 300 head of cattle. They had a wood shop. Their own school. Their own camp. Shitty fish, though, nothing but pike, fucking boniest fish. Can't stand them.

R: Sounds like you might move out of Toronto some time.

That's definite. I want to get right out of Ontario. Might go to Nova Scotia or Newfoundland. I like those Newfie accents. Makes me laugh.

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### **ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF STEVEN**

*Again, on August 23, 1995, I met with Stephen in his shared home.*

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND

R: As we re-read your story, the thing that struck me was that you described your last group home as horrible, in the beginning of the story, and then in the end you talk about all the good stuff, the animals and life style there, as if it were really positive. So could you put those two things together for me?

Hillside was the place I liked, with the animals. Blue Lodge was the pits.

R: So how come you went from the place you liked, with the woman/women that you could really talk with, to a place that sucked?

Um...When I left Hillside, I wasn't really sure where I was going to be staying at, so my worker found Blue Lodge. I didn't really want to move in there, but I didn't really have any other choice, so I had to.

R: But how did the decision to move you out of Hillside come about?

That wasn't really all my choice. I was being an idiot the last little time of being there. I wasn't going to school, just being my own boss. Wouldn't listen to anything they said. So they gave me a choice, either go back to school and start doing programs with the rest of the kids or they're going to kick me out. And I got kicked out.

R: In retrospect, looking back, how do you understand that you were being as you say, an idiot, at that time?

Why do I think I was being an idiot? Um, I don't know, I was just being a goof-ball, just constantly looking to do crime, looking to get into fights. Anything to be bad, that was my whole goal every morning when I woke up.

R: So what was the fire in your gut then, do you think?

R: Fire in your gut; I mean what was the load of energy, feeling, fuel of some sort that drove you to such sustained, consistent negative behaviour?

I don't know. I guess I've always, like, been kind of negative against authority, I've always been a rebel against authority. Always.

R: With reason, right, because your first authority figures, your parents, goofed up big time, right?

Yeah.

R: But was there a time when you could accept authority if it was respectful of you?

Yeah, well I guess it depends on the type of authority. I guess there is different types of people, so different kinds of authority. Some of it, depends on the manner in which it's delivered, I can take it. But some, -- like, I'm the boss and that's it -- I can't.

R: So you said that Hillside helped you learn how to manage your temper. How does that fit together with being super-sensitive to how authority is delivered? Or does it?

I guess, I feel I went through some anger management classes. I don't think it worked because the stuff he was teaching, you were supposed to...He would come in once a month and do a session with you and in between, you were supposed to do it every night by yourself. And I never did, so I don't really think that his anger management course helped me. I just kinda learned to control my anger on my own. Over the years, hearing people, mostly people I respected in the group home, some of the staff, they were always telling me that my anger would get me into trouble so I just learned to control it by myself. I think it was for the better too. There are times when your anger can come in handy.

R: But you run it, instead of it running you, yeah?

It doesn't even come close to running me any more. When I was living in my group home, I got into a fight in the last 2 years I was living there, I used to get into a fight at least once every 3 days. And now, since I've been out, 3-4 years now, I haven't got into one fight.

R: Maybe there were things in the group home itself that fuelled your anger?

Yeah.

R: But that doesn't really ring for you. What I was thinking about is that some of the kids in this project -- youth, sorry -- say that group homes have a way of imposing authority that is designed to push your buttons, sometimes even in the name of helping you learn how to manage anger. Was that your experience at all?

I don't know. If I don't want to be pushed, I'm not going to be pushed. If they feel like I have too much anger building up and I should let it, I'm not going to let it go until I decide. When I was a kid, I used to let things build up until the top blew. When she blew, she blew!

R: But now?

It's been so long since I even, like I've gotten mad but just talking under my breath and throwing a couple of punches at a brick wall or something. I've raised my fist plenty, particularly at my sister, but I don't like the idea of hitting women, so... I've had lots of opportunities to fight, but I've just turned away from it. It's not worth it.

R: And you don't have any assault charges?

No. Everyone was afraid to charge me. They knew if they charged me, I'd just beat them up more. That I'd give them a big enough beating for the charge.

R: But even in group homes? Lots of kids report that they got charged with assault when they were into it with group home staff, often, they felt, when staff initiated the argument, but even then, they'd get charged. Anything like that in your experience?

Never had a staff charge me because I always had a counter-charge. I had every staff in that group home assault me at least once. I had one staff restrain me, threw me against metal chair, broke 3 of my ribs. Are we getting off track here, should we be going in a different direction?

R: I've been leading you down this path, because it's a theme particularly among boys in group homes, so I wanted to explore it with you. But we can go down any path you want. Your turn now.

I could talk about the bad times forever. I've talked with my sister, I've stayed up nights talking to her. She wants to hear about my group home experiences, I can give her an earful.

R: Let's maybe talk about your relationship with your sister, which seems really important to you, but a mixed love/hate bag, yeah?

What's the mixed love/hate bag?

R: You've said that you are afraid that you would hit her, that lots of times you feel like it; that you'd kill her if you had to put up with what her husband has to put up with.

That was just a manner of speaking.

R: I know, but maybe a wee grain of truth inside it?

Yeah. I don't know if I could hit my sister, though. I think if I had to go a month without talking to my sister, I'd go nuts. We're just so close now.

R: Right. So hitting was the old way that you were close, and now talking is the new way to be close?

Sometimes my sister pisses me off, though. Because she has two kids now and I think she tries to take a mother figure over me, which is just impossible. Nobody takes that authority over me now. I'm my own authority and that's it! I remember she used to really get on my nerves, really bothered me a lot when I got out of my first group home, Hillside. Between my sister and my dad, I had one of them telling me I was dumb at least once a day, and I just... Don't do that. When people tell me I'm dumb, it just gets to my self-esteem big time.

R: Okay, I feel like I've interrogated you enough. What else do you want to add to your story, or do you want to go on to messing with it with these little exercises?

Mess with it.

Q3. THE FORM:

The beginning is...Would be when my parents split up.

The middle is...I guess when I was in the rough stuff in my group homes, going through my early teen years.

The end is...Would be after I moved out of my group homes. The transaction was basically forced on me, because I didn't want to move out on my own. Like I didn't know I'd be moving into a place like this. I thought I'd be in my own apartment by myself all the time, drive me nuts. But when I got

out of my group homes, I was moving back and forth from my dad's to my sister's and they were getting pissed off at me a lot. My dad's girlfriend just does not like me, and I was starting a lot of arguments between him and her about me staying there, and when I was staying at my sister's, my sister and her boyfriend were getting into a lot of arguments because they'd just moved in to their new place and they wanted to be alone together. So basically I had the two most important people telling me to get the hell out, and I had my social worker cracking down on me. So it was either make the transition into independence or get out on the street. So I checked a couple of places out. I found the place I'm living at, I liked it, so I stayed.

R: And can you stay here for the duration, or is there an imposed leaving time or age, here?

I'm pretty sure you can stay here until you're 24, but you have to be under 21 to get in. That's what puzzles me a bit.

R: So the end...of one thing was the start of another?

Yeah.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS:

1. Parents separating
2. Moving into the first group home (ABC)
3. Home with mom and new boyfriend, 1 year, not going to school
4. King's Rd group home
5. Moved into Hillside
6. Moved out to Blue Lodge
7. Back and forth with dad and sister
8. Rented a place for 2 months
9. Moved here

Q5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

1. Parents separating: I don't know if that had a really big impact on my life because basically I didn't really know about the divorce thing when I was little. I just knew my dad lived here and my mom lived there. So I don't think it had any impact on my life, although I know it does with some kids. Actually, I'm kinda glad they separated, because if I had to live with both of them together, I'd have gone fucking crazy. +1

2. Moving into the first group home (ABC: - ...I wouldn't say it was a total disaster. Wouldn't say they helped me with anything. I think I was too young to be helped with anything. When you're really small and in a group home, the staff tries to help you with problems, but it just goes in one ear and out the other. You're too fucking young. You're a kid, just take it day by day.

R: But at least you weren't getting beaten around, and you had enough to eat, and some predictability in life; would that be worth something to a kid to help solve problems?

I dunno. So -1. I haven't really had any major disasters in my life, so I don't think we're going to get a -3 anywhere.

3. Home with mom and new boyfriend, 1 year, not going to school: the big [guy] was just a fucking dick. He's dead now. Cancer. Same age as my grandfather, for God's sake. Their birthdays are like 2 days apart. He is actually my sister's boyfriend's grandfather. He was a dick. He used to make me and my sister stand in the corner, sometimes for 2 hours at a time, marching. He used to beat us with a fibre-glass pool stick. His rubber soled slippers. A belt with brass pieces all around it. His hand, his feet, anything he could hit us with, he was hitting us. Made us go to bed every night

at 7:30. My sister was too old to be going to bed that early. So was I. My nephew doesn't even go to bed that early, and he's 3 years old. That's about it. - 3.

4. King's Rd group home: that was a pretty good experience. I liked everyone I was living with. There were a couple of staff there I didn't like, but you're going to get that wherever you go, people you don't like. +2 Wicked allowances. \$5 For cleaning the van. \$5 If you cleaned your room, made your bed, every day of the week. \$10 If you washed down the walls in the house, easy with a sponge mop. I used to get \$50/week just working. It was a pretty good place. I don't have anything bad to say about it.

5. Moved into Hillside: Hillside, it was good, no matter what I say, no matter how many bad things I say, it was still good. The first 1 1/2 years was the worst. No, the first 6 months ran pretty smoothly, because I didn't really know anyone, I was just getting the feel of the place, seeing what I could get away with, what I couldn't. See how far I could push them. Until my first restraint, and that kinda sent me flying. Right off that restraint, I remember saying to my room-mate, that's it, I'm going to start being an ass-hole for the rest of my stay here. And that's what happened.

R: Do you remember what brought on the restraint?

No. Some argument in the van, we were taking a ride.

R: Why was it such a turning-point event for you?

Probably because I didn't like the staff I was arguing with. She kicked me off... The staff in this group home had a tendency, when they had you on the floor, they'd just get you so damn angry, but you couldn't do anything about it because you had 4 people sitting on you. So from there on, I was just a total jerk. When I got restrained, it wasn't no little doozy, it was all-out fucking war. There wasn't a staff there that would try to restrain me by themselves. There was one staff tried, didn't make out too well. I think I can squirm out from anything.

R: So why was it good? Hillside.

They helped me with a lot of stuff. The horses, I liked that. The first time I saw a horse, I was really intimidated by them. The first time standing beside a horse, I wanted to shit myself. But I got used to it. After a month, I wanted to be there every day. Before I left the group home, I was the best rider there. I got 98.9% on my final equine studies exam. The highest mark ever given in the group home. I was the best rider ever there. I could do everything, ride standing on my head, just about.

Helped me with my anger a lot. Helped me learn to talk about my feelings. If you had tried to do something like this (interview) 4 years ago, I'd have told you to go fuck yourself. I didn't like talking to no one, man. As soon as someone said let's talk about your feelings, I'd say get the fuck out of here. What else did they help me with? Um...They helped me with a lot of problems with my family, like when I moved into my group home, my dad basically didn't want to have anything to do with me, for what reason I don't know. But after I was there for about 2 years, and the staff talking to my dad, and me talking to my dad, we arranged for me to go on my first home visit. 2 years, man, a long time. And then for about a year I kept going on home visits, until we got up to home visits every weekend. That's when my and my dad's relationship started to grow. And my sister, that's when me and my sister got really close. I think what really got me and my sister close is I was on a home visit and I was staying at her place for the weekend, and she was going out with another guy than she is with now, and I went out for a walk and I came back, and he was on top of my sister punching her. I almost threw him off the balcony. I'd never saved my sister from any type of fight. But right after that, we got pretty close.

R: One more question on the restraints. Do you think, looking back, that they could have been helpful to you without ever restraining you?

No. They had to restrain me, I would have destroyed the place. Easy. I trashed the school in a matter of 10 minutes.

R: But for the first 6 months, you didn't wreck the joint, did you?

Didn't know anyone. Didn't want to get too involved. I saw kids restrained all the time, but didn't want to get into things until I knew the place. I actually almost enjoyed getting restrained. Sometimes, if I was bored, I'd just say fuck, I feel like getting restrained, and do something and they'd restrain me.

R: Another one: do you think there's any danger of getting "addicted" to being restrained?

Yeah. Some kids after they get restrained so much, they just have the need for physical confrontations, at least once a day. And things that really drive you nuts are quiet rooms. I don't know if all group homes have quiet rooms, but the ones I've been in they stick you in for a couple days at a time, with one staff watching you. He's not allowed to talk to you. I got so pissed off one time when I was in there, I kicked the wall right down.

R: So you preferred action that brought you in contact with people, rather than being isolated?

Yeah.

R: Do you think that's so for most kids, or is there a trend or a rule about that?

No. The group home was kind of divided. A quarter of the kids would get restrained once a week, another quarter say once a day, another quarter once a month, and another say once every 6 months.

R: And were there restraint kids and quiet room kids?

The quiet room was just when you got totally out of control. I remember getting restrained for 6 hours straight before they put me in a quiet room. I was on the floor for 6 hours straight with people taking shifts sitting on me, before they put me in the quiet room.

I think it was one of the best influences in my life. I would rather have lived there than anywhere else. Lots of good staff there. Lots of positive influences. +3

6. Moved out to Blue Lodge: couldn't stand the place. If I had a choice, I would never have went there. Staff were dicks. Kids I lived with were dicks. Couldn't stand anything about the place.

R: Was it rural as well?

No. It was in downtown Toronto. - 2, Because I only got into 1 fight there, for someone stealing \$50 off me, which I think is reason enough to fight someone.

7. Back and forth with dad and sister: I dunno. That was for the better too. Because if I wasn't going back and forth and having them continually kicking me out, I wouldn't have got off my ass and got my own place.

R: Were you being a jerk with them?

No. My dad's girlfriend, I don't even know what the fuck her problem was. Lots of times I wanted to

drive her into the ground, so that's why I knew I had the anger thing under control. Staying there and between my sister's. My sister's wasn't too bad, because my sister wasn't rude to me. Because she knew if she did, I'd slap her. Or her boyfriend, he got feisty a couple of times but I just told him to back off. He got me into a lot of trouble when we were young. Used to crack each other over the head with hockey sticks, baseball bats, everything. Everyday of the week we'd have black eyes from each other. (He was my mom's boyfriend's grandson, remember).

So...Even though it was bad it was good. I liked the fact that they were forcing me out, that they were getting on my nerves so I'd get off my ass and do something. So +2.

8. Rented a place for 2 months: that was pathetic, just fucking pathetic. I'm renting this place for 2 months, \$300/month. The only rooms I'm allowed to use in the house, I'm just renting a room, is the bedroom I was renting and the kitchen and the bathroom. Could only do laundry once every 2 weeks, which I needed to do it at least once every 3-4 days. Couldn't go into the living room. Couldn't do jack shit, man! Then one of my friends from Hillside got me kicked out of there. I brought him into my house, let him spend the night one night, but he didn't know when to go home. All night long, breaking dishes, playing the radio way too loud when I was sleeping, smoking in my room when you weren't allowed to smoke in the house, eating other people's foods. Just making a total dick of himself. And how I got kicked out for sure was he was being really noisy so the super (*superintendent, usually of an apartment building*) told me to go out for a while, cool down, come back. And my friend started getting mouthy, and then the super for some stupid reason spit on him, and then slammed the door, so my friend turned around and kicked in a \$300 door: there goes my last month's rent. So that was the end of that. Last time I heard he was in jail for murder or something like that.

R: Was this a private home?

Yeah. - 2.

9. Moved here: I like it here. I moved here, everyone was cool, the mentor was really cool, I find him a really...he's really expressive, he talks a lot. Talk is his work, talking with youth and stuff. He's a neat guy to live with. He doesn't get mad very often. If you break something, just bring it up to him rather than try to hide it. He's interested in some of the same things as I am, such as plants. I love plants. This place is great. I love this place. I think it's one of the best places I've lived in. Hopefully this is the last youth type place that I live in. The next step is living on my own, total independence.

R: With a garden and a horse.

Yeah. +3. 4!

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. Parents separating
2. Moving into the first group home (ABC)
3. Home with mom and new boyfriend, 1 year, not going to school
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5. Moved into Hillside
6. Moved out to Blue Lodge
7. Back and forth with dad and sister
8. Rented a place for 2 months
9. Moved here

6 = 1, 3, 5, 7, 9

4 = 1, 5, 7, 9

2 = 5, 9

1 = 5

Q7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

I guess I just wanted them to know what I went through, and what I don't think anyone should have to go through. I know a lot of people have had a lot rougher life than me, but in my own way I've had a really rough life. But if I could go back and do it over again, I probably wouldn't change a thing.

*Stephen attended the focus group and took an active role.*

## THE STORY OF TIM

*I met with Tim on May 18, 1995, in the living room of a small house in a public housing complex in 'Goodtown', a small city 100 km away from Toronto. The other people who lived in the main floor of the house were not there, except for his son, for whom he was caring while we met. The couple and their school-age children who lived downstairs passed through on occasion, but were respectful of our privacy.*

All my problems is from my childhood, because I just look back in the past all the time. Then I get mad about things, then I isolate myself from other people. Then I get violent, like mad and depressed. Like I take it out on people sometimes. And I won't talk to anybody about it. Because when I was a kid no one would listen. So it's hard to trust adults and shit. Because when I was a kid, they'd be there and then, boom, I'm by myself.

That's why I don't get along with adults too well. Like if my friend said, hey, do this, I'd do it, but if an adult came around and said do this, I wouldn't because I wouldn't take orders from an adult, I have a problem with authority. You know what I mean, like people in their 20s and shit. Like every time I get in a fight, they're like in their 20s and shit.

One good thing from my past, like when I was a kid, like my parents weren't around for me, so that's why I spend extra time with my son. Because I don't want my son to be brought up like I was brought up. I refuse to. That's how I spend my time, is watching him.

R: When would you say that you began to be responsible for yourself, rather than being the responsibility of someone else?

When I was like 12. Because I just got fed up with people, so I just looked out for myself and shit. I used to live on the streets in Toronto. That's why I used to spend so much time by myself. Like when I'm mad, I just go by myself. That's probably when I got most of my bad habits and stuff, from the streets. Like drinking and smoking and shit. But that was only a thing I turned to back then. But since my son is here, I've slowed down on my drinking and shit.

Stuck again.

R: Who or what was responsible for you, when you were a child?

My dad, when I was little. And then the CAS when I was 2. Then back with my dad again. Then back in CAS, in foster homes and on the street. And then in foster homes and foster homes and foster homes. And group homes. But mostly the CAS. Because I would visit my parents afterwards, with the CAS there. Like a different CAS, not the one I see now. But they switched me over to this one.

Most of my problems started when I came to Goodtown. Because when they stuck me in a group home, I told them I didn't want to go to a group home but they stuck me there anyways. Because my opinion about group homes is like jail. It's like an open custody situation. You don't even do something and you get penalized, like say you didn't put your hand up at the supper table when talking or something, or you didn't dust your window ledges, or do the floors. And staff will push your buttons to see how far they can push you, and when you get mad, then they try to restrain you, but like if they restrain you and you hit them by accident, you get charged and they tell you, we had to control you. And then, my opinion, but when you leave there, I tell them I'm going to be so used to you restraining me, that's how they try to resolve things. But when I leave there, when I'm in the community, who am I going to turn to, are you going to be there to restrain me when I get mad? Because you get so dependent on it when you get mad and stuff. Then, like that example happened to me. Like I went to jail for hitting them, and I pleaded that he came into my personal

space and was pushing my personal buttons, but it seems like because you're in CAS and they think I'm there to be punished, or so it seems like, these are just people off the street, and they try to piss you off. Not all the time, but they do it most of the time. They treat you like a baby. Like if I was in high school, grade 9, they say if I'm late for class I have to go in my pyjamas. And I'm like, my age and everything: nice, in my pyjamas sitting there because I was late a minute or two for my class. Like if I'd miss my bus, I'd be grounded for the day. In pyjamas and shit. And then when they go off their shift, I'd get more shit from the shift that was coming in, and then I'd blow up because it seems like their dissing (*disrespecting*) me again. Another adult is coming in and I don't like taking authority, and when one leaves and the other one comes in, I'll just lose it, because one already gave me shit and I don't need it.

So then, when I turned 16, I thought my wise decision would be to leave, to get out of there. And then, like, as soon as I got out, I did good, until I broke up with my girlfriend, and that put me back in a depression mood again and I wouldn't listen to people, just go out and get drunk and stuff. I didn't want to deal with the problem.

*(Goes to settle baby with music and a bottle.)*

And my friends help me get off the alcohol and stuff, and then there was a time, like 2 weeks, when I went without seeing my son, and then ever since that, my friends help me and I've seen my son every day, I've been with him every day, except for the day I went to jail. I'm taking responsibility for him. It won't look too good because I'm going back to jail, but only for a month. Then I'm going to move and have my son for weekends, every other weekend. So then I won't get mad and shit like living here with my ex-girlfriend living here.

R: Talk a bit about who have been your friends, or part of the solution, to date.

The 'Birch Gang'. They're from Hamilton, from the 'Rascal's' posse, and I met them through jail, a couple of people. I lived with them after I broke up with my girlfriend. We went to parties and they're the ones who told me I should see my son a lot more, because I missed him for two weeks. Then one of them went to jail, then I got charged with three of them, and then more people went to jail in Hamilton, so then me and my co-accused, we went to the guy who escaped from jail, like an open custody young offenders facility, and hanged with him for like 3 months. Then a couple of my friends would get pissed off at my ex-girlfriend and shit, like how she would treat me. Like I wasn't going out with her and she would walk down the street and yell profanities at me. Then all my close buddies went to jail, so I stay home and watch my son, go out sometimes. See some people. That's about it.

R: Talk a bit about how you got started with your girlfriend, when things were good with her.

My ex-girlfriend. I went to the same high school with her, and she kept on asking me out for 2 1/2 years and I kept saying no because I was in a group home and my mind was pretty screwed up. So I waited and finally went out with her. It was good at first because I was just moving out of the group home, putting that behind me. We were getting along good, talking about things, and going to parties and spending time with each other. Then we had our son. When she was pregnant, it was getting a little worse, but I understood it because she was, like, pregnant. Then after she had him, after 3 months it went downhill. After 3 months I was watching him every day and she would be going out to parties and shit. So that would make her mother fight with her, and her aunt, her mother's sister, would say that's not fair that I would watch him all the time and she would go out, like I would stay home. Then include that her mother was sick, real sick, and I would help her out and my girlfriend wouldn't do nothing, and like I had to watch our son too. And then she moved to an apartment with some chick, some girl, and then she was not even getting along with her mom. Her mom was like dying, and every time I'd go up to see my son she'd tell me to get the fuck out of there and shit. So I broke up with her. One thing I don't like about my ex-girlfriend, she'll get my

son to call like her new boyfriend or any boyfriend she gets, she 'll make my son call him dad. So I lost it when I heard that. I came on to her boyfriend about it, and then they broke up because her boyfriend didn't want me harassing him. Then I started getting it from my ex-girlfriend, mouthing me off, because I went to talk to her supposed boyfriend about it, and he agreed with me, didn't want to get in the way with my son, so he didn't want to go out with her. That's about it for her

About CAS: just because I've been in CAS and foster homes throughout my life, they said -- well my worker 'Dick -- doesn't think I can watch my son because of how I was raised. They just judge me. They misjudge me, because I do get into fights, I'll admit that, but I do take care of my son because he's not going to go through what I went through, like no one there for him, so I'm going to be there for him all the time. That's what I think that makes me a good father, that I've been through it all.

R: Who could you name in your life, your whole life, that was there for you or helpful or someone that you could take advice from or direction from?

I'll start from way back there. When I was little, it would be my dad, but my mom had custody of me. She'd be out everywhere, so my dad would spend time with me. That's why I have no respect for my mom. Like I disown my mom. I haven't talked to her in, like, 9 years or something.

Then, I'll jump up to present. People I can talk to now when I have a problem, I'll talk to 'Joe', the guy that lives downstairs and his wife, because I get along with them and stuff, because they don't bitch at each other all the time. We have fun, like we can sit down and talk. It helps me a lot, like you can relate to them. I used to, at one point I used to live with Joe and his wife, that's like when I was having problems with my ex-girlfriend, then like stuff stirred up with my ex telling lies and everything and then I didn't see Joe and 'Susie' for quite awhile and that's when I was getting in trouble. So once I got charged and shit, my ex's aunt that lives here, is Joe's wife's (*Susie's*) sister. So now I see Joe and Susie and talk, and whenever I have a problem, it helps. Like if I want to go out, they'll watch my son.

R: Do I remember you saying that your ex's mother died?

Yes

R: Was she a person that was good for you?

Yeah, I could relate to her. Like she was there when I was with my son, like my ex would go out all the time. And I would help her out like she was real sick and I was the only one who would help her out, like give her money, because her husband wouldn't give her money, because she was sick and she couldn't get out of the chair, like that's how sick she was. I'd like help her, spend time with her, and we'd talk and joke and stuff, and I'd try to make her feel happy, because my ex wasn't around and stuff.

R: Remind me again, when and what she died of.

When, I forget exactly what month, but she was sick when my son wasn't born, but she got a lot worse. When my son was born, she was walking for a bit. She could get out of the chair to go to the bathroom. She said she only wanted to stay alive to see my son, that's all she wanted to be around for, that's all she cared for was my son, her grandson. And I think she had a virus or something from her uterus dropped or something when she had her last kid and she never got it fixed. And it just ate and ate, and she never went to the hospital or anything. And the alcohol, too, I guess. Like she was drinking every day. Then I wouldn't get along, after she passed away, I wouldn't get along with her husband, because supposedly he was having an affair when she was sick, like in the chair and couldn't move, so I lost all respect for her husband because I liked her a lot

and I thought how could someone be so mean as to not stay home with someone who is so sick, like his wife. So I just lost all respect and would argue with him, and just walk away before I lost my temper. So I guess I don't talk to him, I just think he's a goof.

R: In all your years in CAS, was there ever a good worker or good foster parent or teacher or anybody that you felt was good for you?

A CAS worker? His name was 'Bob'. Because he would drive like a Harley Davidson, and like my dad was a leader of a chapter of the Hell's Angels, and I could relate to him like that. And he didn't talk like a CAS worker. He just, whatever was on his mind, he'd say it. Like if you were pissing him off, he'd tell you straight off. Not like some workers who would just keep it inside. And another worker before him put me in a foster home I didn't like, a new-order Mennonites on a farm, and I was used to like living in a city and they put me, like in there, so I phoned Bob up, I said I wanted to get out of this place, no good for me. Three days later he came and got me. I thought he was just coming to visit, though, because I didn't think he could move that fast. Then he came, and he said, fuck, it's about time you should get out of a place like this, and he just sped away. We were going fast leaving the place, and I felt good. Then, I guess, he was like, he didn't stay much longer in CAS after that. And then I got my current worker. So, good for me, just Bob for a worker. My current worker is pretty cool, but not as good as Bob.

One good foster home I was at was in 'Samville', because I had, like a lot of friends, a new school. I went on a hardball team, had a lot of fun. Started playing pool, going to the arcade and playing pool with friends. Like my foster dad would drop me off to play pool, pick me up when time to come home. We'd go on trips. Went to Colorado. We took a motor home and a Honda Gold-wing (*a big motorcycle*) up. It was a lot of fun, because I was just spending time. Like it was just me and my foster mother and my foster father. And once I got older there, I lost it. Like I fucked myself up. Like it wasn't my fault. Like, he, when I got mad or when he was mad, he'd try to restrain me, and I was growing up and I had more strength and stuff and didn't care because I was getting rebellious and stuff. And I got moved out of there because I hit him a couple of time and screwed up. But that was the best foster home. That's all for the foster homes, the only one that was good.

My probation officer is pretty cool. Like, he would help me out (with) basically anything. He got me back in school, a high school. Like he went in the school with me and told the principal that I was going through problems, like going into a group home and stuff, so he got me into school, got me into a drug and alcohol rehab(ilitation) centre, and basically helped me out a whole lot. And every time I see him, asks me if I'm drinking. And I'd go there even when my probation was done, just so I could go and talk to him. He wrote a letter, when I was in a group home and got charged with hitting the staff, he got one of the staff to write a letter of apology for going into my personal space. Like I told my story to him and he told them why I lost it, like they came into my personal space and I didn't think I was doing any harm. I wasn't harming myself or harming anybody else, so I didn't think they should have been able to restrain me. Maybe I was a little mouthy, like I admitted to my part. So he just wanted them to admit to maybe they pushed me a little too hard. So I got off. Like the judge got the letter and released me. That was pretty cool.

R: Do you still have contact with any of these people?

My old probation officer, I do. That's the only one I still do.

R: And do you ever have contact with your dad.

No, my dad passed away when I was at a foster home, and the CAS didn't even tell me about it. Like, my father passed away, and I thought they should at least have told me so I could go to the funeral and pay my respects. But they only told me like 2 weeks later, when everything was done. And my family got on my case, like "Why weren't you there for your own dad's funeral?" Then I started hating, like, everybody. Like that's when I started getting real bad, on purpose, like I'd try to

get in trouble, like after that I wanted a criminal record. Because like my dad had one and I wanted to be like my dad. Then like I moved from that foster home, like that was the good foster home. That's where I think most of my problems started from, because I didn't deal with it. Like I still have a lot of feelings about my dad. Like if somebody starts joking around, like your dad's this, I'll lose it. I'll hurt that person, hurt them more, like not verbal, physical, because that's something that means a lot to me. That's where I get a lot of my anger from, still not having dealt with my dad passing away. That's why I probably do half the things I do, like my childhood, like they're there and then they're gone. Everybody says they'll [be there] for you and then they fuck up -- like my dad and my mom and foster parents -- and I move out of there. So I started thinking fuck, Tim, you just have to stick by yourself. So when I have problems I just keep them to myself and then I just lose it, for no reason sometime. Like I'll just blow up, like I'll probably go out. Like if I'm arguing with someone, I'll just assault that person. It's not a whole lot like I'm mad at that person, it's just like there's a lot in my head and I can't think, and I just lash out at people.

*(Bathroom break)*

R: How old were you when you dad died?

I was around 11 years old.

R: Do you think that was the final straw, the last loss that you could bear?

Yeah.

R: Thinking back, do you think anything could have been done that would have made it possible for you to somehow get it together and heal and go on?

In time. I don't want to, start thinking too much about my past and stuff, I want to let myself control myself better. Because when I start getting depressed and I can't hold my actions back, I get into trouble. I think it will be better to wait till I'm older and more mature and can understand everything, you know. And can forgive people for what they've done. Then maybe I can end up dealing with it. But till then, till I can forgive some people, like my mom and shit. I don't think about my mom. I have some talks here about it, sometimes, not a whole lot. They try to help me, say maybe that's the best thing for you, like talk about it, forgive your mother, then maybe I can get on with my life.

R: It seems a bit like you've imported your mother back into your life by having a baby with a woman who maybe is quite a bit like her? Anything to that?

Well, she's a bitch, my f'g ex. But I can't forgive my mom, because like I was 8 years old and she made me do cocaine, like pushed my head in it. Like she was a drug addict. She got my sister who was 16 to go out prostituting. That's like why I can't forgive. I don't care if my mother fucks her own life up, but my sister had her own choice, too, you know, but she's young so she's going to take advice from her mom. So her mom should be more responsible and say "You're like what???" But instead, she's the one who brang it up, like "Maybe this is good. I've done this and I think maybe you should try it." Like that's no good.

R: Do you see your sister?

Not that often, because now she's a little fucking ho (*whore*). She got into drugs like my mom, prostitution. I think she's still in it. I don't talk to her no more. Why I don't forgive my mother again is like out of 3 girls and me she had, and she only wanted one and didn't give a shit about us when she had us, and only paid attention to my other sister who's in prostitution and shit. And my dad would get mad because he'd work and when he's at work she's supposed to be at home, but she was never there so we got taken away from our parents. And my dad, that's why I can't forgive that

easy, because if that hadn't have happened, I don't think I would have been this way. That's why I can't forgive my mom.

R: If I get too pushy, just tell me. But I wanted to ask how come your dad didn't do for you what you're trying to do for your son, like make up for what the mother can't or won't do?

Because he wasn't responsible enough himself. Like it's not all my mother's fault. Like he had bad qualities, but the only reason why I respect him is because he was there for me a little bit. He'd play with me. Talk to me. My mom wouldn't. And he went to jail for 34 years for me. Because they put me in a thing called 'ABC', not a group home, but a big house with all these kids. And he took me out and he wasn't supposed to have contact with me and he drove up and took me, took off with me, living with him for awhile. Cops came, he smashed a beer bottle over one cop's head, gave him a concussion. And he shot the other police officer. Then he did all that time in Kingston (*Penitentiary*). Lot of bikers went down too. That's when all the Hell's Angels were going to jail. So that's why I respect him. He did all that for me.

R: So let me see if I have this straight. Your mom was a severe drug addict, and your dad was a biker...

And he drank a fair bit. That's where I get my drinking. I dunno, I can't blame it on him, but everybody says so.

R: Would you talk a bit about your drinking/drugging, like when, what, how long, how bad, what's been tried, what's worked, what was a waste of time, what do you think might work, etc.

Okay. About drinking. I'm a big drinker. I'll sit down, when I drink I drink to get pissed. Just to forget everything. It's just an escape, just get away from everything, be with friends. But if I'm drinking and in a bad mood, then I'll end up getting in a fight that night or go looking for a fight. That's most of my assault charges, when I've been drinking and I'm in a bad mood. But I stopped drinking for awhile, about 2 1/2 months, but then I moved here and my assurity's (*someone who puts up bail*) husband drinks every day, and I just see it and I want it, so I'll go out and drink with my friends. But then I'm taking a chance because I can go to jail if I touch one drop of alcohol. But I prefer hard liquor, like rye or Jack Daniels or Crown Royal, stuff like that, if I'm going to drink.

About smoking dope and shit. I don't think there's a problem with it, if anybody does it. The only problem I think is if there's a kid around. Like I'd never smoke up if my kid is here. Or like pick up my son. I won't drink and pick up my son or smoke and pick up my son. But, like, pot or hash or something like that. I think beer's worse for you. Beer gets you hyper and going, you get, like let's do something. But if you're smoking, you're mellow, you don't. Say if I was drinking or smoking like hash or pot or something, if I was drinking I'd do something stupid, if I was smoking I wouldn't, so I think drinking is no good, smoking's no problem. I think it should be legalized. If beer is. Because beer is lots worse.

R: Let me be clear: when you talked about not smoking if your kid is around, you're talking hash/pot, not crack or anything like that.

No, I wouldn't touch anything like that. Like I won't even do acid no more, like you get too hyper. And it makes you stupid, you don't know what you're doing sometimes. Ecstasy, like I'll take that, like go to dances in the summer, raves, it gets you hyped up for dancing.

R: So you've never done "hard"...

Oh, I've done coke. Like first my mother f'g made me do it. And I tried it after that, like once, my

friend had an 8-ball, so. But like, I'll smoke it if it's mixed with oil or weed or something like that, because it relaxes you, but I won't snort it because that screws your brain up. I guess weed to a certain extent messes it up, but it's not doing no harm to you because you're relaxed, you just sit and mellow out and talk. Like when I went to court I was smoking up. Like Bob knew about it. But he didn't say too much because I was still there, I showed up for my appointment, did everything I was supposed to do. But I was relaxed.

R: From way back, I wanted to ask about your courting your ex. You said she asked you out for 2 years. Tell me about why you think she was hot after you.

I don't know. She never told me why she wanted to go out. She just did. I guess she likes some qualities about me. I had a name for myself, that too, like I'm pretty popular in Goodtown, like my buddies too, like we're a posse. Just because like, not to sound smart, but if you're a fighter people don't screw you around and people notice that. But if you get too much of a name, they want to fight you. And she used to like that, like I don't take no shit from people bigger than me. She still thinks that's cool. I don't know why, though, I just moved in with her. The only reason I went out with her was I wanted to get out of the group home and that was a place to stay. So I thought maybe it would get okay, why not? I got what I wanted, and if she wanted me there, it works both ways.

R: But how about the decision to have a baby? How was that made?

Around 6 months, we were going out, or more. We were getting along good, and I wanted to go out with her, like people grow on each other I guess. And she asked me, she goes, "Would you want a son?" I said, "For me, I don't know, I don't know if I'm ready." But she wanted one, so I said I'd do my best so she could have a kid, and that's what happened. I'm glad it happened. That's the only thing that keeps me going I think, my son. Now I love the idea. At first I didn't know, I didn't think I'd be any good. But I can't imagine not having a son now.

R: Talk a bit about how that happened to you. How did he grow on you, or how did you grow into being a father?

He grew on me because I went through everything, like I told her I'd be there 100%, so I went to Lamaze classes with her, started sounding more interesting because I went to groups with her. Then I went into the delivery room when my son was born, and I changed from there. It was just, I dunno, it hit me, I realized I'm having a kid and I felt good about it. I wasn't thinking about no hassles, I didn't have any worries in my head. I just couldn't wait until he was born, like any second. During that first week, I changed a lot of my bad habits,. My drinking, like boom, that was gone. I quit smoking for quite a while. Not doing no drugs. And school was okay then. Probably because I used to watch him when she went out, and he was there all the time, I was there, we were made for each other. So ever since I've been with him.

R: Did having a baby have the opposite effect on her that it had on you?

Yeah. Hers was that she used to go out, we used to go out and have a good time and stuff, and I guess she didn't realize that responsibilities are setting in, like you can't go out to your friends every night, you've got a little kid and like responsibilities, and she was still in the partying stages. For the first month, it was good, and then she'd want to go out. She'd get frustrated, like any parents would, but she didn't handle it in a good manner, I don't think, like say, fuck you and scream and yell to the kid. She was just in the party stage, and then she moved and the cops were up to her place every night, parties every night, and my son was there. Because she couldn't party when we were living at her mom's house, so maybe if she could move our son, she could do what she liked, because I wasn't there telling her, like she'd get mad if I went up, but it was my son.

R: Let me get this straight again: you and she and baby were at her mother's and then she

and baby left and you stayed with her mother and then her mother died and you moved with your...

Buddies, posse, whatever.

R: I'm whuped. Anything else?

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### **ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF TIM**

*I met with Tim on May 25, 1995, again at his house, with just him and the baby present most of the time. He was cleaning the house furiously when I arrived mid-morning, upset and hyper.*

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE: We didn't do this. Tim read it with his girlfriend and they talked about it.

Q2. ADD OR AMEND: nothing.

Q3. THE FORM:

The beginning is...When I was little, probably when everything started going bad, like when I was 10, that's when my mind started working more and I started to realize what was going on around me.

The middle is...When I moved out of the foster home I really liked.

The end is... Probably when I get out of jail this time. That's going to be the last time I go to jail. I hope.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS:

1. Moving away from parents
2. Foster homes
3. ABC
4. Dad "kidnapping" me
5. The good foster home
6. Dad died, losing it everywhere
7. Losing the good foster home, going to Y.O (*young offenders' facility*)
8. The Mennonite foster home, Bob rescuing me
9. The Goodtown group home
10. Going to jail, making good friends
11. Moving out with girlfriend
12. Having the baby
13. Spending time with girlfriend's mom
14. Girlfriend moving out and partying, giving me shit
15. Girlfriend's mom dying, having to leave
16. Moving with my posse
17. Getting more time with my son
18. Jail
19. Moving into house with ex-girlfriend
20. More charges, plea bargaining, looking at a month in jail

Q5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

1. Moving away from parents: -3. Because I was away from my parents.

2. Foster homes: -3 again. Because I was with kids I didn't like and people I didn't know. Strange environment. I just didn't want to be there.

3. ABC: -2. It wasn't that bad at first, but then it got a lot worse. I just couldn't handle it, the environment. Closed in. It's just like an open custody facility. You go to school right inside there, there's a big fence around it. If you go out in the community, you have to have two staff with you. It's not good.

R: How old were you?

I was around, maybe 9 til 10. It's just like an orphan's home, then they find you a foster home and shit like that.

4. Dad "kidnapping" me: I thought it was a +3, but it ended up a -3. Because I was with him, that's what I always wanted, but after that shit went down, I wasn't with him for a lot of years. So that became a -3. But at first it was good.

5. The good foster home: +3. Because I had another foster brother, we'd go places, exploring and shit. Run away with him, and shit. Go on trips and stuff like that.

R: How old was the foster brother?

Exact same age.

R: Would he have been your first friend?

Yeah, first real friend.

R: Do you still keep contact?

No, I keep asking all the time if there's a way to contact him because he's still in CAS, but they keep not getting back to me. Because they think it's not important.

6. Dad died, losing it everywhere: -3!!!. I was bad-ass then, I wouldn't listen to no one. Spend time with myself. Always by myself. Lived on the streets. Just looked out for myself. Steal. Caused shit. Fight. Smoke a lot of drugs. Drink a lot.

R: Would you talk a bit more about how you learned he'd died, who told, how, when, what explanation for not going to the funeral, etc.

My foster parent told me two weeks after the incident happened. He came into my room and goes, "Oh, you're dad's dead." Two weeks later. It gave me a shock. Then he told my worker that he told me, and I was mad, flipped out, because he was lying. Like he's an adult and he shouldn't be lying. He told them he told the same day and asked [me] to go to the funeral and everything, but that was a lie. He didn't. I don't know, but maybe because he didn't have a son and he thought that if I didn't have a dad, I'd be with him, and he didn't want to stir it up so I'd lose it, and not take no authority from them and stuff. But they lied to me, that's why I fucking lost it there.

7. Losing the good foster home: -3, losing the good foster home. Besides everything like my dad dying and stuff, I had a lot of fun there, had a lot of friends, could have anything, like a Honda 350. They'd take us on trips, everything. Like, it was awesome!

R: Do you think that you and he could have worked through your anger at him lying to you about your dad's death?

I don't know. I still don't know. Because my real dad means like the world to me.

R: You didn't say anywhere how your dad died, from what?

Alcohol. He used to drink a lot. Like Bacardi, Jack Daniels, Crown Royal, stuff like that.

R: So he died in jail, of alcohol poisoning?

Yeah. Or cirrhosis of the liver. Something to do with his liver.

7B. Going to YO: -3 at the beginning, because I didn't know no one, I was scared, my first time going into jail. I thought I was never going to make it. And then I started having fun. Made friends. Met people and just had a ball. Because we played sports, lot of recreation things in jail. Just made a lot of friends. YO is fun, now, to me. It's a joke. Like a home away from home. Because I'm so used to it. Like ABC and stuff like that.

R: You were telling me once, I think, about why you liked jail or YO better than a group home, about the rules staying the same?

Yeah, that I liked jail better. Jail is better than group homes. When I'm in jail, I don't know, it's just better than a group home. Group homes they try to piss you off too many times. But in jail they try to help you. I know you're there to be punished, but it seems they don't try to push your buttons, piss you off. In a group home, they try to push you to see what you can handle, and if you're not in the mood, they'll still push the buttons, and if you lose it, then you get in shit. In jail, say you get into a fight or something, they say, guys stop this, stop that. In group home, you're grounded, can't go anywhere, have to stay in your pyjamas. I wouldn't recommend group homes for anyone. I hate f'g group homes, man. This is what I think about group homes. They think you're in there to be punished. And I know they're supposed to be good people. But I'll tell you an incident. I used to get hammered with a group home staff member, at his house. And he lied, I know this for a fact, on his thing to get in to work at the group home, he said he was going to university and take all these courses, but other staff went to university, never saw him, after a while they caught on. He owned somebody \$800. They're just there for the money. The managers, they're there for you. Some managers are there for you. But the staff members can kiss my ass.

8. The Mennonite foster home: -3 right off the bat. This one sucked. I had to get up at 6:00, started making bales and stuff, go to 9:00 and then you get to eat a big meal. And they ripped me off. I made \$500 and they only gave me \$200 because I moved out of their house. I guess I was disrespectful of them or something. I got into a fight with their son and they said I caused it all, and they weren't even there. The guy kicked me in the nuts and I hooked him back. But there was a +1, I made some money. That was okay.

R: So what pissed you off was the people, or the situation?

The people basically, because I'm not no Mennonite but they were, so they thought I had to follow their beliefs and pushing it on me real hard. The biggest problem was mostly about Christianity, they wanted me to go to church. Even on a Saturday. The working was okay. And the one good thing about there, though, was that there was a son and I taught him how to smoke cigarettes. And I got into shit for that.

8B. Rob rescuing me: basically just taking me out of somewhere I didn't want to be. It was a big deal for me. Like when I wanted to watch a movie I had to watch something like Bambi. Like they

thought the movie E.T. was about the devil because he had that long finger. They took all my rock music tapes and gave me some of this Christian metal. So when they were out we'd get some other movies, me and their son. I guess I was a bad influence on him.

9. The Goodtown group home: -3 for sure. Because, one thing was good about it, they had chicks in there. Once they had two girls in there and me and my buddy, we'd have sex with them. Like you're not supposed to go out or nothing, but the staff would be downstairs watching TV and things would go on upstairs. It was fun. But after awhile they caught on, and then it was just guys.

R: Was the sex consensual? I mean, were the girls as enthusiastic as you guys?

Yeah, more. More.

10. Going to jail, making good friends: this time it was a plus, 2 I guess. Because in a way I didn't want to be there, but in a way I did. But that's where I met all my good buddies, have been my good buddies ever since. My buddy, 'Chas', he's like, I can relate to him because he's on the same wavelength as me, his background is sorta like mine, so we can talk about problems. Like in jail, we just sit and talk. And the people who are not in jail say they're criminals, they're shit, they're low-lives, but then they have to look at themselves, because everybody has bad points. Just because you're in jail doesn't mean you're bad. And most of the people on your range are there for the same reasons, or they'd be in a different place, a different range. Because I guess they think that if they put the guys who did the same stuff together, they'll get along, be able to sit and talk. But if you put someone who is, like diddling, or like assaulting girls or stuff, with us guys, there'd be trouble.

R: You were saying before that in jail, everybody has their troubles in life, so you don't have to worry that your bad background will be held against you...

Yeah, because the guys are all equal. They're all treated the same, no one is higher than anyone, no one is lower than anyone. Unless you're a diddler or something, then the guards will treat you lower, like shit. And so will the other guys.

11. Moving out with girlfriend: +2 for sure, at least. But I didn't want to go out with her really, I just wanted to get the hell out of the group home. Just thought, get out of the group home because it's not doing anything for you and I'm just getting in more trouble. So I just moved in with her (downstairs in this house) and then it got good. Then we moved out, and it got bad, after she had the baby, 3 months later.

12. Having the baby: +++++. At first, I wasn't so keen on the idea, having a kid. But I said, I did love my girlfriend and I'd give anything for her. And if she wants this, I'd do anything for her. But now I'm glad. Because I don't know what I'd be doing right now without him. I'd probably be in jail.

13. Spending time with girlfriend's mom: -1. Because I didn't know her at first, and I was sorta shy, I just moved in there. Didn't know what would happen to me, what was to lie in store for me to live there. Because of her and my ex arguing and shit. But then I started to drink a couple beers with her, and then I loved it. She was a great person. I had a lot of fun, just sitting there and shooting the shit. Having a couple beers here and there. I used to work with her husband for a bit, got a job, they have their own business. The cleaning out warehouses and stuff.

14. Girlfriend moving out and partying, giving me shit: -3. For sure. Because she wanted the baby, and it was me who had him all the time. Used to watch him. Couldn't go out and spend time with my friends. I'd ask her, can you stay home tonight and I want to go out with my buddies, but oh no. So then I told her I love my son, but you have to take responsibilities. I do too, I have been, and finally she got mad at me and moved out. Bitching at me, swearing at me. Just doing anything to piss me off. Like she called me a goof. If someone calls me a goof, I'll throw them. But not a girl, because I'm not going to jail for hitting a woman. And she calls me pussy when she hits me,

because she knows I won't hit her back.

R: Do you think that the two of you will ever get it together again?

Right now, I hope not. But for my son's sake, I hope so. Because I don't want to stay here. I want a family setting for him. But I think if I was living somewhere else, I'd get along better. And it would be better for the baby, us not mouthing each other off and stuff. If we spent more time apart, that's when it was good, before.

15. Girlfriend's mom dying, having to leave that house: leaving the house was good, but her dying was real rough on me too. People might not think so, but I spent a lot of time with her, helping her out. Her husband was a real goof, wouldn't help her out. I felt like I was doing too much, felt like I gotta get out of here or I'm gonna snap, lose it. But it's like she was there for me and I was there for her. A +3. Awesome!

R: But she left too, just like all the others, yeah? You've had so many losses.

16. Moving with my posse: +3+3+3. That helped me out so much. Because I was living with my girlfriend's mother, that was cool and everything but I felt like I was going to snap. And my buddies were right there for me. Like I had everything, a king-size water bed, heated. A TV in my room. Ghetto blaster. Everything. Supper cooked for me. For once a real family. That's why I get along with all my friends, because they're like a family. Like my buddy Chas that calls me, I call him "brother" because we're like brothers. And that's the one I met in jail. Like he'll have problems with his girlfriend or something, I don't see him turning to his mom or anything, he turns to me and we spend an hour and a half on the phone and sort it out. The day he gets out of jail he spends with his girlfriend, but the next day he spends with me. Because we care.

17. Getting more time with my son: more than +3. I just love having him around and being with him. Each day he's doing something different, having a good time. Like I didn't have when I was a kid. So I'm giving him something that I didn't have when I was a kid and it makes me feel so good. Like when he's sad, you're there for him and when you're in a bad mood, he's there for you. It's awesome having a son. It's a lot of responsibility, too, but I'd take those any day.

18. Jail: only a few days. It sucked. I did something stupid. I was drinking in a bad mood and beat a "nipper" up. Like one of my friends mouthed off and they jumped him, so I had to go to help him, right? I couldn't let him get beat up.

19. Moving into house with ex-girlfriend: an outrage! Always power struggling with her. She wants to do everything. Now she wants to start doing to me what she did last time, but this time I will go out because I know I will spend the whole day with him and he loves me, so I know I deserve to have free time. Which last time I didn't know. But she's always bitching at me, like today she misplaced her cd and blamed it on me, say I'll have to pay if I don't find it. So this morning I got up at 7:30 looking for her f'g cd so when she gets home she won't be bitching at me.

20. More charges, plea bargaining, looking at a month in jail: that's what's coming up. I'm only going to do a month. It's gonna suck, but I got a couple buddies. But I know what to look for because I've been in. I know what's gonna happen. Just do my time. Get out. Move out of here. See my son every other week-end. In my own place. I'm moving in with my buddy Chas.

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. Moving away from parents
2. Foster homes
3. ABC

4. Dad "kidnapping" me
5. The good foster home
6. Dad died, losing it everywhere
7. Losing the good foster home, going to YO
8. The Mennonite foster home, Bob rescuing me
9. The Goodtown group home
10. Going to jail, making good friends
11. Moving out with girlfriend
12. Having the baby
13. Spending time with girlfriend's mom
14. Girlfriend moving out and partying, giving me shit
15. Girlfriend's mom dying, having to leave
16. Moving with my posse
17. Getting more time with my son
18. Jail
19. Moving into house with ex-girlfriend
20. More charges, plea bargaining, looking at a month in jail

6 = 4, 6, 12, 13, 1, 17, 16

4 = 4, 12, 17, 16

2 = 12, 4

1 = 12

7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? This is a story about Tim, his past, his present, and important times in his life that means a great deal to him.

*Tim was unable to attend the focus group because he was in jail. He served 18 days in June, the time he was anticipating during this interview, and again in August. His worker told me he was again in jail for assault on 'nippers' in March, 1996.*

## STORY OF DIANE

is story on April 7, 1995, in a clean but sparsely-furnished apartment she shared with her baby son.

Oh, God, I don't know how to start...

I think the transition started when I was 15. I realize that CAS was not so much discontinuing their support but not being there so much. I was a chronic runner and I didn't feel CAS had much to offer me after that. At that time I felt I needed to set myself up for independence on my own, knowing that I couldn't go back to my father's or my mother's. I started looking for ways to be self-efficient, to rely on myself and not others. Now I had to start looking for an apartment, a means of income, and whether or not I was going to continue school.

My last place that I was at, that's when I decided that it was time for me to get out. So I ran, and I tried it on my own. With help from friends and acquaintances. A couple months went by and I felt I wasn't able to do it because my income wasn't stable, pretty much my life wasn't stable at that point.

So I went back to the group home and re-evaluated everything and decided whether or not it was time for myself to leave. At that point, I looked back at the first day I went into the group homes, which was stressful and at that point I looked at myself as not being stable, as not being self-confident or independent. I started running away at my first group home, solely because my father had abandoned me: that's how I felt. He told me many times that he'd be there to take me out if I'd stay there however many weeks he'd set forth, but when time came and I did what he asked, he never took me out. So I'd run, pretty much to teach him a lesson, to say "You're not going to do what you're supposed to, I'm not gonna do what I'm supposed to!". After a few months of that, the relationship with my father deteriorated to almost nothing. I lied to him, stole from him, pretty much to teach him a lesson.

And then I got into using drugs and drinking. Then my life seemed to go right downhill from there. At first it was good, I liked it, then I guess the novelty wore off and it seemed to become boring. I became a person that got bored easily, always liked change, new things, new adventures, new challenges. Then I started getting in trouble with the law. That was always a new challenge. I don't think anything was the same with getting in trouble with the law. I met a lot of friends through detention centres, courts, my associations with them grew more and more. And the more I associated with them, the more trouble I got into, to the point where the group homes were pretty much a hotel for me. I'd come and go as I pleased. They'd ground me and I'd turn around and tell them to fuck off. My attitude had gotten really bad. I had no respect for anybody. At that point I don't even think I had any respect for myself.

My school was just gone right down the tubes. I'd went to a good school. I had to work hard to get into it, had to get good grades to get into a school like this, and I turned right around and blew it. I thought that parties were more important than school. Who needs school???? I'd just turn around and get high or drunk.

So I started skipping school. First it started one day a week, then 4 days a week, then I was only going once a month if I was lucky, then I wasn't going at all.

When I finally hit rock bottom with my school, I realized that I have to make up for what I lost in school and become street smart now. I had to learn the ways of the street, things to do, who the right people are to talk to, who's not. And that's when I started associating with 'Scott'. Scott was a drug dealer. He was a pimp, and he thought it would be fun if I tagged along with him. Pretty much a girlfriend, but a lot more on the side. Next thing you know I was holding his drugs, selling his drugs, collecting money from his prostitutes.

And then one day he hit me and I told him that it was over, I was leaving. That's when I realized that I had finally hit rock bottom with everything. He pulled a gun to my head. I thought my life was over. But he turned around and said I wasn't worth it. So I ran out of the house and I ran to the nearest coffee shop and decided what to do from there. I now had no place to live, no means of income, no shelter, no food, no nothing.

So I walked the streets all night, and from there met up with 'Mike'. Now Mike seemed like a nice guy at first, but as I got to know him more, I learned that he was into prostitution. He'd pick girls up and try to get them to work for him or sell them for \$50 to some other guy and make his money that way. So he asked me and I declined because I didn't want to stoop any lower than I already felt. But he said he owned me, I was his now. And at that point I said no and I hopped on the nearest bus and went back to the group home I was staying in.

I was there for a couple weeks, thought things had died over, went back, and then he got these two girls to go after me and make me his "slut", as he called them. Well, we got into a fight and I got beat up pretty bad. Now at this point I didn't feel I could go back to the group home. They'd question me and possibly bring the police in, and so I stayed out for the next 3 weeks until all the physical wounds had healed. When I went back, I was high, I was drunk, and they said that I should maybe seek counselling.

So I started seeing counsellors. And I went from counsellors to therapists. From a therapist to a psychologist. Back to therapists. Finally I said I had had enough of everybody trying to get into my head. So I shut everybody out. I'd only talk about what happened that morning or that afternoon, superficial things, things that really meant nothing to me. I had no real friends at this point. No one I could trust, except myself. So then for a couple weeks I walked around and did nothing, just thought and thought and thought about how I could get out of this situation. I didn't want to stay in it, I didn't want to be a part of it. I had to leave.

So I went back out and I got drunk again. Went to a store and stole some food and got arrested for it. Then when I went there, I was sitting in the holding cell and thinking "Is this my life, in a holding cell? Will I spend the rest of my life in jail?" At that point I didn't care where I spend the rest of my life, as long as I wasn't in a group home. But then I realized when I went to a detention centre, they had as much hold over me as someone in a group home, if not more. I was not one for taking orders or instructions from somebody. I didn't like to be told what to do, so then I rebelled and got locked into my cell for the rest of my stay there.

While I was in there, I met this girl 'Lisa'. Now she, at the time, was not into crime or anything. This was her first offence. She seemed like a nice girl, somebody I could get to know. So I was getting out before her, so I found out the day before I was released, so I met her on her release date. We went straight to this guy's house, 'John', and little did I know that John was her pimp. Now because she brought me there, he assumed that I was coming there to work for him. So again I got asked to work the streets. But I declined.

It's then I ran into this guy, 'Edward'. He let me stay at his house, gave me food, got me high or drunk whenever I wanted. And then I started doing things to make myself look better. I'd dye my hair because I thought guys liked blonde hair, so I dyed my hair blonde. I lost obscene amounts of weight, because I thought I was too fat so I starved myself. Then somebody told me a tattoo was sexy, so I got one of those.

And then when I decided to go back to the group home, I knew I had to make a change. I had to get my relationship back with my dad. I had to get my confidence back in myself. And my independence. So I started to rebuild my relationship with my father. That didn't go over so well. At this point, I'd run away and done so many things it didn't seem there was anything there to rebuild.

I'd burned the bridge with him, and now I had to find a way to rebuild it. He left me with that choice, that I had to find the way to rebuild it. I tried several things, but he ignored me, so once again I did what I wanted to do.

At this point in time, I was on my 6th group home and I decided to start with myself first. So I went back to a therapist, tried to find out if there was anything wrong with *me*, why I didn't have a normal life. So I sort of went into depression. I called it soul-searching, everyone else called it depression. The therapists all told me the same thing, you're a normal 14-year-old, there's no need to worry. But I thought there was something wrong. I *knew* there was something wrong. They all started pushing me away. I thought they're supposed to be there to help, but they're not doing any good, so I guess the problem can't be fixed, whatever it was. And I got depressed over not being able to do anything right, can't fix myself, can't fix my relationship with my father.

So I tried suicide. Thought that might be a good way to solve everybody's problem. Obviously running away didn't help. Doing drugs and drinking didn't help. So I talked to this guy about it and it handed me an obscene amount of pills. Little did I know that they were Gravol, nothing that could do me any serious harm. So I got high and sick and passed out. After that I stayed away from all pills, all everything for awhile.

Then for awhile I just did as I was supposed to, stayed in the group home, went to whatever school program they wanted me to, followed all their rules. Then I decided to work myself into getting off probation. It seemed like a heavy task at the time, because I couldn't speed anything up, there was a set time I needed to be on there for. During this whole time, at least I kept up good with my probation officer, saw him when I was supposed to, phoned him when I was supposed to.

Then I met this guy 'Max'. And I went out with him for about 3 months and he introduced me to his sister, 'Jessica'. Jessica had 2 kids, she was a single mom, and Max thought it would be good for me to get some stability and Jessica needed a babysitter. So I babysat her kids; in return she'd give me a place to live and food in my stomach. That was all fine and good until I got tired of always having to be the one to watch the kids, never had weekends to myself, nights to myself, so one night I told her I was going out. She stayed home. And I never came back.

I hooked up with this girl 'Sarah'. She introduced me to this bootlegger. He was into cocaine and crack and I always told myself I'd never get into that stuff, but I turned around and got into it. Six months goes by, and I'm always high, drunk, whatever. Then one day I was straight for the whole day, and I realized that if I keep going like this, I'll die. So I talked to my mom and asked if I could come and live with her. She says okay, with conditions. That I abide by her rules and respect her and respect my step-dad and her house. So I went down.

That lasted for about 6 months. Then I stole her car. All over a guy I had met in a detention centre up there. Well, I got into an accident with the car, and I blew it up. Then I went to jail. I was in there for about 1 1/2 to 2 months. And then got sentenced to 6 months with a year probation following that. And I came to Petertown to serve my sentence. At this point, I guess is when I really realized that I have to get my life straightened out, that I have to get some independence because this is not a group home. If this group home didn't like me, they could just transfer me to another one. I was in there for 6 months, not a day more.

My relationship with my father was not good, so I realized that I couldn't live with him, and the reason I was in there was because I'd blown up my mom's car, so I couldn't live with my mom. So when I first got there I was rebellious, had an attitude. My whole set goal was to do my time and get out, not to make friends, not to open up to anybody. And I did that for awhile. But the more I did that, the harder it was. So I thought, well it's better for them to work with me than for me to work against them.

So they got me into a Futures program. I was making \$250 every 2 weeks. And once I started to make money, I felt like I was gaining something back. This was my money, I'd earned it. Now that was the first that I had some financial income. Now I had to start on dealing with my self-anger, my attitude toward other people. So I took anger management and saw more therapists. They all told me I was an angry little girl. And now I only had a few months to go, so I had to find a home for myself. So I started looking, started phoning people. And I found a place. The staff at the group home helped me move in, and the day I got out I thought I was set. I had welfare all ready.

But it was harder than I thought. I'd never really been on my own, paying rent, worrying about bills, until this point in time. First three months went by and I guess I sort of felt confident, but then my confidence decreased. Again I hooked up with the wrong people and my house became a party house. I had people smoking drugs, drinking, bringing their girlfriends over to have sex in my house. Then I felt like I lost control in my own place. Now I have to do something again to regain it.

So I moved and left everything. And that's when I met my room-mates, 'Eric' and 'Sue'. Through these people I started meeting a lot more people. People started knowing who I was, and I liked it when I'd walk through a mall or down a street and people would say "Hi, Diane!". Then one day I was with a girl, 'Amy', and that's when I met 'JJ' and 'Steve'. We talked for about 20 minutes and I said I wanted to go and get high, so I left.

Me and Amy hung around for the next week or so, she stayed at my house, I stayed at her's, and the whole time this guy JJ was following me around. I'd see him at the mall, or I'd see his car driving by all the time. But I never thought nothing of it. Till Eric told me one day that I had a secret admirer. When I asked who, he told me he wasn't supposed to say, so I carried on about my business. He kept bugging me about it, and I got mad and told him I'd grown out of childish games like this: tell me about it or don't bring it up. So he told me.

So JJ was coming over every once in a while. He'd stop and he'd get high, or he'd just talk. Then I realized that I liked him more than a friend, so we started dating. And he had a house up north and asked me to move in there, and I did. I was up there for a week, and I started feeling trapped, scared, threatened. I knew I was rushing things and I didn't want to. Everything in my life had been rushed, I'd had to do it then and there. This time I wanted to think about it and make a right decision, a right choice. So I told him I wanted to come back to Petertown. And I was up here for 2 weeks and I thought about it, and I decided to move back up there and try it out.

Well, everything went good and 3 months later I found out I was pregnant. We talked about kids and we talked about our future, but we never thought to have kids now, not this soon. He was ready to have kids, he felt his life was almost over--he was 36 years old. But I wasn't ready. I was only 17, I had everything to look forward to. I wanted to finish school, I wanted to get a start on my career. But I couldn't change that now.

So as months went by, JJ started drinking more and more, and he was one that could not handle his liquor. He'd get violent, angry about all the things that had happened in his past, things that people had done to him, and take it out on me. I was like a big punching bag for him. And one day it got way out of hand and he choked me and punched me in the face, but stupid me, I didn't leave, I stayed. Well, I thought the relationship would get better after this, and it did--for a couple of weeks. But then it went downhill again. He got arrested and spent about 6 months in jail. Everybody at that point in time said it was time to leave him, time to move on in your life, you're going to have a kid. But I said no, I love him, I wanted to stay with him. I lied for him, I did everything in my power, anything that I could think of to do, I did, to keep him out of jail, to keep him with me.

Then when he got out, our relationship seemed to be better. He was excited about the baby. He was excited about being back out again. And I found a place down here [Petertown] and I was living

in it for a couple weeks. The relationship again went downhill. I figured I knew I was safe, I had a place to live, I had food in my stomach, now he could do whatever he wanted to. He'd work from 8 in the morning to 8 at night, come home, be there a couple of hours, go back to the halfway house. This would go on for weeks, so finally I couldn't take it any more and I told him, things have got to change. And again they did. For about 2 weeks. Then we got into a big fight and I asked him, "Do you see any pattern happening here? I think we should end it while it's good." And I got the tears: he didn't want to leave me, he didn't want to break up with me.

And then the baby came. It was the happiest day of my life. And his too, I guess. But I guess the novelty wore off after a month or so. He didn't seem as interested in the baby as he was when he was first born. Then our relationship hit rock bottom and I left to go to my dad's. And both him and my father knew this was not permanent, but they both acted as if it was. It seemed that everybody was making all my decisions for me. I had already lost my independence with JJ. And it seemed I was losing it with my father. I felt like sitting back and saying, "Why don't you guys just run my life? fight over whether I should stay or I should go."

But I had a good friend through all this. 'Mary' was supportive, she listened. She gave me advice, but never ever said do this or do that. The time came when I felt I needed to make the choice whether or not to go back to JJ or stay there [with my father]. JJ had told me he'd changed, so I thought I'd give him a chance to prove it. I felt I was in a win-win situation: if he showed me he'd changed, then we'd all be a family and live happily ever after. If he didn't, then I knew I could never have a relationship with him.

So I came back and I was only here for 4 days and he got arrested again. Now he awaits, sits in jail, all because he had a drink. After he hit me, I was dead set against him drinking around me, and he knew that. So he decided to drink one last time before I came back, and he went outside and started threatening people and tried to pick fights with people. JJ has a history of violence; he's on parole for second-degree murder. But he knew when he took that drink it would jeopardize things with me, him and his son, him and his freedom. And the only question I have in my mind is why.

I think that's all I can think of now.

R: You said you weren't ready to have a baby. Did you consider terminating the pregnancy?

Yup. I thought of abortion. I thought of adoption. But abortion I couldn't do, and then adoption weighed heavy in my mind. And I talked to my mom about it, and she told me if need be she'd take care of the baby until I was ready to take him back. I could live there or close by. I had good support from her. I had good support from everybody. But now I look at him, and I don't think I could have done it. I *know* I couldn't have done it.

R: My other question is about drinking and drugs and you: how has that changed through this transition?

What do you mean, changed?

R: You describe how it was at past times, and how it has been a factor for JJ, his use. And I wonder where you are about drugs/drinking now, and whether that has changed, why, etc???

I still drink, the odd time I get high, but because JJ is not a good drinker, I made it a point to not drink around him. When he got arrested the first time and got out, he stopped drinking and getting high altogether. Five months he was sober. Now that I am not with him any more, I feel I can do that and not feel guilty. I go out occasionally drinking. I occasionally get high. But as opposed to how I was before, I've slowed down considerably. I'm more cautious. My risk-taking is not as great

as it was before. And I think of how it will affect me with my son before I do it. That's it.

R: Did you ever think that you had an addiction problem? Or was it "just" a way to manage tough times?

I never had an addiction. It was more of a way to manage my problems. When I got high or drunk it took them away. I didn't think about it. It was avoidance. It was a good way to avoid all my problems, and that's why I did it.

R: That's all I can think of to ask: you've covered a lot of territory!

Is

*This meeting took place in the same apartment, on April 17, 1995.*

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF DIANE

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND

I want to add something: a relationship with this guy 'Cody'. This relationship went on for about a year and a half. It was a good relationship, my "first love". He was heavy into dealing drugs, but that was pretty much it, no prostitution, just drugs. And he made a lot of money. We had a nice home. I had nice things. After a while, it just seemed frivolous. It was the same thing day in, day out. I had to watch what I said, what I did. So I decided to pack everything up and leave. Again I looked at myself and thought I can't live a life as being involved with crime all the time, and having to watch what I did and where I went for fear the police might catch me or Cody. And I have no explanation of why I left or where I was going or what I was going to do.

At that point I went back to the group home where I was staying, and that's when I met up with this guy 'Adrian'. We still keep in contact. He was in a house across the street from me, a shelter I guess it would be called. At that point in time, he was interested in me. I didn't know. I had no interest in him. He was a nice guy, but not one that I'd want to have a relationship with. And then a couple of years went by and I was doing my 6 months in Petertown and I started writing to him. And now there could be a potential relationship. But he opened my eyes to see that I needed something stable for my son and for myself. And of course he was willing to provide that, which again made me think about all the other relationships and is he being serious, or is he just saying this to "get" me?

R: Do you worry that if you do get into a stable situation, it will drive you crazy like the situation with Cody? Or maybe I misunderstood what drove you from that relationship: was it that it was a nice home, or that you were always looking over your shoulder?

It was a lot of things, always looking over my shoulder, the nice things I had. Mind you, I didn't mind the nice things I had, but I didn't want them: everything is materialistic. If we didn't have the best, then it wasn't good enough. We always had to have something better than the next guy.

Q3. THE FORM:

I don't think it has ended, actually.

The beginning...When you hit rock bottom and realize things have to change, you sort of start to make the transition to change, not necessarily to become a different person, but to become a better person.

The middle??? When you've gotten some things back, be it your self confidence or your financial confidence, or your emotional confidence, you won't necessarily have everything at this point, but you will have some things that will help you get other things. For some people, you need emotional confidence, whatever: it all depends on you.

I don't think it really ever ends, for anybody, because as you go through life you have to have more confidence in one area to achieve something else...

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS:

1. First time dealing with being in a group home.
2. Leaving the group home the first time.

3. First time trying to rebuild relationship with dad
4. First time getting arrested
5. First time using drugs and drinking
6. First time getting confronted to work the streets.
7. First time dealing with abuse.
9. Learning to deal with seeing counsellors
10. Rebuilding relationship with my mom.
11. Dealing with re-abuse
12. Dealing with a baby

5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

1. First time dealing with being in a group home: At the time, a -5; it was hard to deal with. It felt like my whole life was going to be taken away from me. I now had no family home. My friend's would say "I gotta be home for my dad." What do I say: "I gotta be home for my staff"? Now I guess it would be a +3. Near the end, it showed me ways to deal with other people, deal with not having a home per se -- these were always just houses. Teach me rules. And to use counsellors, staff, whatever it may be, to vent my anger or express my emotions.

2. Leaving the group home the first time. At the time, +4. I could do what I wanted. I could go where I wanted. See who I wanted. It made me smarter in ways to deal with things on the street and to deal with people differently. But now I'd give it a -3. Maybe if I had stayed instead of ran, I could have been back with my dad or had my own place or whatever.

R: You said originally that running was to smarten up your dad, get back at him for not following through on his promise? So at the time, would that have "diluted" the +4?

No, because the 4 also gave me gratification, to sit here and go "ha, ha". A lot of gratification!

3. First time trying to rebuild relationship with dad: oh...I'd say that was -2. When I wanted to work things out, he didn't. When he wanted to work things out, I didn't. So it went back and forth and it seemed like it was a never-ending thing. I'd maybe give it a -1 now, only for the fact that it's easier for me to talk to him about problems. But not necessarily solve them or work them out.

4. First time getting arrested: I think this one is off the scale, too, -5. I was scared. Everybody told me it wasn't that bad, that on your first time they let you go, not a problem. But when I sat in that holding cell, just for that 10 minutes, I thought, geez, I can't get in trouble again. You just feel like you lose everything. I don't think the rating has changed much now; I still hate to get arrested, I still feel scared. But I guess the more times you go through it, you get used to the "system". Going to adult jail is different than going to young offender's jail. Young offender's jail always seemed like a group home to me. Adult jail is jail.

5. First time using drugs and drinking: that was +3. I was scared at first, but once I realized the feeling it gave, I thought "This is good". Drinking was easier: I didn't cough. Mind you, my hang over the next morning wasn't good.

R: What kind of drugs are we talking here, and how old were you?

Hash, marijuana, acid. I was 12 1/2.

Now, I think it has helped me. I don't feel the urge to try anything new, because I've already tried it. I think it sort of set me up for when my son came. It would be a 0, neutral, right there in the middle.

R: I'm not sure how to understand that it set you up for when your son came. Could you

explain a bit more?

Well now that I've experienced all that and done all that drinking, I don't need to experience it any more. I've done it all, so I don't need to try any more new drugs or drinks.

6. First time getting confronted to work the streets: scary. -5. You don't know how to react for that. No one prepares you to deal with a situation like that. So handling it is hard, you're pretty much on your own. Now I'm sort of glad I had the courage enough to say no. Who knows where I'd be.

R: Could you talk a bit about how you thought through the issue at the time, what you considered, why, etc.??

I considered death. I heard all the time about prostitutes getting murdered or killed or committing suicide. They couldn't get out, that was their only way out. But not for me. Seeing all these people, I knew I wanted a family some day. That I'd want to settle down with a boyfriend. And how would my son or daughter or my boyfriend know or react to me doing that sort of thing?

8. First time dealing with abuse: definitely -5. It was a hard thing to go through, only because of the fact that I didn't have anybody there for support. Or I didn't want anybody there for support. Life doesn't prepare you for abuse, either. You learn not to trust people, and be very skeptical of relationships when you get into them. First thing that crosses your mind is "Is he going to hit me?". I don't think my rating has changed. You still feel scared and alone.

9. Learning to deal with seeing counsellors: -4. I don't like talking about my feelings, what I went through or what I'm thinking. It seemed all these counsellors try to pry and get inside, they wouldn't leave well enough alone, which is one reason why I think I don't like seeing them. I think now my rating has gone higher, maybe +1. I guess I've learned to talk to people; if I'm angry, how to express myself, to not keep everything inside and wait for one day when I'm just going to blow everything right up. Learning to trust people.

R: But at the time, things weren't "well enough" with you, they were fairly tough. So why the resentment at them doing their job, in a way, and what you needed, in a way???

Because I thought I could deal with all these tough times on my own and I didn't want anyone to help me. And it seemed like the more I shut them out, the more they tried to get in.

R: Sounds like a struggle to get/keep control. Is there anything that could have been done differently that would have avoided that particular pitfall, that you can think of?

Yeah, I think waiting for me to go to them, rather than people saying "You should see a counsellor. Go to a counsellor." Because then I would be making the move, I'd be saying I'd lost control, whereas they were saying I had lost control.

10. Rebuilding relationship with my mom. +1. It's always been easy to rebuild relationships with my mom, because she just gives in. I feel bad for what I did and for what I put her through, but if I didn't do it, then we wouldn't be friends. I can talk to her now about boyfriends or friends or problems I'm having, as if I was talking to a friend, not my mom.

R: I'm still curious about how you managed to blow up her car. Would you like to fill in some details?

I was just driving down the road, and I got nervous because a transport truck was coming on the other side, so I started moving toward the ditch, and when I realized I was too far over toward the ditch, I swerved back over. And a car was coming right at me, and so I had to swerve back toward the ditch. And I panicked, and instead of putting my foot on the brake, I put it on the gas. And sorta

flew over the ditch. And I thought that if I turned the steering wheel around fast enough, like they do in the movies, I could just spin the car around and drive right out. But...it just slid sideways, so I tried steering the other way, and the car rolled over, slid on the roof into the hydro pole. And the hydro pole broke, almost fell on the car, but because the wires were there, it just hung there. And I was stuck in the car, gas was pouring out, windshield washer fluid, all flammable stuff, and it was starting to ignite. Once flame caught the car, it just went "poof"! Good thing I had my seatbelt on. If I had had a passenger in the car, they wouldn't have lived. I'll tell you, it's not like the movies.

R: How did you get out?

Through the window. I just got myself out. My knee was caught, I pulled it out and climbed out. I only ended up with two scars.

R: Did that change your attitude about excitement or anything?

No, I don't think it did. I mean I'm more cautious when I do things now. If things threaten my life, I won't do it. But if no harm can be done, and it's just simple innocent fun. In a sense I wish this would have happened 2 years before it happened, maybe I wouldn't have done some of the things I've done. (It happened when I was 16; I was just turning 17.)

Everything I owned was in the car: letters, clothes, i.d., everything.

R: Why did you have all your stuff with you?

Because I was dating this guy, 'Gary', and he lived in Ottawa and I was on my way down there to move in with him. We were going to return the car the next day.

R: Did your mom know you had the car for this purpose?

No, she thought it was a joke when the police phoned. She hung up on them once, until she went outside and actually looked. That was a feeling I never want to experience again. I would rather have been put in jail than talk to my mom. It was a tense situation. She felt betrayed, so betrayed. First she asked if I was alright, and when she learned I only had two cuts, then she got mad. Maybe I should have told her I had concussion or something. The officer said, "Would you like me to leave you alone?"-- I was holding the receiver 2 inches from my ear. Now I look back and think, "Of all the stupid things to do, this has got to be it!"

11. Dealing with re-abuse: it was hard, again. I told myself I'd never put myself in that position, and I thought I wasn't, but I guess I was wrong. You never expect it. It comes when you least expect it.

R: But you're living with someone on parole for murder, from a murderous family, and it seems to me that it goes with the territory, to some extent. What's my question: I wonder if it's something about being more powerful than the danger, living on the edge and not believing that you mis-judged. Does this make any sense to you?

Maybe this should go without saying. Maybe it's because I misjudged. I thought it happened so long ago. I hadn't known his history at this time. I didn't really learn his history until after all this. I stayed at his sister's house and she told me that he abused his first wife and his common-law wife.

R: But did you know what he'd done time for? The details?

Other than the fact of him being a murderer? (Gales of laughter from both of us) Yeah, I knew he did time for murder, and a couple weeks before he had explained to me what happened. But the way he explained it, and the way he made it sound, he'd never hit me, he'd never hurt me. He just

made it sound like that was his past, and that's where he'd left it; he was a changed man. And he treated me really nice, I thought I had everything I could want, I mean here was a guy who had a nice car, had a house, always had money to take me out to lunch or a movie, and treat me with respect, so I thought, what more could you want? But then afterward, I saw another side of him. But by then I'd fallen in love with him, and there were feelings. And it seemed like the material things didn't really matter; it was emotional stuff that I was after now. Because in a sense I had all the material things.

R: But the parole officer's questions are good ones, about what is in it for you? What do you get from him?

This is a touchy one. Okay. In one sense, he made me feel like I couldn't get anybody else, and I'd rather have him than no one. But in another sense, it was my heart speaking instead of my mind.

12. Dealing with a baby: I don't think I could put a rating on this one. I mean, the only way I could explain it is that he has given me the biggest joy and the biggest frustrations. I wouldn't change anything. Maybe to have waited a little bit longer, but..

R: How did you decide to get pregnant, or not decide not to?

It wasn't really a decision. We both wanted to wait for a year and see how the relationship went between us, so it just happened.

R: You mean, a birth control failure?

No, we didn't use birth control. But I was told by many doctors that I wasn't able to get pregnant, so I didn't think we needed birth control.

R: Why did they say you couldn't conceive?

My ovaries weren't developed enough, and they said that I was unable to carry. They said I'd be able to have kids when I was in my early 20's. But I guess they were wrong.

6. 6-4-2-1

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6 = 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 11

4 = 1, 7, 11, 3

2 = 1, 11

1 = 1 It just seems like that was just the hardest thing ever to deal with in my life. All the rest seems like nothing.

7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Maybe because it gives other kids or potential parents or new parents a chance to see that it can happen to any kid, not just one that comes from an abusive family. That you don't necessarily have to teach them about these things, but when the time comes, if it comes, to help them through it and not just push it under the rug and hope it will go away.

*Julie told me this story on April 13, 1995, in her bedroom in the home she shared with her god-parents. The version that appears here was revised and added to on April 18, 1995.*

### THE STORY OF JULIE

I guess the first time that I really took responsibility for myself was when I was 14 years old and I asked to be placed in foster care. The problems at home at this point were taking a ridiculous toll on me psychologically as well as physically.

I felt that I was taking too much responsibility for my family and not enough for myself. I felt that I needed to be taken better care of. And I hoped that I would be able to find a better environment for myself. I just wanted to grow in a positive way. At this age, I wasn't very clear on, nor did I consider, who I was. I always wanted to be perfect and I always wanted to do things for others. In that way, this was the most selfish decision I ever made. And one where I truly put myself ahead of my family.

The first placement didn't work out. I became ill with mononucleosis. I was not receiving proper care at this foster home. I moved in with my mother who had left my father and she nursed me back to health. Unfortunately, I did not wish to remain in her home. We still needed to work a lot of things out. I made another decision again to leave my family for another foster home.

This placement was a hell of a lot better!! Before I turned 16, I had to decide whether or not I would like to be a crown ward. At that time, I didn't know being a crown ward meant. I could also choose to live with my mother. This decision stressed me so much that my marks dropped in the final part of the year. I decided to go back with my mother after she begged me and cried. I realized I was being manipulated but I just wanted to get it over with. And I had a foolish hope that some miracle would follow, and that somehow we would get along.

My little sister, at the age of 12 1/2, was raped by her 17-year-old boyfriend. She confided this to me. I was shocked. I was about 16 years old. I felt that something had to be done. The same boy had also been beating her up, hitting her, issuing death threats to me, insulting my grandmother, and his behaviour was not improving with his steroid abuse. I did not like him. I told my mother that my sister had been raped and abused by this individual. She took no action. The tension between my mother and myself rose dramatically at this point. My mother would not admit to herself that what I said was true. I believe this was her way of avoiding any responsibility. She had some very interesting theories as to why she should not interfere. Finally one day, this boy hit me. I'm glad he did because now I had legal leverage. I called the police and pressed charges.

So again, I was the one who had to take action. My mother didn't leave my father until I left home, and again I felt that I had been stuck with making the difficult decision. This boy's father was a police officer, and his father threatened to have other officers harass my mother with parking tickets and whatever else they could conjure. We also believe that he had our phone tapped. I had lots of friends, and some of them were...rumoured to be in gangs. This boy was afraid of my friends and that is probably why our phone was tapped. Since he'd been threatening me, I threatened him right back, and he knew I had lots of friends who didn't like him.

His father charged my little sister with mischief for kicking their front door when her now ex-boyfriend refused to return her clothing. I had to compromise my charges against him so that my sister would not be charged. She was only 13, so it wouldn't be on her record. He was over the age of 18, so the charges that I was pressing would have affected him much more. In the end, I got a restraining order against him. The knowledge that I could later charge him with issuing death threats, which is a more serious, if he ever tried anything again. This I had learned from my lawyer.

My sister no longer sees this boy, so I know I made the right choice, but I could never respect my

mother or feel secure when she was caring for me. She didn't seem to be capable of being strong and taking action, even when it was incredibly necessary.

Months later, my mother kicked me out of the house for maybe the third time, and I refused to come back. We had a horrible relationship. I had so many reasons not to respect her that I couldn't obey her. I felt like the adult many times. I rebelled even more by going out more, and spending more time with my friends. I felt more accepted, appreciated, and respected around friends. Let me clarify that: I don't drink, I don't smoke, I definitely am not promiscuous. I don't beat people up. I only hung out a lot to avoid being at home.

I missed two years of school because of all the confusion and by avoiding home and reality, both of which needed improvement before I could face them again.

I had been kicked out and I'd missed two years of school. I lived with several friends. At one point in a *large public housing complex*, and at another point with a boyfriend. Unfortunately for my ex-boyfriend, I was a virgin and did not want to have sex with him. His principles were different. Problem arose due to these differences.

My god-parents allowed me to move in, under the conditions that I find a job and go to school.

When I turned 18, I realized that I was no longer a child. Nobody was taking care of me, and things wouldn't just happen. I was no longer a cute and cuddly infant, and the world no longer had any obligation to protect me. I got a part-time job and went to summer school, where I got an "A". I've been in school and working ever since. After being on my own and deciding to leave home so many times, I finally decided to give up on having an ideal family or home relationship with my parents.

Miraculously, I have an ideal relationship with my god-parents. I don't know what I would be doing right now if it weren't for my god-parents, but it probably wouldn't have worked out as well as it has.

I'm in an extremely fortunate and rare situation, to have such level-headed people to live with. I am more responsible now. I don't go out as much. I've had the same boyfriend for nearly 11 months now, which is quite the record for me. I've calmed down, but I still have a pulse, I still live. I'm being more careful with my money and more optimistic about my future. I realize that the only things I truly need to worry about are school, and homework. I'm relatively healthy, and need to take care of my body as well. I want to make sure that I'm happy. I have put work ahead of school; where I could have gotten straight "A's", I got straight "B's". There's more instant gratification in work because every two weeks you get a pay cheque. With school, you generally receive a diploma every 4 years. So you don't see yourself reaching your goals quickly. I'm trying to modify my thinking so that I will put school ahead of everything else, but I've been very sick this semester and I'm not doing nearly as well as I'd like to.

I'm still working on myself. I've come very far this year. And I hope to go even further in the years to come. I'm part way to a place, or a goal, or an ideal. I will one day be complete, together. Though I don't expect that to happen until I'm about 50. I plan to change a lot and experience a lot of things, different foods, travelling, and to learn different things. My interests are much more suburban right now. I just want to be a happy, well-educated, middle-class, healthy female. This is what I now believe to be cool. The end.

R: Some questions: your god-parents. Did you inherit them from your family or find them yourself?

Found 'em.

R: Where? How?

They were my second set of foster parents. I found them through the CAS. I had asked for a "well-educated professional couple that likes to listen to opera" because that is the sort of role model that I wanted. I had brought up to believe that good parents would be able to teach me social graces and to appreciate "the finer things in life". I didn't want to cut myself off from any possibility of being a relatively cultured individual. My god-mother likes opera, and my god-father is more into modern dance music, but that is definitely better than always having to buy your own cd's.

R: What do you think was in it for them?

They have no children of their own, and they really wanted children. They volunteered to be foster parents because adopting a child would take a very long time and there are lots of children who need good foster homes. They also needed an older child, since they both have extremely busy schedules. So we fit each other perfectly.

R: Were there other foster children who fit like you did?

I haven't heard of any other foster children who had as Utopian an experience. I know some who are okay, and some who are miserable, but I am not personally aware of any other match which fits as well as the one I was graced with.

R: I wanted to hear you on that, because it is not a common experience among the participants in this study, and it's a voice that is worth amplifying, I think. Other things: culture. I know that your family are from Eastern Europe, and I can't remember if you were born here or there, but was that an issue in the trouble in your family, do you think?

Yeah. I was born in Canada. My father grew up during the war. His father was taken away by the communists because we owned a bakery. You were not allowed to own a business at that time. His mother somehow managed to raise 5 boys by herself, in a war-torn country. My father was extremely poor as a result. We had problems communicating and understanding each other. My idea of tough and gentle were very different than his. I was his son because I was the oldest daughter of two -- there were no sons. So he expected a lot from me, some of which I was not physically capable of. My father has told me that part of our problem was that he never had a father to observe. Also in his country, alcohol abuse was very common and accepted, particularly among males. He brought this aspect of his country with him, and he had serious alcohol problems.

My mother was raised in a very spartan atmosphere, very military. She lived on a farm, but it had to be organized and there was a great amount of discipline, tending to physical labours. She believed that I had a duty as her daughter to unconditionally accept whatever orders she gave me, and to respect her unconditionally. I had a different perspective. I do not take well to orders, particularly from those with whom I live, and as I said earlier on, I did not respect her very much. I loved her, and I worried about and cared for her, but I did not respect her judgements.

R: The other things that came to mind was about reputation, and being understood or appearing to be something different than you were. I was thinking first about living with a boyfriend but being a virgin, but you brought up some other things around your phone call [that interrupted the session]. Could you talk about that a bit, and how it changed over time. How that part of your life was in transition?

Mentioned earlier that I was always escaping home. I spent a lot of time in clubs, malls, pool halls, karaoke's, anywhere that wasn't home. I made lots of friends, and of course, people I met in these places were more often than not (although I have met some very together admirable people) ----- . I've met people who were in gangs, people who dealt everything from guns to drugs and were supposedly parts of mafias. Of course I wouldn't find this out until I had already befriended the

individual and there is no graceful way of ending a friendship after this kind of revelation. Generally, I did not want to offend these people. I learned, I began not to care about what people did when I wasn't around, as long as they were decent when I was. Incredibly enough, some people who would be described as being the scum of society were perfectly decent towards me. And some people who deal drugs or whatever go to school and look normal, they don't grease their hair back or wear leather coats or trench coats and sunglasses. So it's hard to decipher who is "good" and who was "bad". At the time, I was just desperate for acceptance. I believed that I could do anything that I wanted to, stay out late, whatever, as long as I never smoked, took drugs, drank excessively (I have had a couple of cocktails but nothing horrible!) and was never promiscuous.

I had deeply engrained morals, not really from church because I didn't attend until I was 15, which I did on my own accord. I stopped going to church about a year later, because I noticed too much biases. I guess I was kind of lost and confused, but I never actually did anything horrible. I gained a reputation from hanging around these people, and maybe I could have had someone shot, but I've never bothered to find out (just kidding!!) People are very, especially with teenagers, quick to jump to conclusions and be intimidated. Some love gossip more than air. So that's how I got my reputation.

R: And how was losing it, your reputation?

I went back to school and started working. Because of my boyfriend, I had less time to go out and be seen. I avoid people who are too far gone for any help I could possibly provide. I don't want anything that could damage me, around. I've disappeared for about a year from being out every night, so people have grown much more used to my not being there. People I was never close to may have forgotten me. And I'm more selective with my friends. I still get phone calls from people I label "punks" usually with "little" just before that word. And they have their own crazy little requests, which I deny them. So now it is their problem.

R: You're going to an adult learning centre. Do you think you could have returned to a regular high school?

If I really wanted to. I didn't want to at the time. Now I hope to return to a regular high school. The courses are better, and there are less 50-year-old men hitting on me. I'm getting a fair education and I really do like my teachers. The facilities need improving. I don't really fit into either institution, so I've decided to just accept people, and I'm sure that in return they will accept me, wherever I am. I am learning to be a more flexible person.

An adult learning centre was better for re-entering because they're more flexible for attendance, and are easier to speak to if you have a problem. Because you are an adult, they don't speak to you like you are a child. The last thing I needed was to be patronized. Returning to school was difficult as it was. Now I hope to return to a regular school because you're more in the swing of things.

R: Will you become a "regular" teenager/young person?

What's regular?

R: Good question. I was meaning, do you think that you will put your difficult past behind you (your visible you, in any case) as you make the transition into middle-class female all that stuff goal? What I mean is: one carries things that others don't know about, an invisible you, or a you you show to only selected people. So I'm asking whether changing your visible, externally-presented self is part of the transition.

I'll dress a bit better. Right now I couldn't care less about anything as far as my appearance is concerned. In a regular high school, I may end up being more image conscious. I'm not about to

dump my problems on every class-mate I have. I'll be a happy, perky, pleasant person. I won't tie myself up in the ropes of my past, and not allow myself the freedom to have a carefree teenage high school life. I really do want to be a "regular" teen, young adult. And without the problems. I just want to be well-adjusted and successful.

R: Did you say anywhere what career goal you have? I remember that you plan university education.

I don't know what I want, which is why I'm taking my time with high school, trying to cover as many disciplines as possible. I don't want to have to return to high school five years from now because I never took biology. I've seen that happen at this school that I'm going to now. When I'm done, I don't want to be coming back for any reason. I'd like to go to university because I'm fortunate enough to have a good mind, which I might as well use since I've got it. And I'd be bored to tears in any college courses I could think of. I haven't found any courses that would appeal to me outside of university. I still respect people with a college education, but personally, I'm a more theoretical thinker. I like to be practical, but I just don't find any careers that would suit me and my talents outside of a university.

R: Living with 2 Ph D's could influence you too?

I've always wanted to go to university. I've pretty much always done well in school. Had my off years, due to stress, but usually I get straight "A's". They, my god-parents, encourage a higher education but they don't shove it down my throat. Maybe my admiration for them kinda oozes out on the things they do, one of which is obviously having acquired a doctorate.

R: That's all I can think of. Anything more from you?

Yeah. Life's been a real pain at times. And doubtlessly, had I been left not alone, but been in a more nurturing environment, I would definitely be further along in my goals. But I've learned a lot of things and I've seen a lot of things, so I figure there aren't too many more surprises waiting. I guess I got a crash course in life. I feel I handled myself fairly well. I haven't gotten as messed up or as mixed up as I could have. I have a good relationship with my parents now, so things are working out and a lot has been accomplished during this past year. I'd say I had a lot to do with it, but my god-parents also influenced me a great deal. As far as foster care is concerned, it helped me when I needed to get out. I think the system needs to be improved, but you've got to make the best of a difficult situation for many people. It's impossible to have everything to work out for everybody. One thing I feel strongly against is having, at the age of 16, when you can't decide what shade of lipstick you want to wear, to decide whether or not you wish to become a crown ward. I believe it would be much more effective and wiser if this decision did not come until the age of 18 or 19.

R: Actually, it could have come much earlier, and often does. The legislation is that the child can only be in care for a maximum of 2 years before they have to become a crown ward or return to parental care. So it could have happened earlier. Only in that case, depending how much younger the child is, the child would feel less input, and have less input, into the decision.

My problem was that I personally had to make the decision and I didn't really understand what was going on. I never felt clear. Also, you cannot expect me or any other person to say, "Mom and dad, it was great but...I don't want you to be my parents any more." I feel that an open door policy would be much better because anybody who is in a foster home would be curious at one time or another or may, unless there was excessive violence or abuse, want to return to one or both parents at one time or another. I felt like I had to at least try, because it was my family. I couldn't just give up on them. And I'm glad that I did go back the two times that I did. Well, the first time didn't really count. The second time I stayed for a while. And I really needed to know that the time had come to

concentrate my energies on something which would be more likely to happen.

I would still be wondering and I would still feel guilty if it hadn't been proved to me, beyond any doubt, that it was not a good place for me to be, at home with my mother and my father.

R: Were you ever involved in any counselling?

I actually have a long history of therapy. My mother included my sister and I in therapy when I was 13. The three of us had a group counsellor: I believe she was a social worker. Then my mother sent me, by myself, to a group for children who had witnessed violence in their homes. Meanwhile, my sister and my mother also each had their own therapy, on top of the group counselling. It was in this group for children that I expressed my desire to leave home and enter the world of foster care. In my first foster home, I was set up through the CAS with a psychologist who I saw about once a week. I found her to be very helpful. She was someone who I could speak to. It was a very cognitive experience; it was like speaking to myself. The only difference was I had more training and experience to help guide me.

I saw her for as long as I could, but when I moved away to my mother's house and my second foster home, the distance was simply too much. I took a break from counselling, and after the second time I had moved into my mother's house, this time permanently, I began seeking counselling again because of the problems I was experiencing at home and with school. This time, I saw a psychiatrist, because this was paid for by OHIP. I didn't get along with this psychiatrist. I think part of it was her, and part of it was me, at this time. I was a lot less responsible than I should have been. She was a nice person, but we didn't "click". I found her to be kind of belittling, patronizing, and authoritative. I was used to communicating on a more equal level with my psychologist. It didn't work out in the end. I missed a few appointments with her for several different reasons. She warned me that she couldn't charge OHIP for visits that I didn't show up for, and that she would charge me instead. And then she did: \$100! I had no job at this time, and my mother wasn't about to pay \$100 because I had missed a session with my psychiatrist. This terminated our therapeutic relationship.

Right now I live with a psychologist. My home situation is much more stable. I'm used to not living with my family, at this point, so I'm much more settled. My god-mother can provide me with any assistance I need, should the occasion arise. I can glean information and examples from my god-parents in a normal atmosphere on a daily basis. Sometimes I don't even have to ask: the answer can be in my face.

R: But at some points, the counselling was important and useful?

Yeah, definitely. It helped me realize that I needed to leave my home, for my own sake. Later on, counselling helped me adjust to being in foster care, not being familiar with my surroundings, and being in a completely different home environment that wasn't very healthy either.

*This meeting took place on April 18 in the dining room of Julie's home, during the day while her god-parents were at work.*

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF JULIE

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND (integrated into narrative)

Q3. THE FORM:

the beginning: leaving home at the age of 14

the middle: moving back in with my mother to be nursed back to health, moving into a new foster home, moving back to my mother's because of the crown ward thing.

the end: coming back to my second foster home to live.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS

1. putting myself ahead of my family
2. leaving home at 14
3. moved in with mother to be nursed
4. returned to second foster home
5. felt guilty and returned to mother
6. took charge and extracted my sister's boyfriend from our lives
7. got kicked out of house by mother for disrespect,
8. missed two years of school
9. living with various friends, including boyfriend
10. turned 18 and saw the light
11. moved in with former foster parents /god-parents
- 12 got a job
- 13 went to school

5. VALUE THE EVENTS

1. putting myself ahead of my family: +2. Because I wouldn't have left home or really learned to care for myself instead of being other people's, living for other people, I should say, and being concerned with their happiness as opposed to my own.

2. leaving home at 14: +2. It wasn't fun at the time, but it was a necessary event. I was very upset and depressed at the time, and it took a lot of courage. It was difficult, but it was a step forward.

3. moved in with mother to be nursed Back to health: +1. Unhappy events surrounded the manifestation of this situation. It did help me escape from my first foster home: I probably would have had a harder time leaving if I hadn't had the excuse of being sick. Also, it kinda reunited me with my mom, and because she was taking care of me, it was more of a mother-like relationship and not so much hate. She was mothering me, being a mother. She was taking care of me, instead of me taking care of myself or taking care of her. I took care of her in a way, because she wouldn't have left my father if I hadn't left. She didn't want to be the one to break up the family, so it fell on my shoulders.

4. returned to second foster home: +3. Very nice foster parents. Wonderful people. The hope for the future.

5. felt guilty and returned to mother: +2 because even though things didn't work out, I had a chance

to look at our relationship again in these new circumstances that we were both in. And by realizing that it wouldn't work out, my guilt was alleviated, so that I could get on with my life.

6. took charge and extracted my sister's boyfriend from our lives: +2 Because I got him out of our way, but I suffered a lot, too, because my sister hated my guts for doing what I did, so it had a negative effect on me although it was overall positive in other aspects.

7. got kicked out of house by mother for disrespect: +1. Because I wouldn't have had the initiative to leave otherwise, and I would have been trapped there in an unhealthy situation, continually being frustrated and hating my family more and more. And they hating me more and more. It broke the cycle.

8. missed two years of school: -3. It doesn't kill me; I can still do it, I'm still young. But it is a waste of time and I would feel much better if I were caught up with my peers academically. There is the chance that I will appreciate what I learned more, and be more mature and open-minded, so I might be better off in that way, but how would I ever know?

9. living with various friends, including boyfriend: -3. I lived in nasty situations with nasty people. The only thing I learned, really, is that I have to take care of myself, and that I didn't want to be there. To be fair, it was a good motivator. But it wasn't that great, so I'm giving it -3 even though I got something out of it.

10. turned 18 and saw the light: +3. I guess since I was officially an adult, I would officially have to begin acting like one. You just don't get as much leeway once you're 18. I kinda felt like I was getting too old to be doing nothing. The time was right for me to move on.

11. moved in with former foster parents/god-parents: +3. I would say that they really helped me a lot to straighten out and they will continue doing so. They've made my life much easier than it could have been. I have a sense of security and continuity. It's a stable situation and I trust that none of us is going to go running off or throwing each other out of the house, or not supporting each other. It is so stable that it would require a major event, which would probably be external, to disrupt our family.

12. got a job and went to school: +3. It had to happen eventually and better sooner than later. It taught me a lot of responsibility, how to appreciate things, gave me a shot of reality. And now I'm getting places.

Q6. 6-4-2-1:

1. putting myself ahead of my family
2. leaving home at 14
3. moved in with mother to be nursed
4. returned to second foster home
5. felt guilty and returned to mother
6. took charge and extracted my sister's boyfriend from our lives
7. got kicked out of house by mother for disrespect,
8. missed two years of school
9. living with various friends, including boyfriend
10. turned 18 and saw the light
11. moved in with former foster parents/god-parents
- 12 got a job And went to school

6 = 2, 5, 10, 11, 12, 7

4 = 2, 5, 11, 12

2 = 2, 12

1 = 2 because I would probably still be in school, maybe. I could have killed myself if I hadn't left my parents. I was very depressed. It was like the beginning of the path to being where I am now. That is truly where I began to take responsibility for myself. I kinda stumbled along the way and took some time out from being responsible because I was burned out from being responsible. I had been very responsible because of how my family was structured, from the time I was 9, I would say. So by the time I reached 16, I had to have a break; I needed somebody to take care of me instead of it being the other way around. Plus I had other things going on, too.

Q7. What does it mean?

This is how I became me, today. Or at least how my perspective has been colored. I was in a difficult situation, and then I got out of it and into another one, and so on, until I found the right place for me to be in. Where I feel I should belong is very far from where I began. I am now in a place that I didn't even know existed until I was about 15, but I now call it home. I don't know if it's modern society, or just society in general, but in my experience I have found it is best to be able to make choices for yourself. Sometimes your original blood relatives may not know how to care for you as well as complete strangers. I will always love my parents, unconditionally. They are not bad people, just a little confused about themselves and how to raise their daughter. In that way, it is ironic that my god-parents, who don't have any children, seem to be handling me better than my original parents. I guess because everything messed up when I was young, I was at the point where a lot could be damaged, and therefore a lot had to be fixed, which led to more complications.

*I met with Kim on June 17, 1995, in the apartment she shared with her baby daughter. It was comfortably furnished and well-kept. Kim's boyfriend returned with the baby, who wanted to be nursed, near the end of the session. This version includes the additions made in the next session.*

### THE STORY OF KIM

R: Start wherever you think the transition to being on your own started... Some young people talk about their experience of coming into care, because they see that that was when they had to begin paying attention to what was happening to them, but others think it started when they left care. And some think they always had to be in charge of themselves, from a very young age. So whenever, for you, you began to be aware that your life was primarily your concern, not somebody else's. Does that help?

Well, it started from when I came from Jamaica and lived with my dad. And they started to fight, my step-mom and my real dad. So one evening my dad went out and drink and came home and my step-mom came from school in 'Bobville' and my step-sister went out, and I went and closed the screen door. And they started to fight then, because of my step-sister going out. But then my step-mom called my step-sister and tell her to come home back, and then my dad start beating up on all of us, both me and my step-mom and my step-sister. And I called the police and he went to jail for 2 weeks.

He used to abuse my step-mom before I come up from Jamaica, so she decided not to go back with him. And I was living with my step-mom for awhile and I was told I broke up the marriage. And the pressure was just too much, because I knew I didn't break up the marriage. And my dad stopped talking to me.

And I went to this lady's house and she seemed really nice. But then I needed somebody to care for me, so I decided to move out and I went to live with the lady. And she had two other kids, actually, three other kids, and at first it was good. But after a year things changed because my step-mom and her used to talk on the phone about me, and she hit me and I decided to leave, so I walked up to CAS on *a certain street*. And I told them that I don't want to live with the lady any more. And they told me that I should try and work out things with her. They send me to stay at a place called 'New Lodge', a crash house. And from there I went back to the CAS office on Monday morning and then they tried to work out things with me and the lady but it didn't work. Because my dad wasn't giving them support for me and it caused a lot of problems. Then I moved back in with the lady and things just turned really bad. She started beating up on me, so I went back to CAS and tell them what is going on and they send me to a foster home.

But I didn't like the foster home because there was too much rules. So I left, I run away. I run away to one of my friends and I stayed there for 2 weeks and CAS was looking for me and the police came to my friend's house. But I didn't want to leave, so they couldn't really do anything about it. Then after, I decided to go back to the foster home, and I told my worker that I didn't like it there and I wanted to be moved after awhile. And she moved me and I went to 'Yellow Group Home', which I stayed for 2 years.

Then I got pregnant. I started to see a guy since I was living at the lady's place, and when I went to Yellow, after about 2 years, then I got pregnant, and then I moved to here.

Then I had her, my baby. And that's it.

R: How old were you when you came from Jamaica?

I was 13.

R: And did you remember your dad, or know his wife and your step-sister before you came?

I remember my dad, but I didn't know the step-sister or the wife.

R: Could you talk a bit about how that move happened, and how you experienced it, how you felt about it while it was happening?

My dad wanted to take me up from Jamaica since I was 2 years old, but my mom said no, she wanted to keep me until I was 10 years old, so when I was 10 my dad decided to take me up.

R: Do you still have contact with your mom?

Yes. I haven't heard from her for awhile, though.

R: Why, do you think?

I don't know. No idea.

R: You're not worried about that?

No, I'm going down to see her in December, with the baby. And the baby's father.

R: Would you talk a bit about that relationship, with the baby's father.

Well, I've known him 5 years now. And he maybe if it wasn't for him, I would still be, like, I wouldn't be settled. Because he helped me through my rough points. I met him at a *subway* station, one evening coming from school. When I met him he was 18, he's now 22, going to be 23.

Because I had a curfew in the group home, and I wanted to go out, so I used to run away. And I used to tell them that I don't care about my life any more because my Dad bring me from Jamaica and I had a better life there. I used to have lots of fun in Jamaica and now it seems like I'm in a jail-house. And my boyfriend used to tell them that if I think about life so negatively, I'll always be negative, I won't get anywhere in life. I should think about the good things, that my dad did right to bring me up from Jamaica because life was rough there. And if it wasn't for him I'd still be there in Jamaica suffering, so my dad didn't do all bad things, he did good things.

R: So did your boyfriend help you and your dad to build a bridge between you again?

Yes, because if it wasn't for him, I would still have things against my dad. When I was small, my dad told me mom I wasn't his kid, so I had a lot of things against my dad. He told my mom that I wasn't his kid, and people had to force him to say that he's my father. My grandmother, my dad's mom, she told him if my mom had to take blood tests because he said he wasn't my dad, she would. Because my mom newly came from England and she was supposed to go back to England because she and her parents came for a visit, when she and my dad got together. So she didn't get to go back to England because she was pregnant and her father was disappointed in her, so she had to stay in Jamaica. And all of her sisters and brothers went back to England, and my mother was left alone with my dad. Then my dad came to Canada without my mom knowing. My mom went to the market to get clothes for my christening, and when she came back, my dad was gone. Like the day before, he told her to wash all his good clothes, and when she got back from the market, he was gone. And she didn't hear from him for three years. She was left all alone. My dad didn't send any money to help my mom support me, so my mom got together with another man that she had a kid with. So that man was my father because I didn't have a father. And after 3 years, my dad came back to Jamaica and demanded my mom to give me away to him to take back to

Canada with him. But my mom didn't send me.

R: How do you understand your dad's change of heart about you as a baby?

Because he was married then. He came up here and got married to my step-mom and my step-mom told him he should get me.

R: What was her reasoning?

To get me from Jamaica? Um, she just wanted to, I guess, build a family and make my dad happy. I don't know why he was sad in the first place, because he didn't upset me (*raised me*) when I was born. But he went to counselling up here, I guess.

When I came from Jamaica, I used to throw that in his face, too. Because it used to hurt me to see that he has a step-daughter that he fully upset (*raised*) but he didn't upset me.

R: Did he and your step-mother have any biological children?

When I came to Canada, she got pregnant and had a kid after I came here. My step-mom had two kids for herself that weren't my dad's so they decided to have a kid in the marriage. Then I got really jealous! I used to go to school and I didn't want to come home because I know that I had to face my dad and his wife and his kid, which I didn't get that.

R: How do you think your mother managed with letting you go?

She didn't want me to come to Canada because she thought I would have a rough life. And when she heard that my dad and my step-mom was having problems, she wanted me to come back to Jamaica, but I told her that I could make it, because there's lots of things for kids over here, like CAS. But she told me that if I had any problem, she would get money and get me a plane ticket and come back home.

R: And did you ever consider doing that?

Sometime. But I think twice about it, because I know that some day I be able to bring my Mom to Canada. I know that if I go back home, she'll never get a chance to be up here. So I think I'll stay and suffer for a little while, and then I'll settle down and one day I'll be able to bring my mom into Canada.

R: And her other kids, would you bring them?

Yes. I wanted to have a family up here, because right now I don't have a family of my own. I was planning, like when I get some money I'll put it in the bank, because to sponsor for immigration, you have to have a lot of money in the bank. Or my boyfriend will sell his two cars. I was planning to bring her up for a vacation, but I don't know how that is going to go.

R: So she has never been?

No, and she really wants to come and visit and see where I live.

I had all these things in my mind, and he let me talk about it. So if that didn't happen, it would still be in my mind.

R: So that's how he settled you down?

Yes. Because he let me know that somebody out there that cares about me, and I could talk about anything to him.

R: Is your boyfriend also Jamaican?

No, he's from Guyana.

R: Born there?

Yeah. He came here when he was 15.

R: And does he live with his family?

Yes.

R: And they're a together family?

Yes.

R: So he was 18 and you were 15, and was he your first serious boyfriend?

He was my first boyfriend, period.

R: And were you his first girlfriend?

Yes, that's what I was told. I think I was, but you never know...

R: And do you have a good relationship with his family?

Yes, a very good relationship.

R: Are they like a replacement family for you?

Yeah.

R: And do you have contact still with you dad and step-mom and stuff?

I don't have contact with my step-mom, I don't talk to her any more. I was told that she wants to see me and the baby, but I still got to think about that. Because I don't want to put my daughter through things that I went through. And I still keep contact with my dad, supposed to go over there today, actually.

R: Does he still have a drinking problem?

No.

R: Or hitting problem?

I dunno, because I don't live with him. But I don't hear anything about him hitting anybody, because he lives with his girlfriend now, and it seems like everything is okay when I go over there.

R: Could you give a bit more of a picture about your boyfriend, like what kind of guy he is, what he does, what your plans are, that kind of stuff.

He's an outgoing person, like he cares a lot about his daughter, he'll do anything for her. And he's a family guy. And he's working in a printing company, printing credit cards. And I guess he wants to marry me in the future. I think he's going to ask me to marry him on my birthday on July 4. I'm not sure, but I think he is.

R: And will you accept?

Yeah.

R: Okay. Can I ask a bit more about you coming up to Canada? Some kids that I know came to Canada very unexpectedly, and didn't get a chance to say their goodbyes back home and were surprised at what they found here, it was all so different and they weren't prepared.

I knew I was coming to Canada since I was 10 years old, but I didn't get my papers until I was 12. And my dad had to come down to Jamaica to look after the papers. Then I got to come after a year. Got the landed immigrant slip in the mail and I was excited. I wanted to come because life in Jamaica wasn't good and I wanted to make better of myself.

And when the day came for me to come, I didn't want to come. Because I thought I left all my brothers and my sister and my mom. And I didn't know anyone but my dad where I was coming. I didn't know what to expect. All my life I was living with my mom, and then all of a sudden, this drastic change. When I came from Jamaica I used to write my mom and my friends and my sisters every day. I was depressed. I cried all the way on the plane flight from Jamaica to here, and all night. I cried for 3 months and I wasn't eating. All my pocket money that I had, I used to send to Jamaica. My dad had some quarters up on the wall, and I used to take it and change it to paper money and send it to my mom. My dad used to get mad at me because I never used to have money for myself because I sent it all to Jamaica. I felt like I was the one to take care of them because I had a better life. And I knew it was really hard for them in Jamaica. I had a cousin going down to Jamaica, I took all my clothes down and I saved it and sent it down to my mom and sister. And I talked to my dad and went into my step-mom's closet and I took out all of her bed-sheets and her clothes, things I think she wouldn't wear, and I sent it to my mom. I got into trouble for that.

When I came up here, I didn't know what would get my dad and my step-mother mad, so I would just do things to test them. And I guess that was a big part of the problem in my dad's marriage that helped to break it up, because I used to never want to listen to my step-mom. I used to tell her that she's not my mom so she can't tell me anything. And my dad, I used to tell him that he didn't take care of me when I was little, so why does he want to now. Why doesn't he send me home. And he would say that he was going to buy my plane ticket that night, a one-way ticket. I guess he was getting frustrated with me too, because I really put them through a lot. I was going through a time when I was missing my mom. And I didn't have many friends, I didn't know my step-mom. I left all my friends in Jamaica, and I didn't want to go to school in Canada because I didn't like it that I didn't know anyone.

R: Was your life in Jamaica with your mother, a good life except for being poor?

Yes, it was much better. It was fine.

R: But you still "bought the line" that coming to Canada was necessary for you to have a good life?

Yes.

R: Do you think, from where you are now, that it was the right decision to come to Canada?

Yes, most likely.

R: And how long would you say that it took you to get accustomed to being here?

A year.

R: But by the time the year had ended...

The marriage was broke up.

R: But you said your step-mom left your dad because he beat her, so at most, your arrival would have stressed an already-cracked marriage?

Yes, so I guess I shoved it over the bridge. It was already rocky, and I came in and it messed everything up more. I think my dad should have waited till his marriage was stable till he brought me up. He should have waited till he got over his alcohol problem before he brought me up, because he should have known that I wouldn't know anybody and it would cause problems.

R: Just a couple questions about coming into care. The first lady you stayed with, she was a friend of the family?

Yeah. And she made things worst because she said things that hurt me. One day I walked into the room and she said that I didn't look like a virgin, and I knew in myself that I was, so it hurt me. Than I thought she used to talk really bad about me and think that her daughter is Miss Goody-Goody, I think, when it was her daughter doing most of the things, and I used to stick up for her and do lies for her.

R: And the foster home had too many rules.

Yeah, and I didn't like the food they cooked. And the foster mom I didn't really like her either, because she was not like the kind of person I like to live around. The house was nice and everything, but I didn't like her personality.

R: Was she Jamaican?

No, Canadian.

R: And the first lady?

She was Jamaican.

R: But you liked the group home?

Yeah, I loved the group home because the staff there was very supportive and wanted to see good come out for you.

R: And did you make friends with other kids there?

Yes.

R: And school?

I changed school. I was going to 'Polonius' when I went in the group home. I used to skip so much with my boyfriend, so they decided to take me out that school and put me in a school that had more

of the group home kids going to, and they could check up on my attendance every day. And that helped. I used to get around it, but I got all my credits, which I didn't get all my credits in Polonius--I got 3 credits in one year.

R: And getting pregnant. Was that planned?

No.

R: Were you planning *not* to get pregnant?

I wasn't thinking about pregnant at all.

R: And were you worried?

I was on the birth control pills so I thought I was safe. I got sick one night and I guess I threw up the pill or something. I don't know because I was getting sick so often. Maybe I was pregnant and I didn't know. Because I didn't find out I was pregnant until I was 8 weeks. So I took the birth control pill all that time, didn't know I was pregnant.

R: Babe doesn't seem to have suffered any ill effects?

No.

R: So what did your boyfriend think when you announced that you were pregnant?

He didn't believe me. And then, I started to show and my group home worker...I was so afraid to tell my dad and my worker called my dad and told him about it. And my boyfriend wanted me to have an abortion, but I didn't believe in it. I don't believe in it.

R: But he got comfortable with the idea of being a father when he realized you were going to carry on with the pregnancy?

Yes.

R: Enthused?

Um. He keep on telling me I should have an abortion until he see that I'm not going to have an abortion. Then, when I ...like, I was really skinny and when I started to get fat and my belly started to show, then he was excited. I guess he didn't think it was a real baby in there.

R: Did he go to pre-natal classes?

Yes. And he didn't tell him mom that I was pregnant until I was 7 months pregnant, because he was afraid.

R: And how did his family react?

They liked the idea, but he didn't tell his mom until I was 7 months, and when he did tell her, she said, oh, I just thought she was getting fat. And she thought that was good that I was keeping the baby, because one of her daughters had an abortion before and she was really upset with her.

R: And your dad's reaction?

My dad's reaction? He didn't talk to me for 2 weeks. I think he knew I was pregnant because I

called him one night and I wanted to tell him, but I started to cry on the phone and I didn't tell him. And he asked me was I a virgin and I said yes. Because if I tell him no, he would think I was really pregnant. Which I was.

R: So your boyfriend has been devoted to the baby right from the start?

Yes. He still is.

R: In the future, do you see working or being a full-time at-home mom, what?

Well, I see myself working and then staying home, because I want to have a next baby, but not right now, maybe in the next 5 years when I have my own house and a back yard for them to play in.

R: So working to get money for a house, and then a second baby, and then???

Then enjoy life. Go and my kids going to be grown up and then I'll go on vacation.

R: Anything more? A bit about what vocation, job, you're training for.

I want to be a police officer.

R: What would that involve, education, training?

I have to finish my grade 12, then I'll go into police college.

R: Well, they get well paid, and being a visible minority woman should be an advantage to getting in, because it's quite competitive.

*This meeting took place on June 23, 1995, again in Kim's apartment, this time with the baby, a very busy baby, present.*

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF KIM

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND (incorporated in narrative)

Q3. THE FORM:

The beginning is...when my dad came down to Jamaica and demand my mom to bring me here.

The middle is...when everything started to come up on the surface, like everything start coming out of the dark. Like the drinking and fighting and my loneliness.

The end is...when I met my boyfriend and he make me realize that I can't stick in the past, I have to move on.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS

1. Dad came to Jamaica from Canada to get me
2. Me coming here
3. Problems in the marriage
4. Feeling lonely
5. Being jealous
6. Missing my mom in Jamaica; wanting to go back home
7. Went to the lady's
8. Went to CAS; put in foster home
9. Run away
10. Met boyfriend
11. Went to group home
12. Got pregnant
13. Moved out on my own

5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

1. Dad came to Jamaica from Canada to get me: +3 because to make my life better, as I've described. And my mom's life, too.
2. Me coming here: I was both happy and sad, so +3 and also -3.
3. Problems in dad's marriage: -2 because it caused me a lot of problems and bring up the past.
4. Feeling lonely: -2 because I didn't have any friends, I didn't have anyone to talk to about my problems, so that bring me down.
5. Being jealous: That drew me way down, -3, because being jealous caused me to do things that's really bad and caused a lot of problems in my dad's marriage.
6. Missing my mom in Jamaica; wanting to go back home: That bring me down, -3, because if I went home, right, it would have caused me more problems because I wouldn't have a life there, maybe I would have 3-4 kids, don't have an education, didn't finish school, maybe don't have a proper job. So that would have bring me down.

R: But you didn't go home, even though you wanted to.

Because I knew in the back of my head that that would cause me more problems.

7. Went to the lady's: It was a good thing for awhile. Because if I had stayed at my step-mom's place without my dad, it would bring me down more than I was going down anyways, so it make me move on. +3 Because if somebody is putting pressure on me like the way she was putting pressure on me, it would just put me down eventually, so I just moved on. Because if she just kept on hitting me, someday she might have killed me because I wasn't her kid.

8. Went to CAS; put in foster home: It's a good thing because it make me realize that there's a different world out there than being abused constantly. +3.

9. Run away: That was good because I had lots of fun, for a change in my life. +3.

10. Met boyfriend: That's a VERY good thing. +3+++ He made me stop building a cloud over myself, stop thinking about the past and move on to the future.

11. Went to group home: That was good. +3 because I met people that cared and somewhere that I wanted to be at.

12. Got pregnant: A VERY good thing, because I have a little angel now. It's like I have my own family now. +3

13. Moved out on my own: It's good, then I got to be independent, responsible for myself, people stopped being responsible for me. I could make my own decisions. +3.

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. Dad came to Jamaica from Canada to get me
2. Me coming here
3. Problems in the marriage
4. Feeling lonely
5. Being jealous
6. Missing my mom in Jamaica; wanting to go back home
7. Went to the lady's
8. Went to CAS; put in foster home
9. Run away
10. Met boyfriend
11. Went to group home
12. Got pregnant
13. Moved out on my own

6 = 2, 10, 12, 13, 11, 8

4 = 11, 12, 8, 10

2 = 10, 8

1 = 10

Q7. WHAT DOES THIS STORY MEAN? It's a big question! It's a story about me and I hope a lot of parents would think that kids have feelings too. Because my dad didn't treat me like I had feelings. Parents should just hang in there with their kids, go with them through the rough times, not just throw them out. But I didn't get that from my dad. So that's why I told this story.

*Lacey lived in a dizzying variety of places during the time between her first appointment and this session, which took place on August 21, 1995, in my home office. She had terminated agency contact but later was convinced by her worker to re-negotiate an extended care agreement. I located Lacey at a drop-in centre for street kids after several unsuccessful attempts to contact her by telephone and through her worker, and she agreed to come with me to do the interview, if I would drive her there and back downtown, which I did.*

#### THE STORY OF LACEY

When I was 16 I started to think about going on my own, when I lived in a group home. But I wound up going back and forth from wanting to know what it's like to be in the big world. And now that I am in the big world, I want to go back to being 16, not 19. And I think that now I am learning a lot about STDs (*sexually transmitted diseases*) and AIDS and safe sex and stuff, it's easier for me to know what I'm doing. And I want to get on with my life, not having to be running from my problems and my fears and hating all my family for doing what they did to me when I was a child.

Now I'm not running from problems or fights. If someone wants to fight me, I let them take the first shot and if I feel it's necessary to hit back, I'll hit back, or I'll walk away. But I don't like getting into fights. You just end up going into jail. Like I did, in 'Vanderland'.

It's easier to walk away from a problem than it is to walk into it. And me knowing about walking into fights, all it's going to wind up is that you'll get involved in someone else's problem, like it's a soap opera. That's all you hear around Toronto, is soap opera. Soap opera this, soap opera that! You get dragged into everything, all your friends' problems. It's not fun, I know that. I get dragged into my sister's problems.

Now I'm moving on with my life, I'm not doing anything stupid, I'm not doing drugs or drinking. I got a roof over my head. May not be with my mom or my dad or my sister, but it is a place to stay, food in your stomach which is free. May not be exactly what you want. There are rules everywhere you go, though, even in group homes.

I was at a friend's birthday party and there was this guy, he was 21, and he was really good-looking and I thought I really really really liked him. And he asked me out and I said yes, but it was stupid of me to say yes, because what wound up happening was me getting raped by 5 of his friends. And it's not fun to know that you like someone and then you said yes when you should have thought and sat and talked with him before you made the decision to say yes. If you said no, that would be fine, too; it is, in my books. If someone says no to me, it's fine. The key point to this part of the story is think before you make a decision if you want to be with that person or not, because you never know what might end up happening. It might end up happening the same thing as happened to me.

Being out of care is a decision that you make, and it should be a right decision if you want to or not. It's hard out in the big real world and you should learn more about it before you leave and go on extended care.

R: Could you talk a bit about how you made and re-made the decision about leaving care?

I made the decision to leave care when I did something bad with the law, and I went to jail and I didn't think it would be right for me to go back to where the crime happened. So I tried to move home. I moved home with my mom for two months and it didn't quite work out. But I'm on my own now. I'm dealing with my own problems, not everybody's problems. It's hard to be on your own, but you can do it if you put your mind to it. If someone says to you, "You'll never make it on your own", don't listen to them. Do what your heart tells you. That's what I'm doing; that's what my heart tells me is right. And it's better to know what you want to do, not what people want you to do in your life.

R: So are the people you're talking about here, adults or family or friends or who?

All of the above people are families, adults, friends or whoever you talk to, may make a decision for you, but you are of age to make your own decisions, right or wrong, you can make your own decisions. But play it smart, make your own decisions for yourself and not for others.

R: Could you give a bit of your experience of making decisions for others or to please others or take their advice, that got you into difficulties?

I took a friend's advice to do some sort of marriage counsellor person and I wound up getting in trouble with the people I was trying to help and I stopped taking other people's advice, and made a decision for myself and not for others. I'm 19 years old. I have a mind. I can think and make my own decision.

R: Who most argues with you about that, says that your decision-making is not good, or hasn't been good; who says that?

My mother and I fight all the time about my decision making and she doesn't agree with my decisions. My decisions are bad. My decisions aren't good for me. Do as I tell you. If she says, "Come home, it's okay, you'll be safe", before I say yes or no, I think about it first, whether she wants me to think about it or not. I think about it and till this day, I will still say no to going home to live. I'll go for weekends but I won't go for months on end.

R: Why not?

My mom and I physically fight and it's not right and I know that; that's why I won't go home. And I don't want to go home and hurt my mother. My mom and I are just walking up the ladder now, to being friends more than family. That's all.

R: At the beginning, you said you wished you were 16 again. Why?

When I was 16, I wished I was older, but now I'm older and I wish I was younger, because I made better decisions when I was younger. I also make wise-choice decisions now, as a 19-year-old, and it's hard to make the right decisions and the wrong decisions, but I'm getting there. I'm working hard on it!

R: Maybe part of it is that the older you get, the harder it gets?

R: Yeah. Talk about that, how the outside expects different things as you get older.

The outside world expects you to know what you're doing in your life to come. I know what I want to do when I get older, when I get old enough and get my degree. It may be hard to make the decision now that I want to be that, but if I keep it in mind, I know that if I work hard at my goals, I can do it. I just have to put my mind to it. And that's what people in the outside world should do, is put their mind to what they want to do in life. That's what I do all the time.

R: At the beginning, you talked about having learned more about safe sex and STDs and stuff. Would you expand a bit on what you were told early, and what was good about that, and what you wish now they had told you then.

I don't get that. What do you mean, "expand"?

R: Okay...Expand meaning say something more about this statement you made earlier, about knowing more about sex?

Um...When I was younger, they never told anybody about AIDS or STDs. And now you should know about it, even if you work at night as a hooker. Be smart and use a condom to prevent getting AIDS and STDs. I had a friend 'Pat', who just died of AIDS not too long ago. She got it from the same thing that happened to me. And I had an STD from it. It was called trichymona (sic). And it's an STD, and I'm lucky I didn't get seriously sick from it. I got treated for it. I go into the doctor's every month after "my friend of the month" and they double-check to make sure that it's clear and that I don't have it again. And I won't get it again. So be smart and use a condom, for pete's sakes!

R: But you got infected when you were gang-raped. So good sex manners are not usual under those circumstances. What about consensual sex, sex where the two of you agree to have sex. Do you think you were taught what you needed to know about that?

Yes, I was gang-raped. But that doesn't change getting infected with what I had. But if you are old enough to spread em (i.e., to have sex), you're old enough to deal with the consequence. Me, every time I have sex, or to the person I'm having it with, making love, I say to them first, wear a raincoat first, please. That's what I call condoms. So nothing happens and you're safe from AIDS. Or any other bad stuff that can happen.

R: Such as an unplanned pregnancy?

Such as AIDS. Such as bad STDs. So if you want to get pregnant, plan before you do. I'm not telling anyone who hears this what to do; I just want to let you guys all know that you should think before you say something. It's like what they say, "action speaks louder than words".

R: What about pregnancy? You mentioned that your sister is expecting her third child, and she's 2 years older than you. What are your thoughts about the effect being a mother has had on her life?

I think the effect of being a mother, on her, is it's harder than what she thought it would be. She thought the life we lived wouldn't come out in her being a mother, but she is trying very very hard not to harm the child in any way, like we were harmed when we were kids. And I respect the fact that this is what she wants to do with her life. I'm not telling her what to do. I'm just telling her I love her.

R: You referred a while back to about getting dragged into your sister's problems.

She blames me for the break-ups with her ex-boyfriends. That I'm jealous that she has good-looking men. But when I brought 'Peter' home, she was jealous of me because he was better looking than a lot of guys she could find. And she calls me the slut of Toronto. She should be called the slut of Toronto, not me.

R: Remind me again how old you were when you went into care.

I was 3 years old, and I was a non-ward until the age of 12. What I mean by a non-ward is my mom could bring me home and put me in when she felt it was necessary. I made the decision of becoming a crown ward so I wouldn't have to be moving back and forth, back and forth, between CAS and home. Being a crown ward is where you mom or your dad can't make the decision of you coming home to live; you make the decision. Your parents make decisions for you as a child. You are basically an adult; you can make your own decisions. I make my own decisions and I'm proud to make my own decisions and they come true.

R: So in a way making the decision to come into crown wardship was the beginning of you

taking responsibility?

Yeah. Responsibility is a hard thing. You're responsible for what you do and what you say. You're responsible to make your own decisions, not to have others make it for you. And you're responsible for getting pregnant, and you're responsible for getting pregnant and for the child's safety. So don't get into any fights while you're pregnant.

R: Bit of a theme about physical violence here, from way back, through jail, with your sister and your mom and

my dad.

R: And boyfriends, you were telling me. Do you want to put that incident on the record?

No.

R: Probably a good idea.

That's all I can think of.

R: I wanted you to say just a bit about reversing your decision about extended care. Let me tell you why. Because until very recently, once you were out, the door was locked. And some of us felt that kids should be given, sorry, young people, should be given a chance to reconsider a decision that may have been made before they had a real sense of what awaited them in the real world. So you took advantage of that s...

system

R: so would you share a bit about what went into the initial decision, and then what made you change your mind?

I changed my mind to go back in because I needed help and support and someone to be there for me, to have someone to talk to and know they care and know they want to help.

R: So how did it work, you decided you wanted to reconsider, phoned your old worker and put it to him. Or did you bump into him and

I phoned him. He told me to call his supervisor, so I did, set up an appointment, got back in a week later.

R: So what had changed for you between the first decision, to leave, and the second decision, to go back in.

That I wanted help.

R: And what led you to that realization? Anything specific, or just a sense of getting in deeper than you could manage or what????

Getting in deeper than I could manage. That's all I have to say.

*I met with Lacey on August 29, 1995, in a borrowed office downtown, near the street-youth drop-in. She was anxious to do the interview, get her money and go.*

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF LACEY

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND:

Q3. THE FORM:

The beginning is...from group homes, up (before)

The middle is...being gang-raped.

The end is...a summary of what has gone on from the middle to the end, it's kind of combined with STDs and that.

4. LIST THE EVENTS:

1. Gang-rape
2. Leaving care
3. Learning about STDs and AIDS
4. Re-entering care
5. Getting into other peoples' problems
6. Learning to think before you say something

Q5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

1. Gang-rape: - 3. Because something bad happened.

2. Leaving care: - 2 because I didn't think about good things.

3. Learning about STDs and AIDS: +3 because that was a bonus for me to learn about because I have friends who died about AIDS and STDs.

R: Did you learn about STDs and AIDS from talking to people or from your own experience?

Talking and reading up on it.

R: For any particular reason?

So I could help out the friends that had AIDS.

R: So would it be fair to say that you made a project out of becoming educated about STDs because of what they were doing to your friends?

No. I did it for my own curiosity as well.

4. Re-entering care: +2 because I'm getting the help I need and want to get on with my life.

R: Such as?

Schooling. Rent for houses and that.

R: This new place you're just moving into last week, do you pay rent directly or does the agency pay on your behalf?

The agency doesn't pay at all. It's a hostel. I'm looking for a house. NEXXT????

5. Getting into other peoples' problems: -2 at least. Because I got the shit kicked out of me for being involved in other people's problems.

R: On more than one occasion?

Oui, Oui.

R: How many times, ball-park?

Cinq times.

6. Learning to think before you say something: If you don't think before you say something, you'll get the shit kicked out of you even more than you did one time. + 2.

R: How would you say you are learning to do this? Who or what is the teacher?

Me-self is the teacher. You got to sit down and think about it yourself before you say something, if it's worth your time to sit down and think before you even get involved.

R: Okay, but I think you're saying that this has been a long-term problem, and that solving it has become increasingly important as you get older. So what I'm interested in is how you go about slowing yourself down.

I don't get involved.

R: You've become a hermit?

Yeah.

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. Gang-rape
2. Leaving care
3. Learning about STDs and AIDS
4. Re-entering care
5. Getting into other peoples' problems
6. Learning to think before you say something

4 = 1, 3, 5, 6

2 = 1, 3

1 = 1 because I'm still dealing with that.

R: When did it happen, how long ago?

Six months ago.

Q7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? It means to think before you make the wrong decisions, to try and make the right decisions in your mind, and to learn a lot about safe sex and AIDS and STDs so you can prevent that from happening to you.

*I met with Marie on April 12, 1995. She lives in a tiny messy basement apartment that is accessed*

*through a basement parking garage, and has one small window in the kitchen. A male friend was in the process of leaving for work as I arrived, a different man than had been in residence on my first visit. This one was closer to Marie's age and quite pleasant and sociable, but quite disorganized in getting himself out the door.*

#### THE STORY OF MARIE

I don't know what I should say...You gonna write everything, aren't you?

R: Yeah.

I don't know...How can I say anything when I'm a responsibility still. I'm gonna be for quite some time.

R: Maybe talk about that. I'm not sure what you mean by it.

Smart alec! I'm thinking. It's tough taking care of somebody when somebody is relying on you. Especially when it's a baby. (To baby) You take all mommy's time.

It takes up all my spare time, so I can't go out with friends or anything. I'd have to get a babysitter, so it's tough. (Puts baby down)

Okay. Let me think... I get tired quite quickly, having the responsibility of taking care of a child. If I could do anything different, I wouldn't have had a baby right now, because I'm still young. If I didn't have my son, I would have probably been working so I wouldn't have problems with welfare and everybody else. Now what should I say?

R: Maybe start with the decision to have a baby, or the road that led to that decision...

My son wasn't planned at the beginning, and then I just decided to keep him after I found out I was pregnant. One thing I liked about being pregnant was I didn't get morning sickness or any hernias or any fevers during my pregnancy.

My mind is going blank. Shoulda told me what we're doing today so I could think.

R: Maybe start back a bit earlier, before baby, if you can remember life before baby...

Before I got pregnant? My life was really complicated. I was living in hostels and in shelters, on the street and with friends, anywhere I possibly could. Because the Children's Aid was on my back.

I wish I had never became a Children's Aid kid. I shoulda stayed with my mom. Because I didn't get to see my mom for 5 years, because the Children's Aid wouldn't tell my mom where I was. The only reason why I came into care with Children's Aid was my mom couldn't handle me, because I had a violent temper when I was a little kid.

I don't know what to say now.

R: Does having a baby of your own change your relationship with your mother at all? Or the Children's Aid?

With my mom, no, it hasn't changed. My mom still hates me. Because I'm not married to the father. My mom's very old fashioned. You have to be married before you have a child. And the Children's Aid is still hassling me. They're coming around when I don't want them to be here. And I've already told each of their supervisors that I don't want them to come back, and they're still

sending them back.

R: What do they hassle you about? Is there anything good that they do, stuff you find helpful? Or anyone else in your world that is helpful?

They hassle me about the feeding, the changing, the bathing. Everything that has to do with the baby, they hassle me about it. And they haven't done anything helpful for me, except for one time, get me formula, when he was on Similac, when he came home from the hospital. But now he's on Prosobee, so they can't do anything for him, because they all get Similac. What else?

R: What about your partners or friends? You told me that you've parted company, for good reason, with the guy that you shared the apartment with the last time I visited, and today I meet this new young man. What is the importance of men in your life?

I don't like being alone. I'm scared to be alone, especially with a child. If I didn't have anybody helping me with baby, I might go stir-crazy, or crazy, period. My sister has been helping me out, my little sister, actually. And my second oldest sister. Oh and my oldest sister, she's been helping me out. That's all the family members that've been helping me since my son was born.

R: Anybody other than family being helpful?

No, nobody else has been helpful. Just my friends. And family. Only one friend helped me out by taking me to the drug store to get my son's formula. How many pages do we have to do?

R: Till you run out of story or I run out of questions.

*(Phone rings)*

You're making things complicated for me. My brain's not working today.

You write everything down, don't you. Oh, my God!!

R: Let me take you down this road...You find being a parent difficult, being alone scary. What choices do you see before you, in the near future?

Me putting my son in day care and going to work, or finishing my school education instead of doing school work at home. Because I want to get a good education to get a good-paying job.

R: Such as?

Such as being a mechanic or a lawyer or something like that. Because I like working on cars and doing all the mechanics. And some law I know how to do, but some of the law I don't know how to do and I want to learn. Be like my cousin who's becoming a lawyer. I don't know.

R: How do you go about getting the help you feel you need to hang in with your life right now?

I'm doing my school work at home so I can take care of my son and watch him grow up, instead of sticking him in day care and not seeing what he does day by day.

R: About housing maybe. You mentioned that Metro Housing has a 2-bedroom apartment for you at the end of this month. How did that come to be?

Um. Before I lived here, I lived in a bachelor apartment and I put an application in for Ontario

Housing. And they accepted the application, and then I got points when I lived there. I don't know how many. And then I moved from there 10 months after. And then I moved to this apartment. And then now I have 165 points, so they said I can move into a 2-bedroom apartment, after I give her a copy of my son's health card, a statement of how much money I make, and a doctor's note. Then I can move into a 2-bedroom.

R: What does the doctor's note need to say?

Well, it has to say that it's hazardous to my and my son's health living in this basement because I almost had an asthma attack a couple days ago. And if it says that, then my worker will move me at the end of the month.

R: Another tack to take: talk about how you choose men to keep you company. What do you look for? Where do you look? What kind of deal do you offer?

I like the last part...I don't look for any specific guy. It's just if they're nice to me and nice to my child, then they can come and stay with me. But if they become butt-heads, I throw them out. And where I look is my friends. They were friends at first, and then they became other than friends. I don't offer them nothing. Except for a place to live and companionship.

R: Talk about how you handle it when they're butt-heads. Like your recent experience, for example...

Well, they lie to me. They steal from me. They go around behind my back and back-stab me, talk about me. To people I don't know. And I hear about it through the grape vine and then I tell them to hit the road.

R: You told me when you called that the guy who was here last time you turfed because he "touched" your baby while he was high on crack, as well as stealing money and having a stolen car in your parking spot.

That's true. I didn't know he did crack until he moved here, until his friend told me he did crack in my house. And then when he told me that, I remembered the day his friend was here, and I remember it clearly, I saw him holding my son in the bedroom when I woke up that morning because he was fussing.

*(Goes out to shut off buzzer from washing machine in utility room down the hall.)*

R: Do you think he hurt your son at all, or was in danger of doing so?

No, my son seemed pretty okay, but I just didn't like a crack-head holding my baby.

R: So, how did it go from there?

I threw him out and he's been calling me wanting to come back and I told him no. And if he ever did come back, he'd be in serious trouble. Because I phoned the cops and told them he stole the money off me, and the cops are looking for him.

R: Do you worry that he might hurt you or your baby, maybe when he's on drugs or something? Or his friends?

No. His friends all like me, but he doesn't like me too much but I have somebody protecting me all the time. So if he ever did come near me, he'd get seriously hurt.

R: Who protects you?

My boyfriend and Satan's Choice. It's a bike gang.

R: Why are they on your case?

Who?

R: Satan's Choice.

Satan's Choice? Because I'm like sorta like one of the member's child, sort of thing. He adopted me when I lived on the street. Not legally, but for Satan's Choice it doesn't have to be legal.

R: Is he an older man? That's the picture I have in my head, a tattooed, leather-wearing tough older man?

Yeah. Definitely. He's pretty big, he weight 250 pounds, he's a big guy and it's all muscle, not fat.

R: The picture I am getting of your world is of women who hassle you about being a mother, and men who protect you. And some sisters and friends who help out with practical things. Is that anywhere close to how you experience your world?

Yeah, that is. That is exactly what my world is all about right now, until I get older. If I could change anything now, I would. But right now things are complicated. I'm trying to get my life back on track, but it's hard.

R: How do you think getting older will help?

Because the older I get, the stronger I'll get and reliable on myself. Because right now I'm not reliable on myself, I'm reliable on others to try to help me if I can't do it.

*(Leaves to answer knock on door: diaper service.  
He can't leave the diapers until she pays something on an overdue bill.  
She gets her \$20 from me and gives it to him, and he leaves the diapers.)*

Okay, now what? You gotta do the same thing with someone else? It's gonna be tough on you to come up with questions.

R: I am having some trouble getting on a roll. I wonder if that is characteristic of your life, being pulled in a million directions all the same time, never able to concentrate on any one thing for very long?

Um. Yeah, it is practically pulling myself in a million different directions all at the same time, and never being able to control it.

R: Has it ever been different for you? Was there ever a time when you felt in charge of your own life, of what was happening to you?

In charge of my own life, no. Because I've been with my mother and she bossed me around. And then she threw me in Children's Aid and they bossed me around until I began running and telling them I wasn't gonna listen to what they told me to do.

R: I'm running out of questions. Anything more that comes to your mind about this transition, that in a sense you think you haven't started yet. Let me say that a bit differently. I'm asking you to tell me a story about the transition between being somebody else's responsibility and being on your own, and you're telling me you don't have a story to tell

because it hasn't happened yet. Is that a reasonable way to understand this?

That's true. That's very true, because I don't know what's gonna happen tomorrow or the next day or whatever. Day by day.

R: Okay. Anything more?

Not really. It's just my life is complicated enough as it is, without having to explain it all out on paper.

*I met with Marie a week later, on April 19, 1995, again in her basement apartment.*

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF MARIE

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND

R: My thought as I was driving here this morning is that I've been asking you the wrong question, about becoming independent when you say, quite rightly, I believe, that you haven't really started on that project yet. So I wonder if it would be helpful to you to explore some more about why you're not there yet. It would be helpful to me to understand more thoroughly how your experience with being dependent has trapped you, in a way, into it after many young people your age have begun to find their way out and into being more self-reliant. So could you talk a bit about your experience with different kinds of dependency?

*(Pause. Baby needs attention. Phone call from housing worker.)*

Oh god!

R: Dependency. Being reliant on others. You said you are reliant on others and would be until you got older. I would be interested to hear you on your experience of reliance over the years. On who? What was it like? How did it change from one situation to another? Does that make sense?

I was reliant on Children's Aid, for a little while until they started pissing me off.

R: In Children's Aid, were you in foster homes at first?

Yeah. And it wasn't a pleasant experience because the foster mother was a total Christianity person and I wasn't. And then when another girl came in, she started putting my mother down, and the foster mother sent me back to my mother's house.

R: And then?

I didn't want to rely on people, but I had no other choice. I was really young and I didn't know who else to turn to.

R: Like, how was being reliant on your mother, for example, different than being reliant on the Children's Aid? Or on friends on the street? Or hostels? Or men of your choice? Or welfare? Metro housing? That sort of thing.

My mother, I didn't have to put up with bullshit; Children's Aid I do. My friends normally were there unless they were in jail or whatever, with family members or friends or whatever.

R: If it is necessary to be reliant on someone, what/who would you prefer to rely on? What's your best choice?

Me, myself and I! Can't rely on anybody these days because people back-stab and put you down and everything else.

Q3. The form

R: the beginning?

I don't get it.

R: It could be that this question doesn't make sense because your story was very short, a non-story, really. So let's see what else we can do with it.

Q4. List the events

1. Getting protection
2. Having adult company
3. Having a baby
4. Making to decision to go through with the pregnancy
5. Getting my own place; having a less complicated life
6. Being on welfare
7. Having children's aid worker hassling you about baby and about everything I do with my child
8. Sisters helping me out
9. Mother not helping me out.
10. Learning how to manage money
11. Working at my education
12. Pets

Q5. Value the events

1. Getting protection: I've always had protection, ever since I was 13 years old. +3 Because I've got myself in a lot of trouble in the past 5 years.

R: Can I ask what kind of trouble?

With people on the streets. Law.

R: How has the value of the protection changed over time?

Because I'm older now and I have a child, and they protect me and my child because they don't want to see nothing happen to my baby.

2. Having adult company: 0, because sometimes having adult company isn't what I need. Because sometimes people get me mad and I start getting pissed off at them because of certain things they say or certain things they do. Because I lose my temper pretty quick and I try to control that now because I have a baby.

R: You haven't talked about alcohol and drugs as a part of this. Is it, for you?

No, it's not for me. I never do drugs or alcohol very much. I don't think it's right for an infant to see his mom or dad do that.

R: Did you before you were a mother?

No, I didn't. Because I didn't think that would solve any of the problems that I had. It just would have made me forget about them for a little while, if I did.

R: That, for lots of people, is reason enough to drink or drug, when things are too tough to face.

It's true, very true, but it wasn't for me, because I wanted to keep my body clean from most things. Because my father is a drunk and my brother is a drug-head, and I didn't want to end up like either of them.

3. Having a baby: +3 big time! I love having my son because he's the best thing that happened to me. When I found out I was pregnant I cried for 3 hours. I didn't stop no matter who came to my door, or anything.

R: Crying from happiness or sadness?

Happiness, because I wanted to have a baby after I aborted my first one.

R: Would you be willing to talk about that a bit?

What do you want to know?

R: I'd be interested in hearing how you made the decision, why, and how you lived with the decision afterwards.

Made the decision because my mother disowned me if I didn't get rid of it, and the CAS forced me, because they would have taken it away from me if I had it because I was only 13.

R: And how was it afterwards?

For a few years I wanted to hurt myself because it was my first child. It still bugs me a little bit because the abortion happened on a very special day, Feb 14, Valentine's Day.

R: Was the guy responsible for this pregnancy involved at all in the decision?

*(Phone with community service police re charging upstairs neighbour for assault)*

At first, no. And then he said it would be the best for me. Because I was young and he didn't think I could raise a child. One thing I like about what the Children's Aid did, they brought me flowers after it happened, my worker did.

R: Did the guy ever think that he might raise the child, either with you or by himself?

No, he was only 18, so he didn't think he could raise it because he was still living at home with his mom.

4. Making to decision to go through with this pregnancy: negative at the beginning and then it turned out to be positive. Because the doctor said I would have had a boy if I'd kept the first one. And then that means I would have 2 boys.

R: Did you know the sex of this baby before you made the decision to carry on with the pregnancy?

Not really. We couldn't see the sex of it, but we figured, me and the ultrasonist (sic), thought it would be a boy.

R: Was the guy responsible for this baby involved in the decision?

To keep it?

R: Yeah.

He didn't want me to keep it at first, and then I told him that I was going to keep it because I

practically lost my first one.

R: And how was he about that decision?

He's happy now, now that he's seen him. He loves kids.

R: Does he consider that he has any responsibility toward this baby?

Yeah. He gives me money all the time. Tries to, anyhow, when he gets paid from work, when he can.

R: Does he consider that he has any responsibility towards you?

Yeah. He makes sure that I have food in my gut so I can take care of my son.

R: Does he call this baby your son, or his son, or our son?

Our son, when we're together. But when he's around other people, he says it's my son.

R: When he's around, do you call the baby "my son" or "our son"?

Hmmm. I call them both, sometimes. Because sometimes he doesn't like the fact that he's a daddy again.

R: I don't understand that. Could you expand?

He has other kids from another lady, from a long, long long time ago. Too long.

R: Was he an older man?

Yeah. He's in his 30s.

R: Where did you know him from?

From one of my ex-boyfriends. They were good friends.

5. Getting my own place; having a less complicated life: +2. Now that I have my own place, I don't have to put up with bouncing around between group homes and foster homes and stuff like that. I don't have to stay on the streets or in hostels. If I had to move out again, I don't know what I'd do, particularly with the baby.

6. Being on welfare: - because I don't want to be on welfare. I'd rather take care of my baby with the money that I earn, rather than have someone else give me money, but right now I don't have much choice.

7. Having Children's Aid worker hassling you about baby and about everything I do with my child: negative, the lowest negative possible!! They are problems, nothing but problems. Because the worker from the hospital told the CAS that I didn't wake up to my child, so the CAS was going to take my child away. And if they did that, I'd have to kill everybody, not literally, but...

R: What do you mean "didn't wake up to my baby?"

Because they gave me tylenol 3 with codeine and codeine knocks me out and I can't hear nothing and the baby was crying and I didn't hear him, so the nurse had to come in and change him and

feed him, so they told the CAS worker that.

R: So what happened to stop that? Why didn't they take the baby away?

Because my worker from *CAS office #3*, my pre-natal advisor, she was still on my case, and she decided that they're not going to take my baby away until I get a full chance to show that I can wake up to my son and be a good mother.

R: So is she one of the workers that hassles you?

No. She's not; we're good friends because she was there during my pregnancy and for a few months after my pregnancy. She got me a lot of clothes and things like that for my baby. She was a person I could talk to if I was feeling down, and she wouldn't tell the other workers who were on my case.

R: How did you come to lose her?

Because she said within 6 months from after my child was born, she wouldn't be on my case. But she was off after 4 months, and this other lady was put on my case. She wouldn't even come to my house because she's scared of my cat, and that's a good thing because I don't want her here. One less CAS person that comes to my house, the better.

R: Why?

Because I'm sick of the CAS. They still think they can run my life even though I'm out of the CAS.

R: You have two: who's the other?

I've got three. One at *office 1*, one in *office 2* and another one in *office 2*.

*(Phone with sister)*

The one at *office 1* is like a counsellor, sort of thing. She used to be my OSR (*Outside Resource*) worker. The first one at *office 2* is the public health nurse who deals with only CAS clients, and the other one was like the worker at *office 3*, like that worker, a PAC (*Pregnancy and After-care*) worker, and they're not supposed to be on my case any more because it's after 6 months.

R: So which is the one scared of cats?

The one that took the PAC worker's place.

8. Sisters helping me out: half and half. Because sometimes they get on my nerves and sometimes they don't. Sometimes they think they know something better than me because they're older than me, but they can't run my life because I'm an independent person now and I have a son and I'm more reliable now than I was ever.

9. Mother not helping me out: negative big time! When I told my mom I was pregnant, I was 4 months and she didn't like it at all. She wasn't even going to allow me at the house during my pregnancy. And she finally let me because my mother's boyfriend and my sister talked her into it.

R: So what do you most miss that you had hoped or expected that your mom would provide when you became a mother?

I hoped that she would accept my son as her grandchild, but she didn't. And that really got me

peevied.

R: So what you miss is the connection across the generations?

Yup.

R: Not emotional support, or older guidance, that kind of thing?

Yeah, that's exactly how I felt.

R: What about practical assistance, lending you money if you need it, babysitting, that sort of thing?

No, not really because I thought they weren't going to do it anyway because they said it was my responsibility doing everything because I was the one having the child.

10. Learning how to manage money: half and half right now. Because I really don't know how to budget too good, but my welfare worker said she was going to get a person to help me budget, but she hasn't, so I'm going to get a friend to help me out.

R: What kind of things do you need help with, in particular?

Everything. Everything to do with money.

R: Is it a case of when you have it, you spend it?

Yup! That's true. First things first: my rent. And then my baby's food.

11. Working at my education: it's positive, because I want to get my high school diploma. Because I want to get a good paying job when I decide to go back to work.

R: How close are you to your diploma?

(Laughs) I have 30 more credits to do.

R: So you have 2?

Yup. I have only 2 credits. I'm trying to get my business credits and stuff done.

12. Pets: positive. They keep me company because they come and cuddle with me when I'm feeling upset. And they're quiet and not rowdy, like a baby is. Ha ha.

R: Are they hard to afford?

Not really, because I know places to go to and shop for cheap food and cheap litter and stuff like that.

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. Getting protection
2. Having adult company
3. Having a baby
4. Making to decision to go through with the pregnancy
5. Getting my own place; having a less complicated life

6. Being on welfare
7. Having children's aid worker hassling you about baby and about everything I do with my child
8. Sisters helping me out
9. Mother not helping me out.
10. Learning how to manage money
11. Working at my education
12. Pets

6 = 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 11

4 = 4, 8, 11, 12

2 = 4, 11

1 = 4

Q7. What does it mean?

I don't feel like I can do it right now. Tell you about it later if I can remember.

*I met with Melissa in my home office on June 12, 1995.*

#### THE STORY OF MELISSA

R: Start wherever you think it begins, this transition from being the responsibility of somebody else, to being on your own.

Okay. I left Trinidad and I moved to Canada with my mom. While living with my mom for about a year, we both couldn't really get along in the same house. So I ran away and I went to live with my girlfriend for a couple of days. And I moved back 4 days later. After things seemed to be okay after awhile, I had a lot of responsibility on my mind. Cleaning the house, taking my brother to day care, doing my homework, participating in sports, and even trying to help out my mother. I got kinda frustrated after 2 years stuck doing these things over and over, so I decided I wanted to move again. So I decided to move out and go live with my girlfriend and her grandparents. My mom came looking for me when she found out I was living with my girlfriend. We got into an argument. She beat me up, bruised up my skin so my guidance counsellor had to call CAS.

After CAS got involved, I went to a shelter for 1 night. After that one night, the next day, I went to CAS for a meeting and they had putted me into a foster home with 'Annette' and 'Dave'. After a year and a half living with Annette and Dave, I decided I was frustrated with them, because they were Christian and I didn't really want a Christian life. So I went back to my girlfriend's house and I stayed with her for about 3 weeks. After 3 weeks, I moved back in with Annette and Dave. After moving back in with them, 2 weeks later, I moved back in with my mother. When I moved back in with my mother, things were getting kinda hectic. It seemed like nothing had changed. So I moved back out, and I went living on my own.

So when I was living on my own, things was kinda rough. I went to live with my girlfriend for about 4 months. After living with her, she got evicted so we had to move out. After she got evicted, I moved in with my other girlfriend. After moving in with my other girlfriend, I couldn't handle her and her boyfriend fighting all the time, so I decided I'm going to move back out on my own. So since I moved back on my own, I tried looking for a job, but there's no job out there. Because the welfare system is so hard out there, and they're so difficult to deal with, I tried to move back with my girlfriend and see if I can save a bit of money, like both of us split the rent. And she is just being a nuisance. So right now, I'm looking for a new apartment. But at the meanwhile, I'm staying at my girlfriend, 'Carla'. That's it.

R: Okay. So when in this list of movings, do you think you were most independent, most on your own?

Okay, um. When I moved out on my own the second to last time.

R: And when was that?

About a year ago.

R: There are other parts to your story that I remember from the last time we met, that aren't in this story. Like the trip to Trinidad and your friend that came back with you, and a pregnancy which I understand ended early and sadly. Why are these not in this story?

(Laughs) oh, gosh! Because it's not really fresh in my mind.

R: Are you still living with your friend, as you were last time we met?

Yes, we are, but he's living in 'Maintown' right now, because it's near where he works. So he's going to move back in when I get my apartment.

R: So is living with him part of being on your own, or part of being the responsibility of someone else?

Part of being on my own.

R: Can you say a bit more about that?

Because I'm the one that's paying the rent, and he buys the food. And he's just there to keep me company, because he's like a best friend to me.

R: So he doesn't think, and you don't think, that it's his role or job to take care of you?

Yes, but unfortunately he can't because he's not working for that amount of money. He would like to, but he can't really do it right now.

R: But if he could get a job that paid well, he could and he would?

Yes.

R: Did it make any difference to your relationship when you lost the baby?

Yes. We became closer to each other.

R: Was there any sense that it had a small piece of good in it, in that neither of you was very well situated to support yourselves, let alone a baby? Any sense of that?

Pardon?

R: Any sense of relief that you didn't have to care for a baby as well as manage to find the money to support the two of you?

I would have been getting more money to support myself and the baby.

R: Okay, so it *reduced* your ability to support yourself, when the pregnancy ended?

Yup.

R: Is that when you and your friend had to split up and live separately?

No. It was just because I moved in with my girlfriend and he didn't really want to move in there with me, until I get my own apartment.

R: Okay. Did your relationship with your mom change any when the pregnancy ended?

No, didn't change a bit.

R: So you see her regularly, and your aunt...

And my grandparents just came up from Trinidad a week and a half ago.

R: These are your mom's parents?

Yes.

R: Did they raise you?

No, my father's parents raised me.

R: And where was your mom then?

My mom was living in Canada when my grandparents were raising me.

R: So, you were born in Trinidad, and then your mom came to Canada...

When I was 3 years and 5 months.

R: And you stayed with the grandparents until???

My mom applied for my landed.

R: And how old were you?

I was 11.

R: And did you remember your mom?

Not really, because I only came to Canada twice after she had left me in Trinidad.

R: Do you think that had anything to do with the friction between the two of you?

Yes.

R: Was that mostly it?

Yes.

R: Can you think of anything, in hindsight, that would have made that reunion work better?

No.

R: You think it was destined to fail?

Yes.

R: Is that always the case? Like with all your friends who have a similar situation?

Yes.

R: Does it have to do with there being other kids in the family, a new partner, her working, needing help in the house, any or all of that stuff?

Yes.

R: All?

Most of it.

R: Which is the biggest part, for you?

Family.

R: Other kids and a new partner, you mean?

Yeah.

R: So if she had been by herself when you came, do you think the two of you could have worked it out?

Maybe.

R: Depending on what?

Her attitude.

R: Meaning what?

The way she talks to me. The way she expresses herself.

R: Differently than you were used to, with your grandparents?

Way different.

R: Is it about her becoming Canadianized?

Yes.

R: So did you ever think that you should go back to Trinidad to live?

Yes.

R: And why didn't you?

Because Canada has a better opportunity.

R: Says who?

Says everyone.

R: So even if you would like to, it would not be a choice that anyone would see the sense of. They'd all think you were foolish?

Yes.

R: Any exceptions?

Because to go to school is a lot of money, and the books is very expensive.

R: So did you get a good enough education here to be able to get a job and support yourself?

Not enough education. Not as much education, so far, because I haven't been in school for the last year.

R: How many credits do you have, or do you need to graduate?

I think 6.

R: That you have?

No, I have 20 something.

R: So one full year left?

Yeah, one full year left.

R: Can you see doing that next year?

For sure. I'm already enrolled. In SCARS. You know SCARS?

R: I think so.

It's an adult school for all native students.

R: Like Caribbean, is that what you mean by native?

No. Alternative students.

R: Talk a bit, if you would, if you're comfortable, about losing your baby. When it happened, how it happened, etc.

And why do you think it happened?

R: Yeah.

Okay. I had noticed the baby had stopped moving so I had went to the doctor to find out what was going on. He had checked me out and had told me everything was "fine". Four days later, the baby had stopped moving, which was on my birthday, Feb 19, and I was feeling a sharp pain in my stomach but I was just ignoring it. I was laying in my bed and the pain was coming stronger and stronger, and I was saying I will probably go to the doctor the next day, which was Monday, but the pain was coming down too heavy so I decided I'm going to go call my mom. When I called my mom, her and my aunt came and picked me up and took me to *the* Hospital. When I reached *the* Hospital, all they could find was my pulse, not the baby's heart beat. So they had to rush me down to a *downtown* hospital, and I never had the baby until Tuesday at 3:17 in the afternoon. And I was in labour. So that means that if the baby was born, he would have been premature. And his name was 'Shawn'.

R: So how far along were you?

7 1/2 months. And the baby weighted 3 lb 5 oz. And I had to bury him. I bury him up at Jane and Steeles. It was a very sad moment, but they always say, what is to be, will be. We both were very sad, but everything always happen for a reason. Yup.

R: What do you think, at this time, the reason might be?

I have no idea. I haven't even gotten back my autopsy results since February, which is very ridiculous.

R: So you don't know why he died?

No, what really happened. Right.

R: That's very sad.

R: You mentioned that welfare was very hard on you these days, and that it's very hard to find a job, and that you still have some health problems. Could you talk a bit about that?

Welfare, my worker is a very hard person. I was sick last week and I needed to go to the doctor, and I needed a drug card in order to get my medication. But my worker had lied to me and told me that he had sent it out, and he didn't, and I have only received it this morning.

R: Is your friend making any progress with getting landed status?

Not really, because I am still looking for a job.

R: Is one of the reasons why welfare is hard on you because you sponsored him?

I didn't sponsor him.

R: Who did?

No one did.

R: So he's on a visitor's permit?

Yes.

R: And when does that expire?

It has already expired.

R: So he's here illegally, now?

Yeah.

R: Do you worry that they will deport him, if they find him?

No, because we have a lawyer that we talk to all the time. Even if they deport him, he will just have to wait down there until he gets his landed and come back up.

R: Do you think there will be any difficulty with him getting his landed?

Not really.

R: Why?

Because since he came to Canada he's been working. And I had a baby for him and I'm landed in the country, and it died, so it won't really be that hard but it won't be that easy.

R: So what kind of work have you been looking for?

Well, actually, in the last two or three months, I've been working for 'Project Return'. And right now I'm working for 'Belle Femme'.

R: What are those? I'm not familiar with them.

Project Return is a company which we try to reach out and try to help the kid that's needy or on the street and try to get them into group homes or even to go back with their parents, by selling teddy bears.

R: So that's what you do?

Used to.

R: What happened to end it?

I was sick so I never went back, but I'll be returning to the job soon, hopefully. Because the other job I have, at Belle Femme, I haven't really made any money. They sell make-up and stuff, bath gels, shower gels, sun tan lotion, that kind of stuff.

R: And it's on sales commission?

Yes.

R: So no money yet?

No.

R: What did your mom and aunt think when your baby died?

They think it was sad but they didn't really know what happened.

R: Did you feel like you were at fault in some way?

No, because I didn't really know what happened so I couldn't really say what was my fault or not.

R: Do you and your friend think you might try to get pregnant again?

(Giggles) if it happens. (Laughs)

R: Why do you laugh?

Because of the way you said it to me.

R: What would be the right way to ask that question?

The same way you said it.

R: But it's pushy of me to ask, yes?

No, not really.

R: Okay...I know: friends. You spoke of many girlfriends. Are these the same one, or several? How many close friends do you have?

One.

R: Which one is that?

Carla.

R: Is she the one that you went to when you first left home?

No, that was 'Susan'.

R: So tell a bit about how you and Carla got to know each other and become friends.

The girl who always used to do my hair, my hairdresser, Carla had just moved down from Ottawa and was living in her basement, so that's how we became friends.

R: Okay. Is there anything else in this story that I haven't asked you about that I should?

No.

R: One last thought. Did your mom have a new partner when you came to Canada, and do you still have any connection with your father?

Yes, I still have connections with my father, and yes my mother did have a new partner when I came to Canada.

R: So is your father in Trinidad?

Yes.

R: Do you miss him?

Yes.

R: Did you live with him, or near him, when you were in Trinidad?

Yes.

R: When will you see him again?

Hopefully, next year February.

R: You're going down?

If I got the money. I want to go for 2 weeks.

R: Do you miss Trinidad?

Yes.

R: What about it?

All my family and friends.

R: Do you see yourself going back there to live anytime?

When I get old and I can't take the coldness in Canada, I'll go back down there to live.

R: Did you have a chance to say goodbye to Trinidad and your friends there before you came to Canada?

Yes.

R: But you still miss them?

Yes.

R: I can't think of any more questions. Can you?

No.

R: Enough, yeah?

(Nods).

*This meeting took place on June 19, 1995, in my home office.*

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF MELISSA

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND

Q3. THE FORM:

The beginning is...when I moved to Canada.

The middle is...when things started getting rough, with my mom.

The end is...I'm out there trying to make it on my own.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS

1. Trouble at home
2. Running away
3. Living with a girl friend and her grandparents
4. social worker got involved
5. CAS in my life
6. Living with Annette and Dave
7. Running away to live with girlfriend
8. Back at Annette and Dave
9. Returning to mom's
10. Living with my girlfriend
11. Living on my own
12. Living with another girlfriend
13. Living on my own, trying to make it
14. Went to Trinidad
15. Came back with friend, lived with him
16. Got pregnant
17. Lost the baby
18. Living with another girlfriend, she giving me trouble
19. Moving out on my own, again.

Q5. VALUE THE EVENTS

1. Trouble at home: -3 because...having a lot of things to do.
2. Running away: +2 because...trying to get some of the frustration off my mind.
3. Living with a girl friend and her grandparents: +3 because...while I was there, I wasn't thinking about all the things I had to do.
4. school social worker got involved: +2 because...she talked to me and give me some advice to go to a group home. ('New Lodge', a crash house.)
5. CAS in my life: +3 because...they took me to a foster home and things was going fine until...
6. Living with Annette and Dave: at first was nice, but in the middle, things was getting kinda hectic. She was a Christian and she wanted me to be a Christian, but I was not into a Christian life. She wanted me to go to church and not listen to certain kinds of music. Her husband was not a Christian, and there was conflict between them about that. I wasn't in the middle. They were from Guyana, but I didn't feel like the culture was different.

7. Running away to live with girlfriend: +2 because she was my best friend. She was there for me when I needed her the most. When I was getting frustrated about Annette, talking about Christian life.

8. Back at Annette and Dave's: When I went back was just to pack up my stuff, not to stay. 0.

9. Returning to mom's: At first, everything seemed to be nice and smooth, but in the middle it was not. +1.

10. Living with my girlfriend (different than #7): Living with a girlfriend was okay, she helped me out and she was someone I could really rely on. +2 But she was fighting with her boyfriend, and I couldn't stand to see both of them fighting, so it became hectic. +1.

11. Living on my own: Was nice, but most of the time I was kinda bored. -1.

12. Living with another girlfriend: It was okay. +1.

13. Living on my own, trying to make it: It was kinda rough, because I didn't really have a lot of stuff of my own. I had to rent a furnished room, and the amount the government was giving us was not enough. I had to do all the stuff, like shopping and cooking and my own laundry, but that wasn't hectic. It was okay. Not really lonely. I had friends who used to live downstairs. +1.

14. Went to Trinidad: I saved up some money to go. I wanted to go to see my dad and my family. It was *very* fun. And I enjoyed Carnival a lot. I met my friend at my cousin's house. When I went out to my cousin's house, I noticed he was always looking at me, and he looked nice. So one day I was standing at the Junction, and he passed by and asked me if I wanted a ride. And I took the ride, and from there we just became close friends. And he really liked me a lot, and he thought that life would be a lot better for him, living with me, so he decided to come back with me, as a visitor. My family thought it was okay, it was nice. He's older than me, 8 years. They had no problem with that. And nobody thought he was taking advantage of me. +3!

15. Came back with friend, lived with him: +3. because...I had a lot of company and I had friend, by giving one another jokes, going out together and talking to one another. He was working, not for much money, and I had welfare, so together we could get along financially. But the place where we lived was not nice, really run-down. When it rained, the rain would come in, flood the apartment.

16. Got pregnant: When I got pregnant, I felt happy because that kid of mine was going to be loved a lot, and I was going to make sure that that kid was not treated the way I was treated. +2.

17. Lost the baby: Losing my baby was very hectic. It come like I was losing part of my body, and I haven't been able to love him in the way I really wanted to. -1.

18. Living with another girlfriend, she giving me trouble: Living with another friend is really hectic. She is so picky and fussy. She is very miserable. She just needs to live on her own. I don't think I will ever want to live with anyone else again! -1.

19. Moving out on my own, again. I haven't done this yet. I haven't really found a place yet. +3.

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. Trouble at home
2. Running away
3. Living with a girl friend and her grandparents
4. social worker got involved

5. CAS in my life
6. Living with Annette and Dave
7. Running away to live with girlfriend
8. Back at Annette and Dave
9. Returning to mom's
10. Living with my girlfriend
11. Living on my own
12. Living with another girlfriend
13. Living on my own, trying to make it
14. Went to Trinidad
15. Came back with friend, lived with him
16. Got pregnant
17. Lost the baby
18. Living with another girlfriend, she giving me trouble
19. Moving out on my own, again.

6 = 16, 17, 19, 11, 9, 1

4 = 16, 17, 9, 11

2 = 16, 11

1 = 16

Q7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? Trying to tell people that at some point in life, you have a good time and you have a bad time. Life is like a scale. And a lot of teens, that's how they are trying to live life. It's really kind of hectic, trying to live on your own.

The move from Trinidad...I wanted to come, but I just didn't know what Canada was really all about. It's just that my Mom was saying that it was a better opportunity for me. But otherwise, when I was living in Trinidad, I was living a very good life.

R: Did you have the chance to say goodbye?

Yes, I did have the chance to say good-bye and most of my good friends came to the airport when I was leaving.

R: So they all thought you were lucky?

Yes

R: And so did you?

Yes.

R: Until...what? What changed that feeling?

Having a lot of responsibilities on my mind from my mom.

R: And at home, in Trinidad, did you have a lot of responsibilities?

No. None, really.

R: So there you were a child who was free to play, but when you came to Canada, it was as if you were grown up and had a lot of responsibilities.

Yeah.

R: Thinking back, do you think it would have been better if you had stayed in Trinidad?

Yes! And why? Because all my family and friends are down there, and I would be working if I were in Trinidad because there are a lot of jobs, and I would be making MONEY! Yeah.

R: So do you think that you will return sometime?

Yes. In the future.

R: But what you said, was when you were old.

Yes, that's in the future.

R: But why not now, because things aren't going well here, and you think they would go better there, so why not go back now?

Because things down there is rough right now, too.

R: Okay.

*I met with Samantha mid-morning on August 24, 1995, in an untidy, sparsely furnished apartment where she was living with a male friend, who remained present throughout the session. Her mother, in consultation with me, alerted the CAS to concerns with Samantha's ability to care for her child, born in April, after she left/was asked to leave her home in early June. At this meeting, her babe was temporarily in the care of CAS until Samantha could stabilize her living circumstances. The boyfriend kept an eye on the time, as Samantha had a food court job interview in mid-afternoon.*

#### THE STORY OF SAMANTHA

R: Start wherever you think it begins...

Started becoming responsible about 9 years old. My mom was too busy with other things, so I had to do everything for myself. And then later on, I ended up moving into Children's Aid. And went in and out for about 5 years. Then finally I moved in with my father, and I was taking care of my father at certain points in time, and my brother and sister. Then I got put in Children's Aid again. And I did not like being told what to do. I got mad quite a bit at all the foster parents and ended up moving out of one house because I took responsibility on for my foster mother, and she didn't appreciate it so she locked me in my room. And then I ran away and went to my aunt's, because it was unfair. And then Children's Aid shut down the foster home, and I went into another foster home. And I lived there for about a year and a half. And I got along with the foster mother, but not the foster father. And then finally I became really rebellious towards them. I used to go out and stay out all times of the night. And they finally moved me for the last time to 'Harriet House' to teach me responsibility. And I could not stand it there. They had the stupidest rules and the place was an old dump. So I kept on bugging my worker to let me go independent, and she kept on denying it and denying it and denying it, and wouldn't let me. Finally, one time, they all got together, the staff at Harriet House and my worker, and they finally came to agreement that they would let me, and they would only be giving me so much money.

And then I moved out to 'Allanville' on my own, and met a whole bunch of new friends. And I was living at the house for a year, but I wasn't there most of the time. I quit school. And living at one place but also paying rent at another. Then I moved out with a couple of my friends and it wasn't the greatest situation. We couldn't live together like we thought we could. And I left and moved in with another friend of mine temporary. And then I got my own place again. I moved out, then I moved into another place. And then I got pregnant. In the middle of my pregnancy, the father left me, and he started accusing me of cheating on him before I was pregnant. That wasn't true. And he thought it was another guy's kid. And at that time, I was living with a friend of mine, which helped me out with going to the doctor's and food.

And then I moved down to 'Queen's Town' with my mom, and I was always fighting with her. Because she wouldn't let me do what I wanted when I wanted. And I told her I was a big girl and I could take care of myself. And finally she started understanding. But we still fought a lot.

And then I had my son. My mom was with me through the whole thing, and supported me in every way. And then after we came home from the hospital, with my son, she expected me to do everything for her, including her boyfriend and me and my son. And it was too much to handle, and I yelled at her more than I did before. And got mad easier. And then eventually she kicked me out and I moved into a women's shelter with my son. And lived there for a week, and moved with a friend. And I was happy until me and him got into fights, and then I met my boyfriend and I've been with him ever since. And I got my own place again. I also had to place my son in care for a little bit, but I will visit him as much as possible. And that's about it. My life is really short: everything was the same thing.

R: What "same thing"?

Nobody would let me be independent, let me live my own life the way I want it.

R: Okay...Let me ask some questions. Could you just clarify a bit more the early history. You said mom was occupied elsewhere and you came into care, and then later you went to live with dad. So were they together for the first while of your life?

My mom was busy with my sister when I was 9. And then later on, she started doing drugs heavily. Started becoming violent. And I went into Children's Aid, and then out.

R: Back to mom?

Yes.

R: Was she clear of drugs then?

No. I thought she was clear.

R: So what is your understanding of why you were returned to her care, when the drug problem was still there?

Because I thought the drug problem was gone. I thought she wasn't doing it. And it was my choice when I wanted to go back.

R: And was your sister also in care then?

No. She was living with my step-father when I was 10.

R: I interrupted you a bit back, about going to live with your dad, wasn't it?

Yes. I moved out with my dad at 15. He o.d.'d (*overdosed*) with my sister and brother and me in the house. And I called the ambulance, took care of my sister, hid all the medication with my brother. My brother helped. And I tried to keep my little sister away from my father. Talked on the phone to 1001 people. And then I got placed in Children's Aid again with my brother and sister.

R: Let me clarify. Are these half-brother-sister or step?

Half.

R: And where is their mom in this scene?

She took off because my father was being an idiot.

R: And was that why he called on you, to help with the kids that had been left in his care?

No, she was there at the very very start.

R: And in what way was your father "being an idiot"?

He hit her a couple of times. And he always threatened to take the kids away from her. Plus he got mad at her for doing drugs in front of the kids. And she got mad at him for drinking too much. That's it.

R: That's quite a bit.

R: Okay, and the foster home situations, were they between the first time you came into

care and the second, the time you just spoke of, or after this time?

R: The foster home where you took over the foster mother's job, how old were you then?

15.

R: So that was after you "rescued" your dad from his o.d.?

Yes it was.

R: Would you talk a bit more about that, about being placed in situations where you had to be responsible for irresponsible parents or step-parents, and then having to change roles when you are placed in a foster home, to being "just a kid" who accepts parental authority?

Um...I had the same responsibility put on me as I did when I was living with my father. My foster sister there o.d.'d when my foster mother wasn't there and I was babysitting. And she o.d.'d and I called my foster mom to ask her what to do, and she said put her to bed. And I didn't listen, and called an ambulance again, and got her to the hospital. And my foster mother did not like that I did not listen, but I was not looking out for myself, I was looking out for my foster sister. So my foster mom locked me in the bedroom and grounded me for 2 weeks without no tv, no phone, no stereo, no nothing. And also another girl that was living there who didn't do nothing. And we took off from there because it was not right. We walked from *a town outside Toronto to well into the city.*

R: How old was the foster sister who o.d.'d and what did she use?

She was 13 years of age, and she took the foster mother's tranquilizers plus alcohol from the cabinet.

R: Okay. The picture I'm getting is that from a very early age, you have had to assume responsibility for not only yourself, but others, both little and big. Is that a fair picture?

Yes.

R: There's some thinking among child welfare people that calls this "the parenting child" for shorthand, and some recognition of the problems in then expecting that kid to assume the usual kid position, where they are taken care of, rather than take care of others. That was what I wanted to hear you talk about, if you could. How you experienced going from being in charge, to trusting other people, strangers, to being in charge...Make sense?

Yes. Um...I never really did trust anybody. I normally depended on myself and not anybody else. I never listened. I always took off and told them where to go. I've always been like that, ever since.

R: Even in the foster home where you were for 1 1/2 years?

Yes. I didn't like listening to them.

R: Why did it last that long? Because 1 1/2 years is quite a long time.

I had nowhere else to go. And Children's Aid wasn't listening to me.

R: What were you trying to tell them?

I didn't want to be there. I wanted to be on my own.

R: How old were you then?

16 1/2 years old. Actually 17 when I moved out.

R: Okay. You skipped quite lightly over the whole business of becoming a mother, and I'd like to hear more from you about that, particularly the big decisions you made, like coming back to mom's place and then leaving it, and then putting him in temporary care, those 3 big times, but maybe other important times, too. Would you talk about that?

Yes. When I decided to move back to my mom's for her to try to help me a little bit, try to get adjusted to being a mom. And I wanted to live out on my own and do it by myself, because I was doing it by myself anyway.

R: Was this feeling of doing it by yourself, before or after the baby arrived? Or both?

After. When he was about 2 weeks old.

R: She wasn't helping as much as you had expected? Or not in the way you expected?

Not as much as I expected. Because she had me at 16 and her mom didn't help her very much, and she was having a hard time, so I thought she would change what her mom did and try to better herself and help me out as much as possible. But her boyfriend helped me out when I needed extra money. He cooked, cleaned sometimes, so I wouldn't have to do it all.

R: And your mom?

She worked and went to sleep when she got home, and sat down the rest of the night. And once in a while she would take the baby if I had to go to the store for her.

R: Was having a baby more work or different than you had expected it would be?

More work than I expected.

R: Could you talk a bit about what you expected having a baby to be like, and how you were surprised, the specifics?

I didn't think I'd have to feed him as much, but he's very hungry all the time. He's always eating. At first he stayed up all night and slept all day. I didn't expect that. I expected him to get up a couple of times during the night for a feeding, but I switched his schedule around so he'd be up during the day and sleep at night. And it was easier on me because he slept right through the night from 8:00 at night until about 7:00 in the morning.

R: From what age?

A couple days old.

R: That is a miracle baby !!! What else was unexpected? Or what was what you thought it would be like?

I thought it would be like changing his diaper during the day and at night, feeding him, changing his clothes, washing his clothes, holding him, taking him everywhere I went.

R: And could you talk a bit about how you came to be pregnant, whether/how you made the decision, or made the decision to continue with the pregnancy once it had happened, the early part of the voyage to motherhood.

I didn't believe in abortion and from then on I thought whether I was going to give him up or not. But I knew I couldn't do it.

R: Why not? It's a complex decision, but I'd like to hear you on it.

It's because he was a part of me. I carried him for 9 1/2 months. And I couldn't stand the thought of giving him up after I carried him that long.

R: And -- you don't have to answer this, but -- how did you come to get pregnant? Birth control failure? Not prepared? Some girls have said that they didn't believe they were fertile.

It just happened. Wasn't expecting to do anything.

R: Okay. One point that is not clear, is the connection between you and your mother during your time in care, including when you were living independently. I mean, did you see her regularly, talk on the phone, that kind of stuff?

I talked to her on the phone about once a month. I see her about twice a year. That was it.

R: And your dad?

I didn't see him. Or talk to him.

R: Is he pissed off at you because of the o.d. and the stuff around that?

No. He's pissed off at me because I was hanging around certain family members he didn't like.

R: Because he thought they'd get you into trouble? Or you'd get them into trouble? Or it was disloyal to him? I don't understand this.

We don't know to this day.

R: Okay, a mystery to all concerned?

Yes.

R: So when you got pregnant, who did you go to for advice or to help you decide what to do?

My aunt (my dad's sister). And also the baby's father.

R: And what was his advice?

His advice was to have an abortion or give it up. But I couldn't do either.

R: Is that why he left you?

He was confused, didn't know what to do.

R: Is he older than you?

Yes. He's 25.

R: Another question, about being in care. Was there anyone, a worker or a foster parent or anyone, that you found helpful while you were in care?

No. None whatsoever.

R: Do you think you could have allowed any of them to be helpful?

No.

R: So it was as much about you as it was about them?

Yes.

R: Would you have any advice for them, about what they could/should have done differently to be helpful to you?

Let me be more independent.

R: Even the first go-around, when you were 9 or so?

Not at 9, no.

R: Was that first time in care at all good for you?

It was okay.

R: Better than staying at home?

Yes, 10 times better.

R: Because?

They didn't do drugs. They paid attention to me. They fed me. Made sure I went to school.

R: Can I just clarify how much or what kind of drug problem were at home. Are we talking a crack-house type of environment, or "just" a party house? What?

Well, kinda hard to say because I didn't know exactly what my mom was doing. My mom would have different guys over every night. One guy threw me up against the wall. And the other ones were always mean to my mom.

R: Do you worry at all that you might give your son something like the kind of life you had?

I'll never give him that, what I had.

R: Okay, I'm out of questions. You have anything more?

No.

*This meeting took place in the same apartment , a week later, on August 31, 1995, at mid-morning. It was a bit untidy; Samantha had gotten out of bed for the session and she and her boyfriend explained they'd had a party the previous night.*

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF SAMANTHA

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND: Some changes made, e.g., "Yup" or "yeah" to "yes", taking out "that's it" or "that's about it" at end of answers.

Add: About the job. I got a job at A&W, starting Tuesday. And I get my son back Sept 8th, Friday.

Q3. THE FORM:

The beginning is...me going into care, in and out.

The middle is...all the problems I had in foster homes.

The end is...me getting a job, living out on my own, and taking care of my son.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS:

1. My sister was born.
2. I came into care at 9.
3. In and out of Children's Aid until I was 15.
4. Moved in with my father, and had to take care of him when he o.d.'d and my brother and sister.
5. Went into foster homes again.
6. Left one foster home after another.
7. Moved in on my own at 17, 4 months before turning 18.
8. Got pregnant.
9. Moved to Queen's Town with my mom.
10. Had my son.
11. Got kicked out.
12. Living in a women's shelter.
13. Lived with a friend.
14. My son went into Children's Aid.
15. Got my place.
16. Got a job.
17. Am getting my son back.

5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

1. My sister was born. -1. Because my mom never had any time. She never paid any attention to me.

R: How old were you when she was born?

I was 9.

2. I came into care at 9: +2 because I had everything I needed, and I had really cool foster parents.

3. In and out of Children's Aid until I was 15: -2 because I was moving around too much. I couldn't concentrate on school.

R: Did you feel then, or do you feel now, that you had any control over when you moved, or was it something that happened to you?

It just kinda happened that Children's Aid moved me.

R: I have the picture that you would be in care and then would go home and then the situation at home would deteriorate and you would go back into care again.

Yes.

R: Would you go back to the same home, or a different home?

Different.

R: Were you ever asked if you wanted to go back to the same place again?

No.

R: If that had been offered, would you have opted to go back to a familiar foster home?

Yes.

R: And just some idea about how long it was usually that you would be at home before you'd come back in.

A week.

R: Really!!! And how long would you be in care until the next return home?

About 2 weeks.

R: So you were in many many foster homes?

Yes, I lost count how many.

R: And did you have to change schools every time you changed placements?

No, it wasn't worth it.

4. Moved in with my father and had to take care of him when he o.d.'d and my brother and sister: -3 because I had to take care of him and my brother and sister. That's why it's a minus.

R: Is there also a sense of the last hope for a stable and competent parent going out the window when he blew it? What I mean is that you'd spent from 9 to 15 trying to make it with your mom, with no or little success, and now it was a chance for your dad to prove that he could be a competent parent, but he blew it. So wondering if there was something special about him being the remaining parent to have a chance at doing it right?

I thought he'd do it right, but he blew it big time.

R: And was there any thought that you'd go back to mom then?

No, none whatsoever.

5. Went into foster homes again: -2 because it was harder than it was before, and I had to take care of my foster mother's problems and her responsibilities.

6. Left one foster home after another: -1 because I felt like I was moving around too much, like I was before. I wanted to be independent and they wouldn't let me.

7. Moved out on my own at 17, 4 months before turning 18: +2 because I had my independence, enjoyed myself more, felt better about myself.

R: Even though you continued to move around quite a bit?

Yes.

8. Got pregnant: -3 because it wasn't planned to get pregnant. I wanted to live my life, and party all the time.

9. Moved to Queen's Town with my mom: -2 because she expected too much of me.

10. Had my son: +3 because pregnancy was over and he's a major part of my life.

11. Got kicked out: -3 because I had nowhere to go.

12. Living in a women's shelter: -2 because it wasn't a suitable environment for me or my son.

R: Why not?

Because I wanted to provide him a home, and there was too many people there. So I couldn't take care of my son as much as I would like.

R: Were they on your case about how you took care of him?

Yes, sometimes.

R: Staff, or other residents?

Staff.

R: How long were you there?

A week.

13. Lived with a friend: -2 because all he did was put stress on me. He told me how to live my life, but I didn't listen. And I was having problems with welfare.

R: What kind of problems with welfare?

They wouldn't give me my cheque even though I found a place.

R: Because you were with your friend?

No, I don't know why.

14. My son went into Children's Aid: -1 because I miss him, but it was a good thing in some sense,

because I could get myself organized and prepared for him.

15. Got my place: +3 because things have started working out for me.

16. Got a job: +3 because I don't have to depend on welfare as much.

R: Any worries about combining being a mother and a working woman?

No. I can handle it.

17. Am getting my son back: +3 because I'm ready to have him back and I don't want him being in foster homes any more. Because I don't want him to turn out like me.

R: What part of "like you" don't you want him to have?

Moving around all the time. Not having his mom with him all the time. Not having a stable home. And being in Children's Aid.

R: You mentioned that they wanted you to leave him there for another month or so. Would you talk a bit about how that business got done? Like, what they said and what you said, that's what I mean.

Hard to say.

R: Maybe this will help. Did you get the sense that there were certain things that you were supposed to do or have accomplished before he came back, a check list or something?

Everything has been accomplished.

R: So you had the sense that there was a "test" and that you've passed it?

Yes.

R: But how do you understand that they wanted to "give" you another few weeks before he came back?

Because they wanted to do it gradually, but I didn't want that.

Q6. 6-4-2-1 :

1. My sister was born.
2. I came into care at 9.
3. In and out of Children's Aid until I was 15.
4. Moved in with my father, and had to take care of him when he o.d.'d and my brother and sister.
5. Went into foster homes again.
6. Left one foster home after another.
7. Moved in on my own at 17, 4 months before turning 18.
8. Got pregnant.
9. Moved to Queen's Town with my mom.
10. Had my son.
11. Got kicked out.
12. Living in a women's shelter.
13. Lived with a friend.
14. My son went into Children's Aid.

- 15. Got my place.
- 16. Got a job.
- 17. Am getting my son back.

6 = 17, 16, 11, 10, 7, 1  
4 = 10, 1, 7, 17  
2 = 10, 1  
1 = 10

7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? It's hard but you can do it. It's possible if you put your mind to it.

*I met with Shawna on August 22, 1995, in a lake-side house north of Toronto, where Shawna was babysitting her ex-foster-mother's two rambunctious children and a large dog.*

### THE STORY OF SHAWNA

Probably when I was about 14, I was living at home but my mom worked all the time and my dad worked on and off so he wasn't at home, so I looked after my sister and brother. I didn't get enough time for myself, so that's kinda where the problems started, because I didn't get enough time with my friends.

About half a year I moved out from friend to friend before I went to the CAS. But then I'm back to having someone take care of me, because she supported me, my foster mother. And then she quit foster parenting and I went to 'Harriet House'. I was taking care of myself but they were taking care of me in a sense. After that, I moved in with my foster sister and took care of the bills and everything on our own. Then I was living all on my own, because she moved back with her step-mother, my foster mother. And after that I moved with my sister.

R: Maybe talk about the moves from then till now, because I should have taken the details before we started, just to up-date your living situation...

What happened was I got pregnant and I really didn't know what to do, so she offered to let me stay here a bit to get my things together, get back in school, get an apartment and everything.

R: So did you come here partly to make the decision about whether or not to continue with the pregnancy?

Yeah, one of the decisions. I needed to get away from the city, basically, get my life back on track. So I applied for college, and I get in January. And I got an abortion. And an apartment. What else?

R: You've sketched the physical moves that marked independence; could you talk about the emotional moves of that journey?

It was nerve-wracking, always moving, that's for sure! You get frustrated. You want things to just go straight, but they never did. I guess the foster home was the worst move, living with a new family and not knowing what to expect. So far away, in 'Allentown'.

R: You were sort of in charge of things at home, and then went to a place where adults were in charge; was that a hard transition?

Oh, yeah! It was too structured, I guess. We always had meetings and things, I didn't like that too much. Always had to be one worker or the next. Always in and out of court. I didn't know if it was worth my while. But 'Melanie' (the foster mom) was a real nice lady and became my confidant, so any time I had problems I come to her and she helps me out any way she can. I guess I was lucky that I got a foster mother like that, because I've heard stories of people who had really awful times at foster homes.

R: And your relationship with her continued beyond the time you lived in her house?

Um-hum.

R: Did you have the sense that you wanted to come into care, like leave your home, or did you want home to change so you could be okay there? Or maybe another alternative?

Well, I left home because of many reasons, one that I was never allowed to do anything because I always had to help out at the house. My father was abusive. And my mom had a lot of problems

because she was trying to support all of us, including my father, so she was sort of bitchy all the time. And the reason I came into care was I was 15, going from friend to friend, had no steady home. My friend told me about the CAS, some of the things I could do, so I just called, had an appointment, and they placed me into care. Because my family was on the record already, so they knew.

R: And your sister and brother came in at the same time?

No. My sister came in a year later, basically on her own too, and my brother is still living at home. What I hoped to get from care was that my family would go to counselling and work out some of the problems, but they refused to go.

R: How do you feel about having to initiate coming into care when the CAS was already involved with your family and presumably had reason to know how bad things were?

They didn't have any proof, so they didn't pursue things. I had gone into court before on abuse charges against my father, and they just didn't take it seriously.

R: They, the court, or they the CAS?

I think both, because they didn't really pursue things, see us to see if things were going okay. Of course they're not around all the time, so they just go by what you tell them.

R: And it comes naturally to defend the family, or soft-shoe the amount of difficulty?

Yeah, that was it. Even in court when my sister had to go on the stand, she denied everything even though she knew it was true, just so my dad wouldn't get mad at her for saying things.

R: Are we talking physical abuse or sexual abuse, or both?

Just physical and emotional.

R: Want to take away the "just"?

R: So what relationship have you maintained or regained with your family members since living away from them?

It's pretty good now. Me and mom get along great as long as we're not living together, and we talk occasionally, I go over to visit every once in a while. It was hard when I first went into CAS, because they thought I was being a bitch, just trying to make them look bad. But then I talked to my mom about it, and she understands.

R: Are your parents still living together?

That's a hard question: yes and no. They're legally separated. My dad has his own place, but they're always together still. Twenty years and they're still together.

R: Maybe they too can be friends when they don't live together, like you and your mom?

Not really, I can't picture them not being together. Two opposite people, totally opposite, but I can't imagine them not being together.

R: Could you talk a bit about how your family and in-care experience has influenced your relationships outside? Like with peers, boyfriends, girlfriends, that sort of thing. Or other

adults, too.

I don't think being in care has influenced any of those at all.

R: But family life has???

That's a hard question. I really don't know.

R: If you're comfortable, I'd like to hear how you thought your way through the decision about abortion.

Well, I just thought that I didn't want my child to grow up the way I did, no money. I just didn't think it was the right time, even though I was going to keep it at first, I decided not to.

R: It sounds like it was a very hard decision, and one that you're still not completely "over".

It was hard, and I just did it last month, so I haven't really dealt with it.

R: So it must have been a late abortion as well, which is doubly difficult.

Un-hum. The doctor was a real jerk.

R: Did your partner in this pregnancy have any input into your decision?

Yeah, he wanted me to keep it, but he said the decision was up to me. And he had two other kids already and he's not very supportive with them, so...I left the decision up to me. But we're still together. We've been together for 3 years now.

R: Is he older? I remember that your sister was with a much older guy, and I wondered if it's a family habit?

Yeah, he's older. He's 26. He's a very young-acting 26-year-old; you'd never guess!

R: Okay, school. Talk about that, past, present, effect of home or being in care, whatever.

Well, I skipped school a lot because I wasn't able to spend time with my friends after school, so I ended up doing it during classes. And after I came into care, I didn't know anybody at the school. Allentown schools are harder than Toronto schools, I find, so I skipped a lot there. But I always wanted to get my high school diploma. In the summers, I was working at day cares and I enjoyed it, so I decided I'd take my ECE (*Early Childhood Education diploma*) at community college.

R: And did you have your OSSD (*Ontario Secondary School Diploma*), or did you get mature...

Mature student. That's what I did.

R: What plans are in place to help you attend college regularly, because it has its own kind of invitation to not go, as I'm sure your friends have told you.

Well, it's something I'm interested in, and I'm paying a lot of money to go, so I think I'm going to stick to it.

R: I recall that you also took care of a nephew? That was handicapped?

Yeah, a couple times. That was more my sister. I have a foster-cousin that was born an alcoholic and drug addict, she was adopted into the family and I watch her once in a while.

R: And you're planning to live with your foster sister?

Yes, two girls, about the same age. One's going to be attending college and one is going to attend university. So with every one attending school, I think I'll be able to go. And I'll have the help at home if I need it.

R: Are they each beginning, or are some already started?

No, they're just beginning. They've got their high school diploma, and that's them up there (on the wall)

R: And who is the guy?

He's kind of a friend of the family, I guess. And the other girl is my youngest foster sister.

R: So this is a family that collects people for keeps?

Yes. That's for sure.

R: That is a rare and valuable quality in foster parents, and I wonder if you have any insight into how to recognize them or support them or create them??? That quality in families, I mean. How can you tell if they've got it, or how can you help them get it.

Um...I guess I just recognized their qualities when I lived there and they supported my decisions. And they get upset if I don't let them know what's going on or call them at least once a week if I'm not living here.

R: After you left, were there other kids placed with them, and did you feel displaced?

No. When I left, she had quit foster parenting. She was going out with a younger man, so she didn't think it was right. It didn't really affect us, but she didn't think that the agency would agree, and her own kids sort of felt that they weren't getting enough attention, because there were foster kids, 6 of us, all over the place. So she quit, even though she wanted to keep in touch with us.

R: So she was a single parent foster parent?

When I went there, no, she was married. And then they separated and she started dating. They didn't have a problem with her being a single parent, just dating men that are the same age as her foster kids.

R: This is very interesting, because on paper, it has all the wrong signs. But for you, it seems to have worked very well.

It didn't affect me at all. Didn't bother me.

R: No, but here you are, a few years later, still able to call on her as a support when you need. That's what the system is dying to have, and here it is in surprise packaging.

She kinda adopted me out of all the foster children, because I'm the only one who still stays in touch. There were 2 that were long-term, me and another girl and we don't know where she is, although we're trying to find her slowly.

R: How long were you with her officially?

Um, about a year, year and a half. It doesn't seem that long; it's like I was there forever.

R: Was or is your mother cool about your relationship with Melanie?

She's jealous in a way. But my mom is the kind of person who doesn't really show her feelings. I think she's fine with it now. It was just in the beginning.

R: Do Melanie and your mom have direct contact?

No. They never really talked unless it was a Children's Aid meeting. My mom always said she'd probably like Melanie if they met under different circumstances. But I don't think that my mom really knows how close we are. Like I don't call her "mom" in front of my mom, and I don't really talk about her to my mom so she won't get upset.

R: You said that your mom "failed" as a parent because she was working double-time, in part to compensate for your dad not pulling his share. Do you think that if the financial or practical problem had been solved, that your family could have gotten it together without you guys coming into care?

Maybe. Maybe. Um...It's hard to say. It would have been easier, because there wouldn't have been as much stress, but there still would have been other problems.

R: Right, you said abuse. Also alcohol?

Yes. My dad drank a lot. But a lot of the problems were caused because they were stressed out by how they were going to pay the bills and all that. And I had a really big mouth, I know that. But I didn't understand why I couldn't go out and all that, because we lived in a bad neighbourhood. They were trying to protect me, but they were holding on too tight, I guess. I had a life to live besides hanging around with my younger sister and brother.

R: And maybe needed some nurturing that wasn't available.

Yeah.

R: How did people understand you living with friends and moving around a lot. People like teachers, neighbours, adult friends of the family, CAS workers, your friend's parents. Adults mostly.

A lot of people I wasn't close to just think it's normal. A lot of kids live on their own at a young age now. Teachers really didn't say much. And most of my family, they knew it was coming, they knew I'd be living on my own soon.

R: Did the teacher clue in to what your home reality was?

Um, they didn't say much. A lot of them knew I was living on my own, when you have to fill in the papers at school, for contacts and stuff. But we didn't really discuss it.

R: Did you consider that they might possibly be of assistance?

Not really.

R: Did you get a sense that people thought you wanted to move out because you wanted to party and be wild?

Yes, some people probably. Like my grandmother; my parents can do no wrong in her eyes.

R: Another generation's version of split loyalties?

R: Workers. Did you ever have a significant relationship with any of the CAS workers?

Not the CAS workers. When I lived in Harriet House, the workers seemed to be more understanding, easier to talk to. And if I need assistance, even today, I can call them and they'll set up an appointment. Like one of my Harriet workers wrote me a reference letter to get into school.

R: Okay, that's about it for me. You?

No, that's all.

*I met with Shawna on September 12, 1995, at the apartment in which she and two foster sisters had moved in order to attend post-secondary school. It was nicely furnished and kept and had a homey feel, complete with a pet cat.*

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF SHAWNA

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND

Q3. THE FORM:

The beginning is...was when I was 14, moving from friend to friend, because I was taking care of myself, making my own meals and everything.

The middle is...probably when I went to the foster home.

The end is...now?

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS:

1. moved out of home
2. went to CAS/foster home
3. went to Harriet House
4. moved out on my own
5. met boyfriend
6. moved to foster mom's
7. pregnancy
8. applying for school

5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

1. moved out of home: +2 and -2. because moving out of the house was better for me, but it started a lot of things. I got confused, I didn't know if I'd done the right thing, I had to go to court all the time. And they placed me all the way in Allenville, and I wasn't too happy about that.

2. went to CAS/foster home: +2 because they helped me out a lot. I was very cold when I went there. Didn't talk a lot. They helped me deal with my problems.

3. went to Harriet House: +2. I learned a lot of life skills there, banking and a lot of things I didn't know, being 16 and on my own.

4. moved out on my own: It's hard because I liked living on my own, but there's a lot of ...I don't like paying the bills, or doing all the laundry. +1.

5. met boyfriend: oy vay! Was that good or bad: I don't know. +1 because he's put me through a lot of shit, but I still love him, even though he can be an asshole at times.

6. moved back to foster mom's: +1 because she helped me out through the problems, like the decision about the abortion, but I wasn't used to living under rules. I had my own rules, so it got, it took a little while to get used to that again.

7. pregnancy: --3!!! It was a horrible time, that's about it. Nerve-wracking.

R: Can I ask how it happened that you got pregnant, because this is a bit of a theme among this group. Like birth control failure, or whatever?

Well, we were using condoms most of the time, but one time we decided not to. It was that easy. I'm very fertile. I'd had two spontaneous abortions before, one an ectopic pregnancy which blew a fallopian tube, so they said I could get pregnant again, but it would be more difficult. That was another trauma. They thought it was just a normal miscarriage, but my foster mom who is a nurse knows my pain tolerance, so she said it had to be something more. So they checked, and I was bleeding internally and they didn't know it. If my foster mother hadn't been there, I could have just laid on the floor until I died.

8. applying for school: My program was full for this semester, but I'm first on the list in January. Because when I was pregnant and making the decision, I didn't apply, until I knew what the plan was. Because I would have had the baby mid-semester, so no real point.

R: Who or what would you say influenced you and/or supported you to do all the work of deciding what to take, where to apply, how to negotiate finances and acceptance, all that stuff?

Well, I wanted to take the ECE program from a long time ago, but I wanted to finish high school and then go. My foster sisters applied, so they'd already gone through the whole process, so they showed me what they did and I did the same.

R: So all three of you in this apartment are taking the same course?

No. Me and one of my foster sisters are, she's taking, like a social worker course, so it's kinda related. And my other foster sister is taking women's issues in University.

And PARC helped me too. Because I was a crown ward, I needed a special financial sheet, and one of the workers there helped me with that.

6. 6-4-2-1:

1. moved out of home
2. went to CAS/foster home
3. went to Harriet House
4. moved out on my own
5. met boyfriend
6. moved to foster mom's
7. pregnancy
8. applying for school

6 = 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

4 = 3, 4, 2, 5

2 = 1, 4

1 = 4

7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? I guess it's a story about a kid who grew up a little bit too fast. Had ups and downs all her life. But despite it all, turned out pretty damn good.

*Teresa met with me on April 6, 1995, at my home office.*

#### THE STORY OF TERESA

16. Semi-independent living. I remember the first day I moved in, I didn't know what to expect, I really didn't. I know that I had to do things on my own, but I wasn't ready, but after a while I got used to it. I was living with my room-mates and role model.

Dropped out of school. Mom got deported. Immigration wasn't working out. Problems with my personal life. I got anorexic. I wasn't eating, wasn't sleeping properly. Lost about 45 pounds in a month, from 130.

A year and a half after, moved out of the program, living with my friends, trying to get my life back together.

Got into the 'Hurry' Alternative Independent Learning Centre. Everything was going okay for about 2 months. I had friends. I had people to talk to. I was doing my school work. I was gaining back my weight. My health was much better.

This is the part where my mom comes in. Mother, of all people, never got along. Always had a problem with me, even though I tried working things out. Never wanted to talk to me. Didn't care what happened to me. Didn't care about seeing me. Just never wanted to be there. My brother was there but he wasn't there. He had a choice to make between my mother, and he chose my mother over me, which I think is understandable. Because I know me and him had problems and never really got along, because of other certain things, regarding my father.

My dad. Met him when I was about 7 years old. Never knew who he was. Going through a phase of thinking "Is this my real father? Is this my dad?" I always remember he told me he wanted me, when he visited. I saw him about 5 times. Having a father was never a part of my life.

Age 13 was the last time I seen my father. Tried looking for him through my mom, through my step-mother, tried writing letters. I don't know where he is. What I know is I could pass him by on the street and not know him.

Age 18. Turned 18. I was presently living at my boyfriend's house, with his parents. Everything was still okay. Had everything I needed, but trying to please others before pleasing myself, and thinking about myself is what happened. Until now, I'm by myself even though I have two of my friends. I finally realized that the only thing I have in this world is me, myself, and I. And having to have responsibilities is only you, is the one that has to deal with it, you are the only one who has to become what you want and love yourself and make yourself happy.

In two months, I'll be turning 19. And I haven't accomplished anything in my life because of always thinking that I was a mistake and nobody cared for me and nobody loved me. Even though I know my social worker was there and my counsellors were there, and everyone else was there. But they weren't the one I wanted to be there. I wanted my mother, I wanted my dad, I wanted my brother, even the one I don't know about. I realize that I'm the one that has to deal with my immigration and not run away from it. Everything happens for the best for people. Not everything goes the way you want it to. Regardless of what happens, you always have to look up high and think about there's always another day. Sad or happy.

Getting raped at 14 years old, moving out of my house at 14 years old, having to have my own responsibilities at 16 years old was very hard but I passed through it and I dealt with it.

R: Talk a bit more about how the rape made a difference in your life.

Okay. It must be because I was a virgin or it must be because I didn't know what it was about, or it must be about I wasn't ready and I didn't know this was happening. Since I got raped, I've never been comfortable with any guys in my life, and that bothers me. But I hope one day that I can just turn around and say to myself not every man out there is the same, even though in the back of my head I always think you never know what a person can do. Since I got raped, I have nightmares at night, I can't sleep, sometimes I may not eat. I would gain weight, lose weight, like within 2 weeks. Knowing yourself as a victim of somebody else puts a really embarrassing and guilt feeling inside of you even though people outside told you it's not your fault. And it's something I'm going to have to live with for the rest of my life. And I know practically it's all because of the way it was done. It torments me and it haunts me. But I can say for myself I feel a little bit better from 4 years ago. I'm slowly but surely getting over it.

R: Don't answer this if you don't want to, but was the person who did this someone you knew and/or trusted? I'm thinking about "the way it was done"..."

It was my mom's boyfriend, somebody that I trusted and somebody that I least expected it from. Someone who helped me in my homework, who was very educated and who I looked up to.

R: Could you just fill in a bit about joining your mother here in Canada, what age, what circumstances, etc. And your brother's role in--

I came up here when I was about 13. I lived with my mom and my brother. We came up on a student visa, me and my brother. My mom was working, my brother and I was attending school. We lived in a basement apartment and shared with my mom's cousin. I was attending 'I D Sales' and my brother was attending 'West End Collegiate'. Those were my happy days and those were my childhood days. Those days I would never forget. Having to come home and know that I had nothing to worry about. Living with a peaceful mind.

R: I'm putting together that you came up here, had a few good years, then the rape happened and you came into care and your mom turned against you. Is that the right sequence of events?

Yes.

R: You mentioned earlier that you lived with your boyfriend and his family, and something I didn't understand very well about having to please other than yourself. Could you talk a bit more about that?

Okay, when I was living with my boyfriend, I always have to make sure that everything was perfect. That's how I felt. I'm not saying it was his fault. He just had his own problems. And the way I feel because of certain things...What do you call about taking advantage, like I just feel that he was using me to have somebody there, even though he gave me everything I wanted and made sure I was happy.

R: Does this have anything to do with feeling denied love because it wasn't coming from the people you wanted it to come from? Like you said the attention of workers and counsellors didn't scratch the itch because of that; do you think maybe the same thing operated with him: it wasn't what he was or wasn't doing, but who he was that was the problem?

(Long silence.) Okay...I think he didn't love me, but he knew the kind of life I lived and I didn't have anyone around me and he probably felt like he had to make me happy because otherwise nobody else would.

R: So he pitied you, more than loved you?

Yeah.

R: Your relationship with your mom: was it okay at some point, and then went bad, or never good?

My mother was a very very very loving mother from what I've known of her. When I was young she gave me everything I wanted, always wanted to make me happy. But I dunno, it was an evil side or a selfish side, or I dunno, couldn't stand the problem of having two kids and had to make the sacrifice of one. That I may never know.

R: Was she with you always, or did she come to Canada before you and your brother?

My mother, she was away from me for awhile, but I was with my grandmother, my mother's mother, so the only persons who took care of me was my mother and my grandmother. But when I was young, I went to bed with my mom and I got up with my mom. And all I remember is at ---I can't remember how old I was, because my mom was here when my dad came to see me. All I can remember was being away from my mom for about a year.

R: So is your dad here, or is he in Trinidad?

He's in Trinidad. Or Texas, I don't know which one.

R: Could you say something more about the anorexia; when it started, how it was, what people tried to do to be helpful and how that felt?

Okay. I would say probably I'm a bit anorexic because I always "pinch and eat". I always have people complaining about how much I eat. I don't eat when I should. But I know it's all because of stress, having to deal with everything. I know that once everything is taken care of and I don't have anything to worry about, that I'll be happy.

R: Did you get "treated" for anorexia? And what does "pinch and eat" mean?

No. My doctor would always tell me to fill in a calendar about what I have every day but I always run away from that because the less people know about what's happening with me, the better, that's the way I feel.

R: "Pinch and eat"?

A plate of food in front of you, for example. Fries, hamburger, salad, medium sized pop. Lunch meal. I wouldn't have any breakfast. I probably eat the fries alone. Eat the hamburger. Leave some of the drink. And then for dinner, I would probably have about a third of what my dinner is. And those are *some* days.

R: I'm interested in exploring if there is a relationship between losing your family in the dramatic way you did, and "finding" another family, your boyfriend's family. Because I remember you told me another time that you and he were on-again off-again several times, is that right? And I wonder if those things are related. Anything here at all?????

I was on and off with my boyfriend because I fell in love with him. Because he was the only one out of everybody that I felt comfortable being around. I know that when I'm with him, I'm okay. He never did anything to me to hurt me, beside my feelings. I never took him and his family as my own family

because nobody or no one or no family can cover what I had when I was with my own family. Because even now I've seen my own family, my own flesh and blood, my mother, be a different person than 7 years ago.

R: There's also some thinking that girls in particular who have lost family replace it by having a baby, and there are lots of girls in this study who have had babies, but you're not one of them.

No. I think...I'm a person I would not use other things to cover other things that I've lost in my life. I do things...I try to do things to make myself happy, but having a kid at this young age is not a solution to my problems. It would just be adding on a problem to the problems I have.

R: Did your mother being deported have anything to do with what happened to you, and/or your coming into care?

No. My mom got deported because she did not do, or did not have the right ways of being in Canada. I got separated from her because she was no longer my legal guardian.

R: The transition that I am hearing you speak of has several threads: losing your innocence by being raped. Losing your mother. Losing your brother. And at the bottom of that slide, being anorexic, almost losing the will to live, by the sounds of it. And now beginning to get your feet under you again, becoming in charge of being your own person and feeling strong enough to begin to struggle with the very large job that awaits you before you can start even the usual challenges of your age, like working and school and stuff. Does that description fit more or less the shape of what you feel your transition is???

Yes.

R: Missing anything?

R: Losing your father, or maybe never having him and missing him when you lost all the others.?

My dad. My dad I don't know. I've only seen what's good, because a very few times...I know he tried to make things very good when he seen me. He called me when I first came up here but my mother didn't want me to talk to him. That's why I lost contact. So it's everything to do with my mom. After I left my house.

R: Your Trinidad house?

No, up here. Because after I came up, he was still calling, he had a phone number. And when I was living in the foster program, my mom didn't want him to know what happened, what was going on with me. I know how much I loved my mom, the last thing I wanted to do was hurt her feelings.

This is what hurts me the most. Okay. There's something I want to say in here. The day I told my counsellor about my rape, I was removed from my house the same day. I went back home after a week. I lived home for about 5 months. My mom was still seeing her boyfriend. There was nothing I could have done about it. It was her decision. She wanted me to drop the charges because her boyfriend wanted to get married to her, but I didn't agree. There was three times she brought him into the house when I was there, to talk to me, but I couldn't agree. I was in pain, I was crying, I was hurt. I couldn't believe that my mother would actually do something like this to me. But then I realized it's only me that loves myself and only me that had to do certain things, and there was no way that I was going to let someone get away with hurting me so bad, no! I told my social worker what happened. She moved me back outside my house. My mom almost got charged. My mom's

boyfriend got charged again for being close to me. My brother almost got charged. But it's all because I love my mom and my brother, I didn't press charges against him. That's why they say you have to love yourself before you love others and choose yourself before you choose others, regardless of who the person is.

R: Another important theme I hear is about choosing, people choosing between you and another, and you choosing between your survival and the comfort or whatever of another. And now choosing for yourself without hurting others...Let me say that another way. It seems to me that in this time you just described, it was very likely said that you were being selfish, as if that were bad, when it was necessary for survival, as you say above. So getting back on track about "good selfishness" is in some ways the theme of your past few years. Does that make any sense to you? Does that fit how you understand your story?

I still have a way I will choose people over me now, but that's just how I am, just the way I am. But I have to keep remembering about myself.

R: Putting you in the driver's seat of your life?

I just want to crash and burn...Sometimes.

R: Well, I think you have had and continue to have a very difficult situation to deal with, and feeling sad, even desperate, seems reasonable enough under the circumstances. To my mind, at least. And I think you are remarkably brave and philosophical. Thoughtful.

That's what somebody said my hands read. They showed me from pictures.

R: Anything else you want to add now?

All I have to say to anyone who reads this is everybody lives a different life and everybody has problems. Everybody is happy one day and sad one day and everybody goes through difficult times. When you read this, I don't want you to feel pity for me. I want you to think about yourself. Use my life to think about yourself. That's it!

Teresa came to my home office for this session on April 13, 1995.

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF TERESA

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND

Q3. THE FORM:

Getting raped at 14 and moving out of my house; that's the beginning.

The middle is semi-independent living. Age 18, living at my boyfriend's house is also the middle.

The ending is "I know my social workers, etc... I wanted...Etc." is the end" (pg 2)

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS

1. Being raped
2. Moving out of my house
3. Dropping out of school
4. Immigration
5. My family
6. My boyfriend
7. Eating
8. Environment

Q5. Value the events

1. Being raped. -2 Because it still haunts me and it still tortures me. I haven't gotten over it. I know it's because of the way it was done, I always say that. I say -2 because it doesn't bother me every day of my life.

2. Moving out of my house. -3 to a 0 now. Because at first I wasn't ready, but now I've learned to deal with my everyday life.

3. Dropping out of school. -3. A big problem of my life because honestly I haven't really thought about it. I don't really want to say I'm lazy because I'm not really, I can do my school work. It's not because I think I'm too old, and it's not because I know I can't be there, it's just the fact of having to deal with certain things. Flashbacks. My mom's boyfriend used to help me with my math. That's why I'm so good in math. But I know I'm going to get on my feet one day and start all over. I keep saying that. I know I'll be saying that for a very long time. It's just that every time I say that, something else happens.

4. Immigration. -3 To -1. Because for the last 4 years, I have not dealt with it, but for the last 2 months, a little progress has been made. Thanks to my social worker and a lot of people around me. *(Teresa has no immigration status because she entered Canada on a student visa which has now expired, and her mother has since been deported. Lack of status makes her ineligible to take part in civic life, like get a social insurance number, go to school, receive welfare. The CAS can continue to support her financially for two more years, until she reaches 21. Her worker has recently made immigration status a priority in their work together. Teresa understands that she is responsible for legal fees and is not able to pay a lawyer, so she is doing the work on her own for now. Even with a good lawyer, the process can be very lengthy and may well extend beyond her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.)*

5. My family. -3!!! Since the last 4 years, I have not have a decent relationship with my parents or

my brothers. And I know that I don't want to think it's my fault, but sometimes I think it's my fault. Thanks to my mother! (In a bad way).

6. My boyfriend, 'Love'. 0. Because I don't know what the future lies. But all I have to say is I love him, regardless of what, he would always be part of my good past because I remember he did a lot of good things for me, and he was there when I had no one. And now things have changed, where I can't say what's going to happen tomorrow. His baby-mother (*a woman who is the mother of his child*) would always be part of his life, regardless of what happens, and that has become a problem between us, where it has led to everybody being hurt.

I'm so confused about my boyfriend. He's hurt me a lot. You see how my family hurt me. My boyfriend hurt me the same way. It's the same kind of hurt.

7. Eating. 0. Since I've lost my weight, I've not gained it back. It's because of all the problems in my everyday life. But I know I can get help, but I don't want that kind of help from anybody, I just want to do it on my own.

8. Environment. From -3 to +3 to 0. -3 Was the time when I moved out of my house. I couldn't deal with everything, for about 3 years. Until +3, where I was taken away from a lot of problems and I was secure and I was happy and I was trying to deal with everything that was going on around me. (That's when I was living with Love). A 0 right now: it's not a proper environment, it's not the best. But you always have to be happy with what you have.

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. Being raped
2. Moving out of my house
3. Dropping out of school
4. Immigration
5. My family
6. My boyfriend
7. Eating
8. Environment

6= 1, 2, 5, 6, 3, 4

4= 1, 2, 5, 6

2= 1, 5

1= 1

Q7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

My life is basically about having lots of difficulties to deal with. Being raped is one of the most important ones. It's something that's taken, not given. My family was never there, but I guess there's nothing that I can do about that. Having a proper environment, having proper food on my table, having to go to school every day, was never part of it. There was only one person that was there, besides my counsellors and my social workers and my teachers, and that was my boyfriend. But I guess things change over time. For the last seven years, immigration has been a problem of my life, but it's only now that I'm starting to get on with it.

*I met Vanessa in the eating area of the semi-independent group home in which she lived, on June 28, 1995. The staff were displeased that Vanessa had not told them of my visit, but withdrew to their office to give us privacy.*

#### THE STORY OF VANESSA

Okay...throughout my life, there has been many ups and downs. From age (long pause...)

R: Can I suggest that you start wherever it seems to start, and you can go back and forth from that starting point.

Since I've lived in...when I moved to 'Autotown', it was a big step for me because I had to move from where I was living comfortably, to a home where I knew almost nobody. Throughout my life I've moved from place to place often. At times I didn't think it was that hard for me, but it was a big step in order to move from a home where I was taken care of, from family actually, to a place where there are complete strangers.

I've lived in this group home for about 2 1/2 years now. At first I was at one house --because there are several different houses-- and I adjusted pretty well. I met a few people there and it, at first it was kinda hard to adjust, but eventually I adjusted, because that's why I've been here for two years. I think of all the houses there is, when I got moved to the semi-independent house, that was the best adjustment that I could have had. They are not like the other group homes that I was in previously.

At the semi-independent house is what I would call a better place to be. I would recommend that people work toward moving into a semi-independence house before they actually go out on their own. But through this group home that I've been living in, not that many people have come a long way, or even tried to make something of their lives. I had a friend at one of the group homes in Autotown that would constantly get into, she would be into prostitution and all that. She was a great person and all that, but she just didn't know what was good for her.

Now in this semi-independence house, there's a bit more flexibility. You have to know, before you come here, that this is the right thing for you. Like you have to pretty much know that this is what you want. For me, I would say that the adjustment to independence was made at the semi-independence house. Even though I learned a lot of things from my family, like how to cook, clean, and all of that, I learned about things like budgeting, and like how to practically like be independent.

R: Could you take your story a bit further back or a bit further forward?

Yes...When I was younger, I always had to practically look after my younger sisters because my mom and dad were, like, not financially equipped. They would always be out of the house, something like that. And when I moved to my uncle's house, (long pause)...

R: With your sisters?

No. My sisters stayed with my grandmother at the time, and then I was just, I just went to my uncle's house for a week, just actually a get-away or a vacation, just to visit the family. And then I learned a lot of things from my aunt. I think that when I lived with my mom, since I had to do practically everything around the house, I had to come home from school and make sure my sisters were okay, like picking them up from school and what-not, that happened for about a year. But when I moved to my aunt's, I practically had to do the same thing. So I think that right there, that tells you that it was a lot of responsibility that had to be given to the children. And to myself.

When I came to Autotown, I sort of got more freedom, especially at the semi-independence

program. I didn't have to do as much, but I was still responsible for some things, like maybe chores or doing group, which was a night when everybody would get together and discuss issues that arose in the house between the girls. Or life skills. (Long pause.)

Or where you learn different things about being independent. I got to do the things that a teenager would want to do. Or the freedom that a teenager would want to have. Sure, I understand that teenagers can't have everything they want and all that, especially when living in the group home (long pause), I do think, however, that teenagers need some type of freedom, like the semi-independence house gives. Although there is still rules and regulations that you have to follow, which I understand.

R: Can I ask what you see following the semi-independence home?

Following, what do you mean?

R: When you graduate from here, what then?

Actually, I'm leaving, well on Thursday I'm going to be graduating high school and going to college. I plan to take food and service manager, that's like working in restaurant or taking later courses to be a dietitian.

R: And will that mean moving out of this home?

Yes, it will. I'll be moving into residence at the college, which I think will be kind of fun. Well, not fun, but a chance to meet new people. It's like a whole new step for me, like moving from semi-independence to living on my own. I'll be moving into residence for the first year, and then after the first year, I have to find another place to move in Autotown, because the college only has the residence for first year students. Which will be another transition. Considering it's been two years that I've lived in this group home, I've gotten to know everybody and all the staff. It's kind of been like my home for the last while. And now moving to college, will be a big step. It's kinda like your step from public school to high school, there's a little step there. And now it's high school to college.

R: Can you see yourself continuing to have contact with the group home staff when you go to college?

Yes. Occasionally, I'll call 'Rebecca'. Rebecca has even told me to call anytime I need anything, or just to call when I first get into college and say how it is. So I'll still have contact with them. Which is pretty good to have. And I also have my family too. Everybody has told me that they're so proud of me because I'm going to college and I've been through a lot. The staff at the group home take every chance they get to say, oh, we have somebody that is going to college now, because I guess I'm the first one to have gone to college through this group home. And another resident is moving out soon, she's the first one out of this semi-independence program to move the right way. Meaning, she's found a place, she's moving on her own, and she's leaving the proper way. Other residents we've had have left, just taken up and left. I guess they didn't know exactly what they wanted. Some of them didn't like the rules.

R: What do you think accounts for the difference? Why have you been able to succeed where others did not?

I think it's a matter of knowing what you want out of life, knowing, you know, you're not gonna just sorta fade your life away. Throughout my life, I've always had high expectations for myself. I knew I was going to get through high school, which was one of my goals, and go to college, and become, like, something. I think a lot of people that have lived in group homes, they think, oh, well, why should I have to do that. CAS supports me so what am I gonna do. Because I've come across

several kids that just want CAS for the money. I'm not saying all of them, just the ones I've come across. And not only that, but a lot of people from CAS have been hurt emotionally, physically and what not. It's kind of hard. Some people might dwell on the fact that this has happened. Or maybe because they're still hurt, they might not have enough self-motivation to accomplish in life. Which I think is sad. As I mentioned before, one of my friends that I got to know really well from one of the group homes in Autotown, she didn't know what was good for her. So she AWOLed and AWOLed, just to get away.

R: You mentioned that your family would also be a resource to you when you are in college. Who? How? Whatever...

My grandmother would be a good resource. So would my grandfather. My aunt, not the one I lived with, my mom's other sister. And my mom. My family has always encouraged me to be successful, or not necessarily successful, but, oh yeah, just make something of yourself. I told my mom the other day, and she said, wooo, she was so happy. I think I'm the only one besides my, since I'm the first daughter, I'm the first one to be going to college besides my uncle. My uncle is another resource. He always likes to hear what I'm doing, how I'm doing, stuff like that. He's in university now, so we can sort of talk about school and all that. He can relate. Sure, my other family members have gone to college and university, but I'm the only child of my mom's to go to college.

R: Do you think your sisters will make it to college?

Actually, yeah, I think they'll make it to college. They have a lot to learn before they get to college, especially my next younger sister. Since she's been in the foster home where she's living now, she's been getting into a lot of trouble. Well, I wouldn't say a lot of trouble, but she's just not focussing on school work. She's doing school work, but she...And she's fighting with my little sister also. I guess that's natural for little sisters to fight, but I'm just worrying about 'Tammy's' school work.

R: How old are they now?

Tammy is 14 and 'Lisa' is 10.

R: And did you all come into care at the same time?

Um, actually, I was put into care a little bit, like about a month before my sisters were, because at the time I was living with my aunt and she called, well, CAS had been involved but I was taken into care before my sisters. Since my sisters were living with my grandmother at the time, CAS doesn't give any financial support to the grandmother.

R: So you were at your aunt's and CAS took you from there or gave financial support for you to be there?

No, CAS never took us from our home. Occasionally, there would, they would look at taking us away from the home, because they were involved previously before my aunt took me. She wanted to take all of us at the time, but she didn't have enough room, so she took me. At first it came about, I was just going over there for actually a weekend, just to visit. Everybody knew what was going on in the house, there were a lot of drugs and stuff going on, that's why CAS was involved.

R: But what changed the plan of you returning home after the weekend?

My aunt liked me being around, so she wanted me to stay. And she wanted, because she knew what was going on, she got my sisters out of the house to my grandmother's. Well, my aunt and my grandmother took it on themselves to get us out of the house because the CAS wasn't doing that much.

R: Are we talking a crack-type house here, your home?

At first it was just marijuana and stuff, and they would do it in the basement and stuff. They would never do it around me, because my dad wouldn't want it done around me or my sisters.

R: And it got worse?

It was just, yeah, well (long pause)...

R: let me go at it this way: I hear your story as a story of someone who had to be responsible for herself from a very young age, and for her sisters as well. And then the relatives stepped in to change that. And I'm trying to make a picture in my mind of why they decided then that something had to be done, whereas before they had let it go along, as had CAS. Like what the change factor was, what pushed it over the edge to where something had to happen.?

Well, when we moved, CAS wasn't involved that much because we were only there for about four months until I got taken from the home, to my aunt's. CAS always got the picture that everything was okay, because that's the way my parents would present themselves, so to speak. It was never really to a point where they didn't know what they were doing or where they were coming. But later on it got to the point where my mom was doing it because my dad got her involved, and there would be fights and so on.

R: And that's when the relatives intervened?

Yes.

R: You didn't mention your dad as a potential support. Is he still in your life?

My dad, he wasn't in my life for 2 years now, and just recently he came back into the picture. So I see him about once every two weeks. But I haven't seen him lately because he just moved and he hasn't got a recent phone number.

R: Is he still using?

No.

R: And your mom?

No. My mom got cleared a long time ago, actually.

R: Did you think you might go back to her when she got clean?

I never really thought, well I thought about it, but my mom is not a person I could live with, because she couldn't financially support me still, and...

R: So drugs was not the only problem she had/has, and that's a consideration in how you include her in your future?

Yes.

R: Why do you think your sisters are having a more difficult time in care than you? Or maybe just different, not more difficult.

Um...I guess because they're younger and they just missed that father and mother figure around. It's harder, especially for young children.

R: Are you saying that you have good memories about how you were parented before the drug thing got out of hand.

Oh, definitely.

R: Is that part of what makes you different than a lot of other kids who you've seen go through the system less successfully?

Yeah, I think so. And I think it's also because I have family that I can count on, like my grandfather, my grandmother, my uncles. And they're there for me, not all the time, but when I need them. So I have that family background, and not a lot of kids have that.

R: And your sisters have it less than you, because they came along when the family had begun to fall apart?

Yeah. Like my sister Lisa doesn't even remember anything that went on because she was too young. Tammy now has a lot of anger inside of her, built in towards especially our father for what he has done to the family. Now I'm not blaming it all on him, because I guess my mom was old enough to make her own decisions. But still, that would be hard for somebody that you cared about.

R: The "if you can't fight 'em, join 'em" syndrome?

Probably.

R: Was your time at home just disorganized, or was it violent either to you, or around you?

Well, it was disorganized, a bit of both. But it wasn't towards me, it was towards my mother.

R: So you observed violence.

Yes.

R: There's some thought now that observing violence as a child is as damaging as being the victim of violence. What would you say?

Well, I wouldn't see it all the time, but when I did see it, I would see the after-effects of what had happened, for example her face. I thought it was really damaging to see my mother experience this, this type of violence. It was hard.

R: Do you think that your relationships, particularly with peers, other kids, potential partners/mates/dates, has been affected by your family experience?

Um, I wouldn't say it has affected it that much, because I'm totally, I don't see myself as committing, doing the same thing as my dad has done. I'm pretty much an easy-going person. I just "go with the flow".

R: Actually, the image you project in the story is of someone who very much takes control of a situation, not to fix the situation but to manage within it. I can see "go with the flow", but you also talked about being clear what you wanted to achieve in life, having goals, making choices to reach those goals, that's not "go with the flow".

(Laughs)

R: So how do you explain those two themes co-existing in your life? Easy question...

Um, well, "go with the flow" is like, I just, it's more or less like I like to have fun and do things that teenagers do, and that stuff, but at the same time I still have these goals and that sort of stuff. Although when I go to college, I won't have that much fun.

R: But maybe at college, your dilemma, the tension between having fun and taking care of business, will be more like those your age. In a sense, it may be that your life project will be age-appropriate for the first time.

Oh, I agree.

R: Another participant who had to care for younger siblings talked about feeling cheated by things not happening at the right time, like being responsible when she should have been carefree, and now when she has the opportunity to be a carefree teenager, being told that it's time to grow up and be a responsible adult, make money, buy the groceries, that stuff. And she felt like she'd been cheated by things happening at the wrong time. Do you have any sense of that?

Um, yeah, I do actually. I felt like, at the time when I had to care for my sisters, that I was being robbed of my childhood, being a teenager. Like I wouldn't get to do the things I wanted to do, to come home and have those responsibilities laid on me. And that's why today, I try to get as much freedom as possible.

R: If you had the choice, would you continue to stay here and go to college as a day student, rather than live in residence?

No, I think I would definitely move to residence. I think now that my time has come, that it's time for me to move on. Even though everything here is given to you, you don't have to do much. Like, your clothing, you just get \$40, whereas now, it's gonna be really tight.

R: You haven't mentioned feeling stigmatized by either your family situation or living in CAS. Was that ever a factor? Or keeping the secret a burden?

Do you mean like keeping the secret like what happened to me, you mean?

R: Well, it seems to me that you don't speak very easily of your background, I had to poke and pry quite a bit, and my picture is that that was part of how you managed when with your family, keeping the secret of what happened in the basement, or why your mom had a bruise on her face, that kind of stuff. Which I think might be a burden.

Actually, I've told people that I've come into contact with, like counsellors and stuff, about what's happened. I can really talk to the staff here about my family and what not. But then again, you have to kind of watch what you have to say here, because there are other residents that might be here at the time, and that. But it's not like they will tell what they hear, but you can't exactly trust them either.

R: So you "censor" yourself, almost as a second nature? Always watch what you say, at least a little bit?

Yeah.

R: What about intimate relationships? Particularly best girlfriends or boyfriends. How do you decide what and when to tell them your story?

Actually, I've come across several people that I can talk to, friends that I can be open with. I don't go into major detail, but I sort of give them a rough idea when I get to really know them and when I can trust them. Actually, there's one girl in this semi-independence house that I can talk to.

R: The one who's moving out right?

No.

R: Boyfriends?

Not at the moment.

R: One other thing that you haven't mentioned this time, was about you having this diagnosis and being on preventative meds (*medication*). Does that play any role in your life?

Well, the reason I didn't mention it is that I don't really like saying to people that I have this diagnosis. And I don't think that it's that much of a major, well it is a major issue, but not to talk about now.

R: Like, you don't...

I don't feel that...I'm just like any other person, like I don't want to be ...

R: Labelled?

Yeah.

R: What I hear you not saying is that the diagnosis has no role to play in your life as it unfolds. Like, it's not going to make a difference...

If I have it or not, yeah.

R: Well, my observation, for what it's worth, is that if you hadn't told me, I certainly would never have entertained a notion that you have a diagnosis, or are on meds. So, for what it's worth, I don't see how it will influence what happens in your future. Maybe when it's time to have babies???

Um...

R: Anything else?

I think we've covered everything.

*I met with Vanessa at the semi-independent group-home on November 20, 1995, after she had begun her community college course. Again we met in the eating area. Staff withdrew elsewhere after handing Vanessa her medication.*

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF VANESSA

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND:

R: I'm thinking that we should include that within a couple of weeks of that interview, you had a quite serious breakdown and ended up in hospital for quite a stay. What do you want to say about that?

Well, it came on quite, just like, I went to school one day, actually it was graduation, and I came back home from graduation, and things were quite tense at graduation because I had my grandfather and my grandmother there, and they're not exactly the best of friends. And also I was taking on the steps that are going in my life hard, I guess, like graduating and eventually you have to move on with my life, like going to college and whatnot, and at the time I wasn't taking my meds the way I should have been.

R: Can I ask a question about that? I'd like to hear you on the problems with taking meds.

Well, it's kind of hard for me to remember sometimes, because I'm preoccupied with things and it's hard to remember my responsibilities with taking my meds.

R: Is there also an element of denial, of wanting it to just go away, and thinking that if you don't pay attention to it, it might just disappear?

Well, I probably want that to happen, but I know that it's a fact that it won't happen, so I have to just take my meds because I know it's a fact, that it's there and it won't go away.

R: I have to admit that I had some moments of guilt for encouraging you to forget that "it" was there. Because it really is invisible--except, I guess, when it's front and centre.

Yeah.

R: Another question: do you think that the stress of graduation and all that entailed, was a factor in the breakdown?

Well, one of the factors. Because everything was building up at that time and I didn't know how to handle it at the time. But the meds factor was a major one.

R: Did staff know that you were feeling so stressed?

Yeah.

R: But couldn't be helpful?

Ah, it's sort of happened all in one day. Just sort of collapsed on me all in one day so they just took me to hospital and admitted me.

R: How long had you been skipping meds?

Well, I wasn't skipping all of them, I was just not remembering to take one here and one there, and that had an effect on the kind of meds I was taking, I had to take them all the time, regular basis, every day.

R: Are there nasty side-effects from the meds, aside from the idea of taking them?

Well, I'm on new meds now, but the ones I'm on now are more better than the other ones. But there are side-effects, like if I use alcohol, they make me go to sleep or knock out. I'm not as drowsy as I was on the other meds I was taking. I'm more awake, alive.

R: That's good, since you're a student.

(chuckles)

R: Okay, so just for the record, because of the breakdown and the hospitalization for, what, a month?,

Yeah.

R: The plans changed and you're still at the group home even though you're attending college as you planned. How long do you think you'll stay here?

Actually, since you brought it up, I'm moving out in 2 weeks. And I'm moving in with a room-mate, a girl I know, we both go to the same college, so it's kind of cool.

R: The plan to stay in residence: are you sorry that that's not going to happen?

In a way. I was kinda looking forward to moving into residence, being with all my fellow colleagues, so to speak. But now that I'm moving in with one of my good good friends, I think that's a better move, because I can stay longer, don't have to look for another place.

R: Yeah, one move instead of two. Plus living with one person instead of a bunch, could be easier.

Yeah.

R: Okay. And let me ask how you experienced the big move to college?

Sort of happened naturally. I went the first week for orientation week, and we sort of got a chance to meet all the students. And we sort of hit it off right from there, and it's just great. I like college more than I liked high school.

R: What in particular makes it better?

Than high school? Um, just the respect you get from other people. You're on the same level as other people. Like you're an adult now and you're treated like one. The teachers, they're the same kind of...I just like the fact that you get more attention, so to speak.

R: And the course is ???

Food and beverage management.

R: Okay. Did you have anything more you wanted to add?

Yeah, actually. I want to say that hopefully, like, right now, I'll take all my meds and I won't have to have such a tragic episode as in the past. That way, school won't be slowed down, I won't have anything interfering with school. So I'm looking forward to a good year at school and after school.

R: I know, one more question. Your room-mate to be, did you meet her at college?

No, actually, she's a friend from high school. So we know each other for two years now, ever since I moved in here.

R: And for money, you're getting ECM (*Extended Care and Maintenance*) and OSAP (*Ontario Student Assistance Plan*)?

Yes.

Q3. THE FORM:

The beginning is...my childhood, when I had to live with my aunt and stuff and be the mother of my siblings.

The middle is...moving out of that atmosphere and moving into the life I live now in a semi-independence house.

The end is...could that be the future too?

R: Yeah.

It sorta goes with the middle, from 19 on, the fact that I've learned so much since I was younger, that I've learned the right steps to take in order to be what I want to be in life.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS

1. The good times with my family
2. The beginning of the rough times, the drugs in the basement
3. Looking out for my sisters
4. Not having money, being poor
5. Living with violence
6. Moving a lot
7. CAS being involved but not doing anything
8. Aunt and grandmother taking us in
9. The group home
10. Losing contact with dad
11. Re-establishing contact with dad
12. On-going relationship with mom
13. Moving to the semi-indep home
14. Graduation
15. Breakdown
16. Going to college
17. Moving out of semi-indep home

Q5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

1. The good times with my family: +3 because there wasn't that many good times with them, and when there was, I really valued it. It was exciting to see us together.
2. The beginning of the rough times, the drugs in the basement: --3 because I never liked when they went down there to do whatever they had to do, because that took away less attention from my

parents, my dad in particular.

3. Looking out for my sisters: Probably +1 because I enjoyed looking after my sisters, but then again, I didn't have a life of my own because I had to be home all the time.

4. Not having money, being poor: -2 because I think it's hard if you don't have that much to live on and stuff like that. Like scaping and trying to make the last ends meet.

R: Can I ask a question? How did you understand why you were poor, when you were younger?

Because we wouldn't get the same things as other kids got. Like all the money was being spent on other things that weren't necessities.

R: Like drugs?

Yeah.

R: So did you have the sense that your parents couldn't get a job or whatever, or that they "wasted" the money they had?

Well, my mom had a job but she would either give it to my dad or use it to pay bills or something.

5. Living with violence: -3 because no kid wants to see their parent hurt or even be hurt themselves. So that -3 is kinda self-explanatory.

6. Moving a lot: Oh, -2. I hated moving, but I kinda got used to it after awhile, after the 10th time. Because you'd have to get enrolled in school, and then you'd meet people and you'd get used to them and then you'd move out again.

R: Did you feel at a disadvantage scholastically at school?

Yeah. I had a steady schooling from grades 1 to 6, but then after that I had a lot of moves.

R: So your family had it together until you were 12 or so?

Right.

7. CAS being involved but not doing anything: -1 because I liked the fact that they were involved, but I didn't want to be taken away from my family because I loved them no matter what they did.

8. Aunt and grandmother taking us in: +2 because I liked it when my aunt took me in because I got more things, still had to work around the house and take care of my cousins, but my aunt was always home when you wanted her to be. And things like that.

9. The group home: -3. I hated it. You couldn't do anything. It was like a locked-up place. I had to have such an emergency move, they had to find a place for me fast. And there was no other place to go. Of all the places, they put me there!!!

R: There's a procedures for complaining about where you're placed. Did you know about it?

No, I had no idea. I'd have been complaining every day, if I knew.

R: What did you say when your worker visited and asked how things were going?

I told her that I didn't really like this place, but she said there wasn't that much she could do because there weren't that many spots in Toronto.

R: You weren't in Toronto, you were in Autotown?

I was in 'Maintown' with my aunt.

R: But the group home was in Autotown. So your worker understood you didn't like being out of Toronto, not that you hated the group home?

Well, I did hate the group home.

R: Did she know that?

Yeah.

R: But there were no other alternatives.

No.

10. Losing contact with dad: -3 That was the hardest thing because I was so close to my dad.

R: But in this story, he seems like the villain. The presumption is that he abused drugs and was violent to your mom, but still he's the one you felt close to?

I know it's kind of weird, isn't it? There was a time when my mom was in the hospital and he was really there for her, cooked for her, cooked for us, took care of the house while she was gone. I didn't like the fact that he abused her, but I, well, he would tell me that everything would be okay and not to worry, and I was just a kid so I believed him.

R: And he could relate to you, whereas your mom had more difficulty?

They both could relate. Actually, as a child, growing up, I was a very quiet kid. Hard to believe?

R: No, I don't think so. I still see you as very private, I feel almost bad prying as much as I have to to get an understanding of what your life was like.

R: So, still on this. Your dad, when he was good, was very good but when he was bad, you forgave him?

Yeah.

R: Not an uncommon situation with substance abusers. Not at all weird, actually.

11. Re-establishing contact with dad: +3. I was so happy to see him when I did find him, and he was happy to see me, and we took it from there. We were happy to reunite.

R: Was he disallowed to see you when you came into care?

No.

R: But it was your initiative to reunite?

Yes.

R: Could a talk a bit about how that happened, what steps you took, what help or encouragement you got?

Well, practically, all I had was my sisters, because everybody else couldn't care less if I saw him, they thought he was the worst thing that ever happened to me, but I didn't care.

R: So what did you do?

Well, actually, it was my sisters who got me the number where he was staying because they knew his girlfriend, so I phoned up and took it from there.

R: And did your worker(s) know about this, discourage you, forbid you, whatever?

No, sometimes, my aunt did, because she didn't really like him. My mom sorta understood that I wanted to get back in touch with him. My workers tried to say that I didn't need him, but I kinda convinced them that I did.

R: Did his getting clear of drugs have any bearing on that decision at all?

Most definitely. If he was still in drugs, I don't think I'd want to get back together with him. Or if he was, I'd just try to get him out of them. But there's not much you can do; if you're in drugs, you're just in.

12. On-going relationship with mom: +3. Even now that's important to me. I value my relationship with my mother, all the time. Always. I will continue to have a good relationship with her.

R: You didn't invite her to your graduation?  
Yes I did.

R: Did she come?

Yes.

R: But she wasn't a source of concern, like your grandparents?

No.

13. Moving to the semi-independence home: +1. When I first moved here, I thought it was great because I didn't have to stay in the group home any longer. But after a while I sort of got annoyed because I couldn't stay out as long as I wanted to. But after awhile we worked out something. Now I'm on a different schedule than everyone else because I'm 19, so we found a way to work around things.

R: In your story, you sounded like #1 fan. But now not so sure?

#1 fan: what do you mean?

R: You were sounding as if it were the answer to everyone's problems, including yours.

The semi-independence program?

R: Yes.

Yes. It is because there are different things we do each day that helps a person if they want it, like life skills that I mentioned. And I'm not denying that it didn't help. But...

R: The time has come and gone; time for the next step?

Yeah.

14. Graduation: +3. Even though I had some ups and downs, I still managed to graduate and get my diploma, and without it I wouldn't be in college.

R: But the event itself was very stressful, you said.

Yeah.

R: But worth it?

Yeah.

15. Breakdown: -1. It was hard, actually, because practically my whole summer was wasted in the hospital. I couldn't do anything but sit there and look at a tube (TV) all day. It sort of made me realize how much more responsibility I needed to take with my meds so that won't happen again.

R: But I have to comment that I just saw staff remind you to take your meds, or maybe in the house the rule is they need to keep control of all meds. So I'm wondering what, if any, worries you have about remembering when they're not around to remind you.

Yeah, I have worries. But with these new meds, they just give me the 3 I need for the day and I take them on my own. So it's simpler than them just giving me one at a time. But I think if I really put my mind to it, I can manage.

R: What do you see as being the danger spots in forgetting?

You mean what would happen?

R: No, what would make you forget.

Being preoccupied, doing something interesting that would take my mind off what I would have to do. But I just have to remember because that's the most important thing.

R: There's gadgets, too, little pill trays that you sort out in advance, things like that that can help you remember.

16. Going to college: +3! I like going to college a great deal because I meet new people, meet new teachers, I'm in the industry I want to be in. It's not like high school where you have to take courses you're not even interested in. Here you take the ones you want and you work hard in order to pass.

17. Moving out of semi-independence home: That's +2. I didn't include that extra 1 because I'm going to miss the extra support. But I'll have the support of my friends and family. I'm going to miss being around, because I've been here 2 1/2 years and it's been my home, and now I'm going to have a new home.

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. The good times with my family
2. The beginning of the rough times, the drugs in the basement
3. Looking out for my sisters
4. Not having money, being poor
5. Living with violence
6. Moving a lot
7. CAS being involved but not doing anything
8. Aunt and grandmother taking us in
9. The group home
10. Losing contact with dad
11. Re-establishing contact with dad
12. On-going relationship with mom
13. Moving to the semi-indep home
14. Graduation
15. Breakdown
16. Going to college
17. Moving out of semi-indep home

6 = 1, 11, 12, 14, 16 17

4 = 1, 11, 12, 16

2 = 1, 16

1 = can't/won't make the choice

Q7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? This is a story of my life. To the reader that will read this story, I hope will enjoy it. For me, I'd have as much fun telling the story as the person is, who's going to read it. I've touched on some things that I haven't thought about lately, for a long time, which is kinda a good thing. It's made me realize some things I haven't realized for a long time, and I can look back and say, Hey, it was kind of beneficial to have done this with *the researcher*. And if anybody can relate to this story, I just want to say that everything you do, from the day you're born, affects how you're going to be later on. Whether your family life is totally good or just excellent, or whether your family life was in the beginning a bit on the rough side. Just like I've remembered it and how other people remember it. And it will be with you from this day forth.

*I met with Veronica on August 19, 1995, in her mother's apartment, which she and her baby daughter shared. Her mother was out at the time. The apartment had a settled, lived-in look, with evidence of serious sewing projects and training in computer software.*

#### THE STORY OF VERONICA

I've been on my own in many different ways. First way was when I ran away from group homes and decided to live on the streets. Not really actually sleeping on the street, but not really having anywhere permanent to go. I would stay by friends' houses, hotel rooms, depending if I was making money. Not as a prostitute, but by robbing people and selling drugs, crack.

The second way would be just living independently in some small apartment, bachelor, 1-bedroom, whatever. It wasn't all that nice, but it was somewhere to stay. That was when I was 16, that was when I was allowed to live on my own. And CAS would pay me money every month. But sometimes it wasn't enough, so I'd still have to rob a couple people here and there for food and stuff.

I guess there was another way. The next way would be taking care of a baby, which is a lot of hard work. And buying everything for the baby, doing everything independently. I'm living at home with my mother, but I'm still paying rent, buying the groceries, baby supplies and everything you would if you were on your own.

Those are three ways.

R: I'd be interested to hear about the transitions from one way to the others...

Okay. I dunno.

R: Let me ask, for example, how you made the switch from living on the street to living in a room?

Okay. It wasn't really a room, it was an apartment. Because when I was living on the street, I was under 16 and I was running away from the police because I wasn't allowed to be on the street. Like I was in a group home, and they kept locking me up in (*a closed CAS short-term facility for underage youth picked up on the street*) and W (*a longer-term facility for street youth*) and stuff. And I didn't like the group homes, so I just took off with this girl that I met in a group home, and we just lived around.

R: You were how old when you first went to group homes?

I think 14. But it seemed a lot longer than that. And when I turned 16, I decided to get my own apartment because I was now legally able to live independently.

R: If it had been legally possible, would you have done that earlier?

I think so, yeah.

R: Do you think you would have managed it as well earlier as you did when you were 16?

No, because I learned so much on the streets. I didn't know anything at first, but then I learned how to take care of myself. I became "street-smart".

R: But before you came into care, were you at all into that sort of street stuff?

Before I was in care, no, not at all. Like I used to drink a little bit and smoke weed, but not as much as when I went into the group home.

R: Would you say a bit about what brought you into care?

I guess my mom just couldn't handle me any longer. I would stop going to school. I would go out in the nights and I would start cursing at her. And she just couldn't take it no more.

R: When did you start driving your mother crazy?

I think it was when I was 13.

R: Why?

I dunno.

R: Puberty?

I doubt it.

R: But did it have to do with boys and going out and all those teenage priorities?

Well, I wasn't really with boys in that way, but I would just hang out with a bunch of friends. So it wasn't really boys.

R: Were there any other changes in your life situation that would account for this change in your behaviour?

Maybe because my mom was strict when I was younger, so when she couldn't push me around any more, I just didn't care any more. I got lazy and didn't want to wake up in the morning to go to school. I don't know if that's the reason, but I know that she was really strict. Well, not beyond strict, but stricter than my friends.

R: Like, she didn't beat you or stuff, but...

...had too many rules.

R: Is she from another ethnic culture, that would explain that to some extent?

No. But my grandmother was Greek, and I think she was really strict with my mom.

R: And your older brother had no trouble with her when he was a teenager?

Yeah, he did too. I think it was just my mom.

R: Okay. So the picture I have is this sweet little girl who hits adolescence and rebels against her mother's standards, that she thinks are unreasonable. And it quickly gets out of hand, and the mother asks CAS to get involved.

Yeah, because she can't handle certain situations, like if something has gone wrong and she can't deal with it, she'll just want to throw you out and just get rid of it. She can't deal with problems.

R: So she gets rid of the person as well as the problem?

I guess you could say that if you want.

R: Because it's interesting that you keep coming back home even though things are a bit tense. Maybe that's because there aren't a lot of other options.

Yeah. Because when I had my baby, I was living in a small hot room that was overcrowded. I needed a bigger place and I moved back home after my mom asked me to come back.

R: Is she helpful to you with the baby, like babysitting or giving advice?

Not really. She loves to give advice sometimes, and she babysat once in two months, which isn't that great. And then I complained all the time, saying that she's the grandmother and that she should help a little bit. I'm not expecting her to babysit while I go out and party or anything, because I know it's my responsibility. I'll ask her little favours, like if you couldn't pick the baby up if she cries while I'm in the shower, because she's a little colicky, but sometimes she just says she's busy, but I think she could take 5 minutes off. Just little things like that, a lot of little things like that she doesn't do. But now she's helping out a little more since I've been complaining to her all the time.

R: Do you think she loves the baby?

Yeah.

R: Maybe just waiting for an invitation, doesn't want to barge in with the baby?

She knows she could babysit anytime she wants. She sees me struggling a lot. She doesn't need no invitation!

R: What about the baby's dad?

Yeah, he's still around. We're supposedly still going out, but I haven't been seeing him that much lately.

R: He was your boyfriend for quite a long time, wasn't he?

Yeah. It's been like 2 1/2 years now.

R: But he isn't keen about being a father? Like, going out is one thing, but assuming parental responsibility is another?

No, no, no, he doesn't take the responsibility like I do.

R: When you got pregnant, did he think becoming parents was an okay idea?

No. It was an accident and he wasn't thrilled at the beginning. But then he just couldn't leave me, and...

R: But he kinda slip-slided away?

No. I would still see him a lot, a lot more than I do now. Maybe he just doesn't come because of my mom. Plus he hasn't had insurance on his car lately and he lives pretty far away.

R: But what you are free to do is quite different now that there's a babe, so maybe it's about finding things to do together with this new reality?

I can't do what I used to do, but I still take her out everywhere I go, like to the mall and things like

that.

R: Okay.

Do you have any regrets? No.

R: Do people ask you that all the time?

Not really.

R: Do you ask yourself that all the time?

Yeah, but I don't have any regrets.

R: Can I ask how you see yourself in the future, the close future, year or so down the road?

I think things will get better. Maybe harder, maybe not. Baby will be bigger, able to walk so I don't have to drag the stroller around everywhere, on the bus. I could do more things with her, take her more places. I think it will be better.

R: A man in that picture?

Depending on my boyfriend, if he learns to take more responsibility.

R: If he doesn't, will you dump him and look for somebody else?

I'll definitely dump him. Maybe I'll talk to a couple guys but nothing serious, because I'm not ready for a big relationship yet. Like it's a big circle. First they treat you all nice, and then, once they know they have you, they don't put you first any more. That's true, not just with me but with friends and stuff.

R: I wanted also to ask about a father in your life, your father...

I don't have him in my life. I haven't seen him for maybe 13-14 years. But he knew when I was pregnant and he sent me a present and he called me at the hospital and I talked to him for like 2 minutes.

R: How did he know that you were pregnant?

I think my brother told him because my brother had contact with him recently. Or it could have been my mom, who knows?

R: A bit more about how you went to the street. Can you draw a more specific picture of how that happened?

I was in an all-girls group home ('Adventure House') and I didn't like it there too much. And my friend from my old group home just had a baby and she wanted me to come out and I went out with her to her baby-father and her apartment and I think I just never came back. I stayed there for awhile, and I met this guy at this plaza right by there (he's dead now, he got stabbed in the heart) and I liked him. But I didn't know that he was much older than what I thought, he looked young, he really did. We were talking and he was a dealer and I would hang around that plaza with all the other dealers. And then -- we didn't do anything, because I was a virgin and very young, like 15 and I didn't know much then -- so then I remember 'Nicole' finally went out with me alone, without the baby, who was with its father, and she was so happy to be out because she hadn't been out for so

long. And we went out to this place, got some weed for free from her friends, smoked some weed, drank a couple of beers, chilled out. And then I guess she just wanted to go out more and more until somehow she just ended up on the streets with me. I don't know how it happened. I just can't remember, it's like a blank. Because she was with the father, and then she wasn't. It was weird. I kinda blame myself, because now she's a crackhead, and I could have ended up like that, but I didn't. But now I'm here with my baby, taking my responsibility. But I never asked her to smoke crack. I tried to stop her so many times, but that was later in life. Back then it was pure weed.

R: But you said that you sold crack.

Yeah, because it was winter. We met up with this next girl at (*a motel strip on the Lake*). We couldn't rent a motel because we had no i.d. (*identification*), but we had money. We'd robbed people for money so we could rent a motel room, because we desperately needed some place to sleep. And we were walking around with our back-packs, our hair all messy, when this girl called us with two other guys. She looked good, with this cord (*corduroy*) suit on that was in style. She called us and we ended up talking to her and she asked if we needed someplace to stay, and offered for us to stay with her, in the motel. So we three slept in one bed, two on the other, with our shoes on because it was nasty and dirty. But...it was someplace to sleep, so who cared, we were just crashing out anyway.

We started selling with her, because she was selling. And I learned the hard way how to sell crack, because I got ripped off a couple of times. I was so dumb! So eventually we just sold crack all winter, because it was so hard finding a place to sleep and we needed clothes and food and all.

R: But you weren't using crack?

Oh no. I tried it before, but that wasn't my type of drug.

R: And you weren't prostituting?

No.

R: Was there pressure to prostitute?

Yeah, but I thought it was disgusting and my friend did it sometimes. I would always try to stop her from doing it, but I don't know what was wrong with her. She would do it and I would tell her not to. I would say let's just rob the guy, because you get the money first. But sometimes I would just have to make her run; after I would run, she couldn't just stay there. Because I didn't want her to do it, with old strange dirty men.

R: But no pimps trying to sign you on?

No pimps could sign me on.

R: What do you think was the difference between you and her, that she went the street way and you didn't?

I know a long time ago that she used to smoke crack until she got pregnant. She was smoking until she was 4 months pregnant but she didn't know. So the father made her quit. They were both smoking. So she stopped. So one day I went into 311 Jarvis (*the juvenile court and detention centre*) and left her on the street by herself. When I went in she was fat. When I came out she was skinny. I didn't even recognize her: she was a crack-head.

R: How long was that?

Only two months.

R: Talk about your experience with the justice system, since you mention 311.

I've just been charged maybe 8 times. 3 assault charges, fail to appear for prints and fail to appear for court, and fail to comply, theft under \$1000 and mischief over \$1000.

R: And how much time did you do?

3 1/2 weeks. They all got dropped in the end so I didn't have a record. I was lucky. Everything was a fluke. One time the guy who charged me didn't show up. It just got dropped. I had to pay for the theft under.

R: And you never got charged for robbing people?

No, never got caught by the guys or the police.

R: Tell me about how you did that, robbing people.

I'd have to pretend I was a prostitute.

R: So you'd make a deal, get the money, and take off?

And jet!

R: Did you think that up yourself, or is...

Yeah, I guess. I don't know anybody else who did that. It was my own style. It was easier to get opportunities like that. I can't even count how many times I robbed people like that.

R: Did you ever rob people who weren't potential clients? Like the more usual means of robbing people.

Yeah, I have. Like sometimes we'd pretend we were going to buy drugs for them, and we'd take their money. Like stupid people. Like whatever situation we're in, where-ever money is, we're going to take it.

R: Is this still part of your routine?

Like now? No. I have better things to think about, like my baby. That life is done for me.

R: Do you still have friends who are involved?

Not really, all my friends are in the downtown area and I don't talk to them any more. I talk to other friends around here who aren't into that. Friends I grew up with.

R: Is the baby's father from your street era?

I met him when I was on the street, but he didn't know that because I would take care of myself, I didn't look all bummy-looking. I just looked like a normal girl to him.

R: Does he know that you were on the streets? And what does he think of that?

He didn't want me to rob people any more. I used to be rude and he kinda changed me for the better.

R: Has he been street-involved?

No. He's an ordinary guy, a normal person.

R: And black?

Yeah, he's a Jamaican.

R: Born here?

No. Came over when he was 13.

R: I want to go back to the question of why your friend got eaten up by the street and you escaped.

It's all about will-power. I had it and she didn't. I tried so many times to get her off it. I took her out of dirty crack houses. She was a junky sometimes. I used to take her off the street and tell her to stop smoking. And she would stop for pretty long, but then if it was introduced to her, she didn't have the will-power to say no.

R: And you always kept one toe in the straight world, right?

Yeah.

R: Your family the connection, or friends, or the way you were raised, what?

Just my brains. It doesn't really....like anyone could get addicted to crack, whether they were from the richest family.

R: Do you think that if you don't get addicted, you can leave the street without too much trouble?

It all depends what else you do on the street.

R: Like prostituting, you mean?

Exactly.

R: And you avoided that, over 2 years?

Oh, yeah.

R: Did people, like your worker and your mom, think you were prostituting?

I have no idea.

R: Okay...I don't have any more questions.

Really???

R: I do. I wondered if you think that getting pregnant, even though you didn't plan it, helped you settle down.

Definitely. I can't do all the other stuff any more.

R: Do you miss it?

In a way. My weed, that's all I miss. If I was out and my baby wasn't with me, maybe I would smoke a spliff, but if I'm with her, I wouldn't feel right.

R: I also wondered if most of your friends are Caribbean, because sometimes they have a special attitude toward weed.

Most of my guy friends, some of my girlfriends are. But most of the friends I hang around with now are Spanish, Canadian, just a mix. I used to hang around with a lot of Jamaicans, though.

R: In your street days?

Yeah, for sure.

R: Okay. Anything more from you?

I can't really think of anything.

*I met with Veronica on August 25, 1995, again in her apartment. Her mother was getting ready to go out, meticulously ironing a skirt and blouse for a protracted time, during which Veronica and I made small talk, since she was clearly not prepared to get into her narrative within her mother's hearing.*

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF VERONICA

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND:

Q3. THE FORM:

The beginning is...when I started going out more, like teenagers do.

The middle is...how I was in group homes. There's another middle, which is when I went from group home to the streets.

The end is...when I got back on track and had a baby and settled down.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS:

1. Going into care
2. Moving all over the place.
3. Running away.
4. Living on the streets.
5. Trying to find places to sleep.
6. Robbing people, selling drugs.
7. Hiding all the time from police.
8. Getting in trouble with the police.
9. Living independently.
10. Having a baby.

5. VALUE THE EVENTS:

1. Going into care: -1 because...at the time I really really hated it, because I kept moving from school to school. I never really finished my high school to this day.

2. Moving all over the place in care: I didn't like that. -3.

3. Running away: I liked it, obviously, or I wouldn't have done it. +2

R: Let me ask a question. Some kids run not because they like running, but because they hate the circumstances they're in. So the run away, rather than to something. It sounds to me like you ran to the excitement of the street, rather than away from horrible group homes. Yeah?

Well, I didn't run to the street at first. I just didn't want to be where I was.

R: What was so bad for you about where you were?

There were so many rules. And I just hated it so much. The first one I liked, the one group home I didn't run from. I ran from all the foster homes I was in, because it was so un-home-ly, all of a sudden in this brand new family. I didn't like it even when I was in my friend's families. Because I was with my friend's [family] and I still didn't feel right. It's just odd. I preferred group homes

because two people aren't trying to be parents to you all of a sudden. And there would be little kids, and all of a sudden I'm your sister now; too weird! In group homes, I liked that there are other people in my situation, other kids there as well.

R: So how long did you stay in the group home you liked, and why did you leave?

Because it was only a temporary group home and they transferred me to this all-girls' home. And I didn't like it too much. The staff was rude. Like one of the staff thought she could just tell us anything, she'd just make up things sometimes that she didn't like, like she became assistant or something and she just thought she could run everything, and I just hated it.

4. Living on the streets: That's hard to say. I didn't like it, but it was better than all those rules. And being locked up in those places. I had more freedom. It was good in a way because I wouldn't have met my boyfriend and wouldn't have had a baby and wouldn't have the experience of independence and being street-smart. So it was good and it was bad. Rough, though. So +3 because of my baby, and -3 because of the starvation, struggling.

R: But don't you think that you could have managed to have a baby without going through that process?

Well, then I wouldn't know how to live independently as much as I do, like how to budget my money and stuff.

R: Okay, so living on the street is a bit like putting your life on fast forward?

Yeah.

R: Learned a lot of things before your time so you were ready to have a baby when you were 18?

It was easier in a way. But I have to give up all the things I used to do. *(Mom is in the scene at this point, which makes candidness a bit difficult. Then she leaves.)* Like going out and smoking my weed. Like that's all I did was smoking weed, that was all my excitement. And sometimes drinking rum and beer, that's all I really drank.

R: I still gotta go on this one a bit longer. It is sounding to me like your goal was to become a mother.

My goal, no, I wasn't expecting it at all. I said I never want to have a kid.

R: So how did it happen?

We'd been together for so long, so after a while we stopped using protection, and then you keep doing it because you don't expect anything to happen. And then it does. That's exactly what happened for sure; I never wanted to have a child until I was married.

R: But...gotta say that if you stopped using protection, you must have expected...

No, no. I just didn't think it would happen to me for some reason.

R: What reason?

I just, I don't know. I just didn't think it would happen. Because you know you're just stupid. Like sex just happens and sometimes we wanted it without protection just for, it was better without. Like

sometimes we'd just sneak it once in a while, just risk it. And once I got pregnant...I was going to go on birth control pills after my next period, and I was pregnant before that.

R: Why didn't you consider birth control pills earlier?

I'd taken it once before just to be regular, and it gave me some bad side-effects. Like it made me sleep all day. And I didn't know that there were these low-dosage pills, and then my doctor told me there are different kinds and you just have to find the right ones. Because I thought all of them would give me that side-effect. But then I got pregnant.

5. Trying to find places to sleep: -3 for sure. I hated it. It was so hard.

R: Because you were under 16 and couldn't use hostels?

I didn't like hostels.

R: So even though finding places to sleep was rotten, it was better than hostels?

Well, my friend could get into it but I couldn't because of age and because I'd have to give my name and they'd call places and find out that I was a runaway, and I wasn't into that.

R: Let me ask this: some thought that there should be a place for kids who are on the street to stay without having to give names or be discovered as runaways. What do you think about that?

I guess for some people it would be okay. But I'd probably be afraid that someone would take my stuff, I'd have to sleep with [it] under my head. And I wouldn't like to sleep with a bunch of street people; you never know what could happen.

6. Robbing people, selling drugs: It wasn't that great. It was risky. 0 It was bad because you're risking your life in a way, somebody could just pull out a knife, kill you, rape you, molest you, kidnap you, whatever. And selling drugs was hard because of the police, you'd have to do some hard time. But the reason why I put 0 was that if I didn't do that, I wouldn't have food and clothes and somewhere to sleep. Like it was good in a way, but it was risky.

R: A hard job, but better than none?

Yeah.

7. Hiding all the time from police: It was hard because a lot of police recognized me. And my friend, if they saw her they'd know I was around somewhere. I'd always have to hide. It was hard. -3.

8. Getting in trouble with the police: -3 obviously, because why would you want to get in trouble with the police?

R: Well, some kids say it was a bit of a relief because for a little while you didn't have to worry about a place to sleep and food to eat.

Yeah, in a way that's true. It depends what time you get in trouble. Sometimes you'd be doing so good, you'd have a permanent place to stay and you'd be so happy, and they'd come and you didn't want to get locked up.

9. Living independently: +3. Learned a lot about paying my rent and budgeting. Had a place to sleep every night. Food to eat-- sometimes, because I didn't get all that much money, but it was

good.

R: Did you have difficulty ever with friends crashing and wrecking your place or eating your food or getting you kicked out?

It was really just Nicole but I didn't have that much problem with her. She would just bring guys there and I wouldn't approve. Once there was these guys that came in when I wasn't there and took my stereo. They wouldn't leave one time and I wasn't into calling the police, so this guy came that I knew and he just made them, well he didn't make them leave but they just left after he came.

10. Having a baby: +3. It's hard at times, but I'm glad that I had a baby. Because now I can't imagine how it would be without her.

R: Do you think that you could have settled down without having a baby?

I already was settling down, going to school.

R: So once it was legally possible for you to live independently, you had no difficulty really leaving the street and getting on with your teenage business?

No, when I was already settling down, I was living at home. It's a long story about my landlord, so I moved back home.

R: And did you fight with your mom then more or less than now?

I couldn't tell you.

R: The same amount, maybe about different things?

Yeah.

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. Going into care
2. Moving all over the place.
3. Running away.
4. Living on the streets.
5. Trying to find places to sleep.
6. Robbing people, selling drugs.
7. Hiding all the time from police.
8. Getting in trouble with the police.
9. Living independently.
10. Having a baby.

6 = 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10

4 = 1, 4, 9, 10

2 = 4, 10

1 - 10

Q7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? It's about life and how a little thing like going out a little bit more than before can lead to all this. So my life is not the normal typical life that everyone has.

*I met with Victoria on June 14, 1995, in an office in the residence for women in which she lived, although she spent considerable time with her boyfriend, 'David' at his place. When she completed the Census '91 Questionnaire, she insisted on completing it for David as well, even though they did not live at the same address. On this occasion, she was recovering from a rape incident the prior evening, in which she and David were both assaulted by a man who had also assaulted David on a previous occasion.*

#### THE STORY OF VICTORIA

(Refers to Q; gives me David's portion with corrections)

R: Start wherever you think the transition from being the responsibility of someone else, to being on your own, began...

It starts somewhere back when I was 6 or 7. I was forced basically to grow up rather fast. I had my sisters who needed guidance and our mother wasn't there. I basically looked after them and made sure that they were taken care of. So I didn't have very much of a childhood, although I never had much of an infancy, either.

Between the ages of 6 months to 14 years, I was molested by a friend of the family we were made to call "uncle". My sisters didn't understand what to do and stuff like that, and my mom was an emotional abuser, so we never really had any positive role models. Because as I said, my uncle was a child molester that also sexually assaulted women, but mostly children. My father killed himself when I was quite young. And like I said before, my mother was an emotional abuser.

When I was in my early teens, I was basically told to sign papers signing me into care because my mother could no longer handle me: she didn't know what to do with me. I wonder why she couldn't control me. Look at my past: it isn't very good!

When I was living in a group home, I learned a lot of things about me, and I could actually settle down to have a childhood, an actual carefree adolescence, and it took me a few years before I actually achieved this. They taught me how to deal with my emotions. In '91, I went through a program that taught me how to live independently. Such as budgeting, and how to grocery shop, and important things you need to know to survive in the real world. And then when the group home felt I was ready, they implemented a program for me to iron out some of the problems I might have in cooking for myself, buying my own groceries, budgeting my money, and all the things I would need to be quite familiar with to live on my own.

In the summer of my 17th year, I moved out onto my own. And being that that was my first place, I didn't do very well. I had a lot of problems go wrong, and after a month of living there, I had to find another place to live. And that's when I moved into my current residence.

When I was living here, I found friends and began to have an adolescence when I should be learning and evolving into an adult. Which I'm doing, it's just that it's my carefree adolescence as well. (Big sigh)

I still want to be a teen! I wish my life had been better. I wish I would have experienced all of the things I should have experienced when they should have happened. Like being an infant when I should have been an infant, being a child when I should have been a child, and being an adolescent when I should have been an adolescent. Instead of having my infancy taken away, being an adolescent, so to speak, when I should have been a child, a carefree child. And now it's time for me to move on to adulthood, and I haven't experienced the joys of being a teenager. It's not fair!

*(Break to get dinner)*

It isn't fair! Like, people who say that teenagers are rebellious and they should be locked up until they're adults are people who really don't care. People who probably had an adolescence and probably enjoyed it. But now a new generation is coming up and they don't like it. But I never had an adolescence, so how can I be bothersome? It makes me mad. That people could be so arrogant, to the points of view of children who never experienced these things, and now we're troublemakers? Some of us are good kids!

R: Would it help to focus a bit on your time in care, which seemed to be a positive time? Like how old were you when you came into care?

It was 15 days after my 14th birthday. I tried to mess it up as much as I could. Like my sisters needed me at home, and I wanted to be there. So I tried as hard as I could to get back, but it didn't work. I had a lot of fun in those years, but I also learned a lot. I didn't have to be an adolescent looking after kids, I could be *me*, something I never experienced before.

It bothered me when I got into high school, mainstream high school. People would put me down and stuff like that. But then again, I was always put down. But these were people who were pretty stable in their life, and really didn't have to work hard for much, because it was pretty much handed to them. Nothing was handed to me. I had to work for everything I have and everything I strive to be. I wish I could put those people in my position for a day, so they could live through the torment and the anguish and the pain that I lived through, so they would know what it's like. I think they would change their tune when they find out exactly how it hurts, the pain I have to live through on a day-to-day basis.

R: Could you expand a bit on how you were put down in school, more precisely.

They would call me names and just overly exalt the fact that I wasn't like them.

R: In what ways did you appear to be different, on the outside?

I was very closed to people, didn't want to let many people in until I knew them. Until I knew that they couldn't take the information that I gave them and turn it around and distort it.

R: What kind of information--no, how much of your history -- no, still not right. What I want to ask is what of your history had some chance of being okay to share, knowing that some was pretty dicey. But what did you even think about sharing?

Do you want to repeat the question?

R: Yeah. Okay. One woman who studied kids who had been in care was surprised to find that they were protective of letting people know that they were in care, even, let alone the details about why they were in care. And I'm wondering how you drew that line.

I drew it very much the same way. I didn't like people knowing that I lived in a group home. But I did say to them as I got comfortable, "Look, I live in a group home, and if you don't like it, I don't care". And I still liked the people that I told for a specific reason. I basically told people that couldn't hurt me, or turn it around to use it against me.

R: Like who might the "safe" people be? Adults?

Yeah. I didn't tell a lot of the kids at school because teenage gossip is like everybody's business.

R: So even without kids knowing that you lived in a group home, you still felt put down?

Yes.

R: I guess my question is how this kind of secretiveness goes with being a carefree adolescent? It still sounds really burdened with adult-type concerns, to me.

I was able to live my life. I could go to dances. I could go out in the community and not worry about being home at a certain time to cook for my sisters, or being home to make sure that all their needs were being met.

R: Did you make any good friends, that you could share a fair bit of your life with?

At school?

R: Yeah, or in the community?

I found when I was living in the group home that I made really good friends of my roommates, and I still talk to them. And I had a boyfriend in the group home, actually quite a few, and I still talk to the one.

R: So your social network, your friends, were also kids in the care system.

Yes, and a few friends I had became friends with, outside, like neighborhood kids.

R: Your sisters. Did they come into care too?

The one did. The younger one did.

R: And did that stop your worrying about them?

It made me feel that my younger sister was getting the help she needed. My mother couldn't help her any more so she decided to put her into a strict group home, because she's suicidal.

R: Don't answer anything you don't want to, but can I ask if she too was sexually abused as a young child?

Yeah.

R: And the older one?

The other one? (The next youngest to me, the second oldest) she too.

R: And did she come into care?

No. I don't think the middle one got it that much. I don't think he was really that interested in her.

R: So is her life fairly together?

Yes.

R: And your mother? Do you see her?

I see her about every month or so.

R: And? How is your relationship with her.

It's been getting stronger. But it's taken a long time.

R: And therapy?

What do you mean?

R: Did you and your mom see a counsellor, either together or separately?

We saw family counselling, but my mother never believed it happened, just because our family unit wasn't that strong, that's why we were seeing the counsellor.

R: And that was before you came into care?

Yes.

R: But there was this pregnancy when you were 13, right? Surely that tuned somebody in to what was happening?

She was born when I was 14, but my mother always thought I was promiscuous.

R: And did you finally blow the whistle? Or not?

On the abuse?

R: Yeah.

When I moved into care, it stopped, because he couldn't find me. Until he found me and started giving me harassing phone calls and coming around my school.

R: And then you blew the whistle?

No. Like when I moved into care, that's when it all stopped.

R: So you were never seen as being a sexual abuse victim and he was never fingered as a perpetrator?

He was arrested. And sentenced to 125 years in a state pen.

R: And did you have to give evidence and stuff?

Yeah.

R: Could you talk a bit about that, about what it did to making your childhood/adolescence "abnormal".

Meaning?

R: Meaning what you were talking about before, being adult-acting (like giving court evidence) when you are still a child

I was 17 when I went to court.

R: So learning to be a carefree child, you said happened when you got into care and got the hang of being "kidlike". Did that happen before the court stuff, or did the court stuff put that off yet again, part of the learning to be free process?

I started really noticing I was free after the court, after he was sentenced.

R: Some kids have said that school was a refuge from dysfunctional families when they were little. Did you find that?

I enjoyed school extremely much; I really enjoyed school. It gave me a place I could go to get away from everyone who continued to hurt me. (Big sigh)

R: Were there any people in particular who were protective of you when you were still at home? Neighbours? a teacher?

I had a few teachers who cared, and my grandmother was living at home.

R: Did she know what was going on, or believe you when it came out?

She didn't know what was going on, and didn't listen to the court case at all.

R: Now I have the sense that this thing, this abuse, even though the guy went to jail, is like a non-event in your family, everybody just acts as if it didn't happen?

Everybody acts like it didn't happen.

R: So is that still a burden for you, o...

No, now I can actually tell people that my uncle was a child molester and laugh about it. Like, who cares about him, he's nobody important.

R: Did you ever get counselling about this abuse?

Not that I talked about it to anybody, no. I talked to a few people about it, but that's it.

R: Could you see in your future some advantage to working this through with a counsellor, rather than friends or even staff, who have many responsibilities other than helping you with this?

R: Or other victims, that's another approach, self-help groups.

I didn't understand the question and I'm sorta fading out on you.

R: Fair on. Any energy for other kinds of questions?

We can try. It's like my mind is saying I want to go to sleep some more. We've got 7 pages; I think you've pulled enough out of me.

R: Me too.

*I met with Victoria on June 20, 1995, at the women's residence.*

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF VICTORIA

Q1. RE-READ NARRATIVE

Q2. ADD OR AMEND

Re the question I faded out on: No, I'm not into counsellors. Like some counsellors are fine, but some I can't get along with. And I don't want to probe into the torment and anguish that goes on in my mind when I have to go on about it.

R: Like now: we should end this line of discussion?

Yeah.

I wanted to put David into there. Because he did help me. He helped me to find good in myself. Although other people did that too, it's just that I enjoyed it from him. I fell deeply in love with him at the same time that he was helping me. And our relationship wasn't really good in the beginning because I was feeling feelings that I had never felt before, and I was afraid of them. So instead of finding out what they were and dealing with them, I took the things that David didn't like me doing or that he said I couldn't do, and would do them so that we would fight about them, giving me a place so that I could escape. Because then we'd break up. And then I would, in a sense, have run away from my problem. Although I always went back.

And then he met another woman, 'Paula'. He went out with her for a week and a half. And then he started going back out with me, and during that week and a half, I found out -- I understood that I really loved him, although at that point I couldn't tell you why.

During this time, Paula went from being engaged to 'Sam' to going out with David to being back engaged with Sam to now being engaged to David. So Paula and Sam got into a fight because David and Paula wanted to sleep together one last night, like not have sex, but sleep together one last night to help them get over their relationship. Although don't ask me how that is going to help them get over their relationship! So David invited Paula to sleep in our bed with us. Now any logical person that had any right mind would sleep with the one they're going out with, but David slept with Paula that night, right while I was sleeping in the same bed.

That's just one incident. Another time, I had gone away for the weekend and Sam and Paula had broken off their engagement and Paula started going out with David on Saturday night. They did "it" numerous times and he's the one that started it all. When I came back on Sunday, they were all supposed to act like nothing had happened, but I knew something had gone on. When it all went down, I found out exactly what happened. I was quite pissed off!! He was crying and down on his knees and wanting to take me back.

But before Paula ever came into the picture, he gave me a lot of my "firsts". This is back when I hadn't realized I was falling in love with him. He was affectionate towards me. He loved me, or at least he said he did, and at that time I believed him. I still do. He...a lot of my boyfriends, they'd just...one day we'd fool around, and then a few days later we'd make love, although at that time, with them, it was sex. But David didn't do that. We would make out and then we'd make love. Something that I hadn't experienced before, and I really enjoyed. He made it fun and he made it enjoyable. He loved me and he cared for me, things that I had never really expressed to me, except for my boyfriends, but I never really loved them like I loved David.

One thing that I really enjoyed and I wished I had completed, but I had another engagement I

needed to go to that night: I took him to my school dance, and that was the most wonderful night that I have ever experienced at a school dance. I danced all night with him, and I felt like a Queen. It was the most romantic night of my life. And even my teachers said to David that they were happy that he was going out with me, because they had never seen me this happy and this content, ever. I just wish that I had gone back to his place that night so we could sit and talk and reminisce, but I had to go to my 30-hour famine.

R: Maybe you could give just a bit of background, like how old you were when you met him, where you were living, how you met him, that kind of stuff???

I met him when I was 18. I was living in the residence where I'm currently living. I met him through my best friend, who I no longer talk to because of David. David didn't stop the relationship with 'Rene' until he had already been with me. Me and David started going out on the 27th of December. He broke up with Rene on December 31st. Broke up with her on New Year's to go out with me! I suppose it's better than keeping her to the New Year and then breaking up with her. I guess that old saying holds true, eh, "Out with the old, in with the new!"

He's into triangles, can you tell?

R: Which leaves me wondering how he has been helpful to you and commanded your affection and loyalty? Because in my scheme of things, that doesn't go very well with triangles. But for you???

Well, like, as to affection and loyalty, I've been loyal to everyone I've been with. Because I haven't had very many boyfriends, and to me they're hard to come by, so I can't be bothered screwing around on the one I'm with. As for the triangles, I think he doesn't completely know how to end a relationship without starting another one.

R: Don't answer this if you don't want to, but as we were ending our last session, you said that the guy who assaulted you had assaulted David twice before, or something like that. I'm wondering now if this is a variation on the triangle theme in any way?

It was three times. That's an interesting way of looking at it. I haven't really sat down and looked at it in that light before, although why would someone want to think of a sexual assault as part of a triangle. Because, usually, well with David it was different, but usually you only see the guy who did it to you once, although David saw him three times. But on the other hand, there's sometimes a falsehood to David's words.

R: Well, it was a question that came to my mind, and also because you said that David wasn't charging the guy, which seems odd to me.

I never said that he wasn't charging the guy, I said that I didn't know if he did or not. But I know that he made a report.

R: And did you end up pressing charges?

I don't know.

R: This started out with you wanting to put David in your story. Have you done that to the extent that you wanted to, or is there more, or different?

No, I think that's fine. But oh...I want to get back in my story. I was over there, yesterday, and I was told and I think this was provoked by Paula, because Paula has him wrapped around her little finger, that he doesn't want me over there any more and he doesn't want me phoning any more. And my

personal opinion, and I can say this, Paula is nowhere right for him. He needs someone with intelligence, a sense of morals, values, knows where she wants to go with her life or has some idea, and does more with her life than sit on her butt and collect money from the government. Although I guess they can't sit on their butts any more, eh? (*Reference to the recent announcement of workfare*)

R: So you think you'd be better for David than her?

Yeah, if you put it that way, yeah.

R: And would David be better for you?

That I haven't decided yet, but right now I was never given the opportunity to express my love to him because there were so many people around, and I don't like expressing my love in front of people. Well, oh yeah, hugging and kissing him and that kind of stuff, but not..like I couldn't take him out for dinner or that kind of stuff, because David was always afraid to leave them in the house by themselves because they had already broken in once before, and he didn't want them doing anything in his house.

R: So David regularly lives with Paula and Sam, and you visit there occasionally, is that it?

That's how it's working now. Although Sam doesn't live there now. Sam was told in no uncertain terms that the landlord doesn't want him in the apartment, so he moved up the street.

R: So your boyfriend is living with another woman more or less permanently, long-term.

Yeah, with her child. And it's not my boyfriend, it's her fiancée.

R: So you and David are past tense?

Right now.

R: But you want him back?

Yes, because that little snake is not right for him! She's just filling him with venom, and her kid, and I can't stand it. I hate it. It makes me so mad!!!

R: But what I don't understand is why you would want a guy who shows this kind of persistent bad judgement, or so it looks to me from what you've said? Why would you want to complicate your life with his messes??

That's why I've decided to stay away right now, and if I know him at all, and because they need somebody to blow up at because they fight constantly these days, they're going to be needing me. They're going to phone me and say "Victoria, na na na na na" and I'm just going to sit and see how long it takes, because apparently Paula is to be moving out on her own with her son, and while she was engaged to David, she was fucking Sam.

R: Ask me if I'm surprised????

(laughs uproariously!) And leaving David in his old apartment, and apparently, according to David, he won't be spending a whole lot of time over at her place, and she won't be spending a whole lot of time at his place, and Sam will be spending time with her, and David is allowing this to happen because his mind is so wrapped up in this witch.

R: But my question is why you're mad at her, and not him? Why does she get to be the bad guy.

Because she's the one who came and took him away from me, and she just wanted to be greedy because sex was good with my guy and it wasn't that great with Sam, that's why she wants to go out with David.

R: But presumably, David is adult enough to make up his own mind, so he's as responsible for getting taken as she is for taking him, right?

Yeah, you are right. But Paula is a snake. And...

R: And David is a what?

David is just a guy that's mind has been taken over because of this snake. He doesn't think for himself any more. He's not allowed. At least with me, he could think for himself. I didn't control his thoughts, his minds. She has turned him so cold toward me, so distant. He was never this way with me. If I ended up in the hospital, he'd be right there. But now he couldn't care. Because his fiancée wants him around so she can fuck him. But we all know she's a sex fiend, she can't go one day without it.

R: Are you referring to when you were in hospital after you were assaulted?

No, just if I had to go to the hospital or whatever. But that's a perfect example of how she controls his mind to stay home.

R: Okay, I don't think I'm going to understand this, even if you keep explaining it to me. Well, not understand. Accept it. He just doesn't sound like any kind of bargain, to me. Even if he's excellent in the sack. But I don't want to argue with your opinion.

Okay, don't argue with my opinion. People don't necessarily win when they go up against my opinion.

R: Yeah. You're absolutely within your rights to have any opinion you want, particularly about someone I've never met. Or just very briefly.

R: Okay, so can we move on?

Sure...don't want to say any more about the snake and her clones.

Q3. THE FORM:

The beginning is...back when I was 6 or 7, when I started feeling responsible for my sisters and stuff like that.

The middle is...I dunno

The end is...with David. That's not the end of the...I don't think until I actually get out on my own, living in my own apartment, until then that it will actually be finished. But for right now, I'll leave it with David because I haven't moved further in my development yet.

Q4. LIST THE EVENTS

1. The abuse
2. Being responsible for my sisters

3. The group home
4. Having my teenage-hood
5. Moving out on my own
6. Evolving into an adult
7. How people saying that teenagers are bad bothered me
8. High school, being put down
9. Drawing lines about what to share, with whom
10. Safe people
11. Friends and boyfriends
12. Abuse denied by family
13. David

Q5. VALUE THE EVENTS

1. The abuse: -3!!! because...it's self-evident.
2. Being responsible for my sisters: I don't know. My sisters are my sisters. -1 because I couldn't have my own life, I was always worried about my sisters. About what they were doing.
3. The group home: +3 because...it taught me a lot about myself and gave me a lot of my grounding.
4. Having my teenage-hood: I used to think that was the cream of the crop. I always wanted my teenage-hood, but now with what happened with David, it's like I want to join a convent. From +2 to -2.
5. Moving out on my own: +1 because...I had a chance to be independent, a chance to find on my own if I could survive out there by myself. Because for so long I survived independently by myself, surrounded by others. And I wanted to know if I could survive on my own, by myself. I wasn't very successful at it.

R: Can I ask, what done you in? What blew it for you?

Me and the lady didn't get along very well.

6. Evolving into an adult: +2. because...I haven't really experienced all of that yet, and I can't really say...right now, I think it's going to be fun, but I can't really say because I'm not there yet.
7. How people saying that teenagers are bad bothered me: deleted
8. High school, being put down: -3! because it wasn't helping my self-esteem or my self-confidence. it's self-explanatory.
9. Drawing lines about what to share, with whom: Don't know where to place the ball. In order to keep my sanity, I had to draw the lines, because if I didn't, everybody in this world would know my life story and really nobody needs to know. -2.
10. Safe people: +2 because they're safe people, people I can talk to, people I get along with, people that understand me and don't pass judgements too quickly.
11. Friends and boyfriends: these people could be either way, depending on how you look at it. But with all my boyfriends I seem to have learned things I value in a man and things that I don't, and things that I'd rather not be around, like Paula.

R: My question on Paula is how she gets to be so very powerful with you. In family therapy, there's a concept, an idea, that people who are more powerful than they ought to be are standing on someone's shoulder, so to speak. And then the therapist asks the family whose shoulders the overly-powerful person is standing on. So let me ask you, whose

shoulders Paula is standing on, in the cast of characters in your life history?

Like, I'm almost geared to say David's, but...that can't be. Or can it? Because really, she's got David right now, and he was mine and I was happy with him. When things weren't going wrong with us, and Paula destroying everything.

R: Whatever...it's a complex question, and maybe not one that is easily answered off the top of your head, or maybe not at all. Maybe it's a wrong question.

They've got to find some way to ask that question so that people can find out how to answer, a simpler way.

R: You could well be right.

12. Abuse denied by family: I didn't like that. It means they didn't trust me, and they didn't really care. On the other hand, why should they acknowledge it; it's abuse. And who wants to believe that abuse exists in their family unit? -3.

13. David: +3 to -2. because...for reasons I've given.

Q6. 6-4-2-1

1. The abuse
2. Being responsible for my sisters
3. The group home
4. Having my teenage-hood
5. Moving out on my own
6. Evolving into an adult
8. High school, being put down
9. Drawing lines about what to share, with whom
10. Safe people
11. Friends and boyfriends
12. Abuse denied by family
13. David

6 = 1, 3, 6, 9, 5, 11

4 = 1, 3, 6, 9

2 = 1, 3

1 = can't decide between the two...

Q7. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? I hope it helps somebody. It means that I can't really decide which is the most important part of this story, but I have narrowed it down to two events, one of which is the group home. It helped me a lot. It gave me a foundation to build so that I can start my life again, in hopes of building a future for myself that I may not have had if I had not had the group home helping me. But on the other hand, the abuse was very much a big part of my life. You and I both know it lasted just over 14 years of my life. And although it made me afraid to love and to show my feelings, that is also affecting me with my relationships, and I need to now work on that. I need to now move on with my present information, so that I may eventually have a relationship that I am happy in and that I can express my love -- if I ever love again -- so that one day I can get married and have children of my own. If this story helps one person, I'll be happy. If the person understands the concepts and helps them sort out their abuse, the concepts of the group home and although you may not like it in the beginning, when you leave and think back, they did nothing but help you. Keep that in mind as you walk through the rest of your life. All the best...