

Breaking the Secrecy Vow - Part 1

Posted by [Karen E. Lile](#) on *Friday, 20 March 1998, at 6:48 p.m. (eastern time)*

The following is a statement I submitted to the State of Washington, under penalty of perjury, at the request of a petitioner.

BREAKING THE VOW OF SECRECY

On January 9, 1998, I, Karen E. Lile, took a vow of secrecy at the request of a facilitator of the Teen Help Discovery Seminar at the Holiday Inn in Livermore, California. The next day, at approximately 4:30 PM, I left the conference room in a state of distress and emotional shock. Before I walked out of that room, I was told, by a seminar staff person, that I could not come back again while the seminar was in progress. The doors were locked on the room and the windows covered, so there was no way I could reenter the room anyway. Today, I am breaking my secrecy vow and stating why I have decided the vow was not only made invalid by the actions of the facilitator/trainer, but is unethical and goes against my deepest personal values. I am going to relate what happened to me, how it affected me, and what questions and actions the processes and substance of this seminar provoked. I am opening my actions and the actions of the facilitator and participants to public comment and feedback. I am hoping that people will take what I have written and compare it against their own values and standards. I want to know if others feel there is legitimate cause for concern about these events and their import to the hundreds of teens who are confined in the Teen Help residential programs and the parents who have placed them there.

Before beginning my story, I will tell you about myself. I am 39 years old, a law abiding United States citizen and resident of Clayton, California. I have been married to Kendall Ross Bean for almost 19 years and have two daughters. I have never been divorced.

I have shared ownership in a piano business with my husband, in Contra Costa County, California for 16 years and am also the President of a California nonprofit corporation currently applying for federal exemption status. I completed my college studies at Brigham Young University, The University of California at Berkeley and the University of Texas at Austin. In 1982, I graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a Bachelor's Degree in English and Special honors in English. I am currently a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I value my religious freedom and support others in theirs.

As a teenager, my grandmother enrolled me in MENSA and the Children of the American Revolution as a member. I value freedom of the mind and the United States Constitutional freedoms. I have held membership in many professional and community organizations. I have been actively involved in the community, serving in leadership roles of various capacities. I have been involved in local government affairs, writing proclamations and resolutions that were later ratified by city councils and county boards of supervisors.

WHAT WE EXPECTED FROM THE DISCOVERY SEMINAR:

On April 20, 1997, my husband and I placed our daughter in a residential behavior modification school, Tranquility Bay, in Jamaica, West Indies. She had been missing for over a year and we felt at the time that this decision was an intervention to save her life. Details about why we made that decision and what has happened since that time can be found in entries posted between February 24th, 1998 to present, under mine and my husband's name at the world wide web site <http://www.bridgetounderstanding.com>.

When my husband and I entered the Livermore Holiday Inn Hotel to attend the Discovery Seminar, we checked into the hotel expecting to stay for three days. We had been looking forward to this event because we had heard glowing reports of the seminar's significance to us and our family from other parents and from Teen Help. Teen Help is the organization that referred us to the seminars and to Tranquility Bay and we believed at the time that they were our advocates, representing our interests.

The full name of the series of seminars, of which this Discovery was the first, is called "TASKS", or "Teen Accountability, Self-Esteem and Keys to Success". On the first day of our Discovery seminar, we knew that our daughter had already attended all of the TASKS seminars with the exception of the Parent/Child Seminars.

Promotional Teen Help literature stated that: "These seminars [are] aimed at enhancing self-esteem, honesty, accountability, integrity, trust, agreements, leadership, communication and responsible decision making. The seminar series also strengthens a teen's ability to overcome anger, peer pressure, and self-limiting beliefs."

This sounded wonderful. I was greatly interested in having my daughter learn these principals. I took these words at face value and expected them to mean what people in my culture understand them to mean. I had no idea that words like "accountability", and "integrity" had hidden meanings to "insiders"; that "outsiders", (those who had not been through the seminar) could not hope to understand.

Other literature I had read before signing the contract to send my daughter to Jamaica, had given me further expectations:

"As students participate in the seminars, they are immersed in a combination of educational, therapeutic and experiential activities, that give teens an opportunity to evaluate the negative results of their past choices, and begin making effective new choices"

I had participated in many progressive educational experiences, including activities as part of my honors classes at Brigham Young University, which had been labeled "experiential". I felt that I understood the scope of activities that might fall under the categories of "educational" and "experiential" activities. As a former associate member of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists and affiliate member of the International Society for the Study of Dissociation, I had studied a broad range of literature, reports and research and felt that I understood what types of activities might fall under the category of therapeutic activities. Even with my educational and research background, I could not have anticipated what my daughter was put through or I was about to enter into, as you will see by reading my experience as described later in this document.

Teen Help literature further explained that:

"While a child is in Tranquility Bay, parents are invited to participate in a three day Parent Seminar. The parent seminar is similar to the seminars attended by the Teens. As each student returns home, their families are then invited to a three-day Parent/Child Seminar. This seminar creates working relationships within the family structure and sets the tone for a smooth transition."
"

These seemed to me to be worthy goals. I was looking forward to open discussions, opportunities to talk freely with other parents, and an environment that promoted freedom of thought and association with others. I looked forward to these future seminars and was motivated to complete the Discovery Seminar in order to qualify. We had been told that Parent/Child Seminars are not open to the family unless the parents have completed the Parent Discovery.

The cover letter to the Tranquility Bay parent manual had stated: "I cannot overemphasize how vital it is for parents to complete these trainings. Everything seems to get a lot easier once you have completed the Parent Discovery training. For then, you will have a clearer understanding of how changes will come to occur in your child. For these are the same trainings your child will experience in the Program. They will assist you in moving forward, both personally, and as a family, and provide the needed support and understanding of your child's program."

Both my husband and I were extremely interested in what our daughter was learning and experiencing. Tranquility Bay had controlled and limited the communication between our child and us. There was a lot we did not know. We hoped that this seminar would give us greater insight into what our daughter was being taught. We imagined we might see slides of her activities at the facility, have her curriculum outlined and receive other information about what she was doing. We expected that we would be the one's asking the questions and that there would be people there to answer them.

As a parent who had recommended three other families to Teen Help in previous months, I had been given no reason not to trust the Teen Help Family of Services and Tranquility Bay. The day before, on January 8, 1998, the Contra Costa Times had published an article in which I was quoted as a parent defending locked facilities. The writer Gayle Melvin quoted me on my experience with my daughter in Tranquility Bay. (See <http://hotcoco.com/newslib/index.htm> and search under Contra Costa Times, Parents Defend Locked Facility as Aid to Kids.)

I did not expect anything remotely like the experience I was about to undergo. I entered the seminar with an open mind, eager to learn and share; excited to find out more about my daughter's program. My daughter had written to me expressing her feelings of joy and significance after completion of her Discovery Seminar. I expected my experience to worthy of the same sentiments.

I didn't know that the nature of the seminar process was so foreign to ordinary human experience, I couldn't possibly have understood the true nature of what I was about to undergo from anything I had read or heard before hand.

MY EXPERIENCE OF DISCOVERY SEMINAR - JAN 9-10, 1998, LIVERMORE, CALIFORNIA

THE BEGINNING:

When I checked into the Holiday Inn, it was late Thursday night. My husband brought up our luggage and collapsed on the bed, being exhausted from a week of long work hours. I was full of energy and anxious to check out my new environment. I took a walk around the hotel and located the conference room where we would begin our Seminar the following morning.

When I looked inside, I saw about 20 people busily engaged in setting up chairs and assembling packets of materials. Someone was assembling a sound system and plugging in the cords to a mixing board. Posters with slogans like "That Which is Not Acted Upon is Not Learned" and "Based on the Results you have Exactly what you Intended" were on the walls. There was a feeling of underlying excitement in the activity of the staff members as they busied themselves at the various tasks. One man gave me a look, as I was standing there in the doorway, that gave me the impression that I was interrupting something very private and was not welcome to come in. So I passed on down the hallway and returned to my room.

The next morning, we got up bright and early, ate breakfast and were standing in the hallway at 9 AM; as instructed by the letter we had received beforehand. The letter had outlined some rather unusual ground rules (see posting on February 26, 1998 4:27 PM EST at <http://www.bridgetounderstanding.com/cgi-bin/bbs.pl?read=190>) which I really did not understand

completely. But I knew we had been told to arrive on time and stay for the duration of the seminar.

The seminar however was not ready to begin. The doors were locked and the windows in the doors were covered with paper, so we couldn't see in. I had rushed my breakfast a bit to be on time, and was a little surprised that the staff were not on time. But, I didn't take much notice of it and began to look around. The hallway was very crowded with parents. Most of them looked to be in their 30's to 50's and fairly affluent, judging by their clothes. There were a few teenagers and a few grandparents as well. One parent came up to our husband and I, (I will call her Rebecca to preserve her confidentiality) and began talking to us in an animated manner. We were glad to meet her and in the 20-30 minutes we stood in the hallway waiting for things to begin, we discovered that our children were both at Tranquility Bay in Jamaica and had been there for almost the same length of time. Other parents had children from Paradise Cove in Samoa, Spring Creek in Montana and Cross Creek in Utah, all Teen Help programs. This was the first time we had heard that all these facilities were using the TASKS seminars.

I saw parents picking up nametags from a table with their names on them and went to look for my name. It was there, and I pinned it to my shirt. When we entered the room, I observed that there were about 90 parents assembled there. The padded stacking chairs were arranged in two sections, facing the front with military straightness, with a long isle exactly down the middle about 5 feet wide. There was masking tape on the floor marking the exact position of each row. My husband and I sat next to each other on the left-hand side. Then I looked at the letter I was carrying which stated that we were not supposed to sit next to anyone whom we had previously known before the seminar. I figured that included my husband, so I found a seat a few rows back, next to two strangers. These people, on my right was obviously married and sitting next to each other. I was trying to keep the rules and so asked a staff person to clarify things for me. He stated that it didn't matter if I sat next to my husband at this point in the seminar, so I went back and sat on the isle seat next to Kendall.

At this point and time, I had some time to observe, before the seminar began. I noticed that all of the participants (the parents, grandparents and teens) were dressed in casual clothes. We were instructed in the literature to dress comfortably and casually. I noticed that there were approximately 15 staff standing around the sides of the room. They were dressed in more business-like clothes. I assumed that they were in positions of authority in the seminar.

When everyone was seated and the doors to the outside hallway were closed, a 6'4" muscular man in a suit strode purposefully towards the front of the room. His presence commanded our attention because he presented himself before us as though he were the one in authority. He asked us to put all of our personal belongings at the side of the room and not to record or take notes on the seminar processes we were about to experience. There was a flurry of movement as everyone obeyed and took purses and other belongings and put them by the side of the room and then took their seats.

The speaker then welcomed us to the "pilot" seminar for the Livermore area and introduced himself as the facilitator of the Seminar. He stated that these seminars were initially taken from a corporate training program and that Resource Realizations came together with the Teen Help folks to make up a new brand of seminar especially for the teens. He said that the Teen Seminars had been so popular and successful, and there had been so many requests for a parent's version, the seminar we were about to undertake was created for the parents.

He told us that we needed to participate in this seminar for ourselves, not our children. This sounded something like the 12-step philosophy, and didn't seem too unusual a request. I assumed that soon he would begin to tell us more about our daughter's program as well. He gave an inspirational speech of about an hour and a half in length on the subject of why we were all here together that day. He drew upon his own experiences and assumptions about the

experiences that parents must have been through before placing their child in the program. He told us that he personally knew all of our children, because he was the facilitator who conducted their training. He joked about how ridiculous these "little white punk kids" looked when they said, "I'm a gangster." He mocked their posture giving the audience his profile and then thrusting his shoulders back and head to the side. He said how funny he thought it was to see these little rich kids pretending like they were gangsters. The audience laughed. Then he said, "I look at these kids and say, 'You don't know nothing about what being a gangster is.'" He then told us that he was the authority on gangsters because he was raised in East LA and he belonged to two gangs where people were shot if they were in the way of the gang. He hunched his shoulders forward and showed us a truly aggressive stance, which I later came to call his "gangster" stance. He said that one day, as a teenager, his father gave him an aggressive wake-up call, saying, "I would rather kill you myself than see you doing this stuff." He said that this had really turned him around and that later he had gone to college and then become the speaker that today we saw before us.

I understood his logical point was that we should hope that our children could grow up to be one day like him. I however, wasn't prepared to conclude that he was a role model for my child. Being from a more conservative background, his style identified him as a different culture than mine and I felt I needed to translate his behavior and words into my own understanding. I was really expecting him to tell us what his credentials were and why he was qualified to be the facilitator of this seminar. In my culture, these types of personal stories are best not talked about publicly. However, I put a filter on so that I could try to understand what he was saying from his set of assumptions. Obviously he felt that this qualified him to be working with the teens. I decided to suspend judgement and go with the flow, keeping an open mind.

I looked around me and saw that others in the room were really involved in what he was saying. They seemed to respond to his statements as credible and to support his authority. I found myself drawn in by his entertaining personality and command of the emotions of the audience, getting us to laugh at the appropriate moment and moving to dramatic and persuasive climaxes with the ease of a revivalist preacher. In fact, his speaking manner reminded me very much of some of the more energetic preachers I had seen in the movies. He walked up and down the aisle, making eye contact with various audiences members. He gestured boldly to emphasize his points. He had the timing, the powerful voice, and the emotion, the rhythm and dynamic control of a dramatic actor. My husband turned to me and whispered, "He's quite good" referring to his style. I found myself enjoying his speech and thought him quite talented. In fact, his personal presence was so overpowering, I found myself focusing more on his delivery than on the content.

The content however required my attention, so I began to focus more on the words than their delivery. As I stated earlier, I had some expectations about this Seminar and was here to obtain more information about my daughter's program. I listened with interest as the facilitator (whom I will call Don hereafter) explained the TASKS Seminars and outlined the various stages that the teens pass through.

THE FACILITATOR'S UNEXPECTED BEHAVIOR:

At one point, he used a large white writing pad placed on an easel in the front of the room, to write comments and illustrate points. After informing us that the object of the seminar was to find our Magical Inner Child, he drew a small circle and surrounded it with three other circles. The inner circle represented the Magical Child, the next circle layer represented "Fixed Beliefs", the next layer represented "Fixed Emotions" and the outer layer represented "Fixed Behavior - Image" He used words like "protection" and "ego" as well. He stated that the purpose of the Discovery Seminar was to penetrate all these outer circles to reach the Magical Child, which was hidden in all of us. I was rather perplexed about the relevance of this to me. I had done an extensive amount of individual and group therapy, read numerous self-help books and done lots of inner growth work. He seemed to be assuming that I did not have this knowledge. Considering that Teen Help had never asked for my personal background and growth experience before

asking me to attend this seminar, I realized Don couldn't possibly know very much about me and what work I had already done. I was sure I could find something of value in what he was saying and so continued to pay attention.

He then began to talk about concepts of right and wrong. To illustrate his point, he singled me out, walking halfway across the room, to the outer isle seat where I was sitting. He stood so close to me, I was very uncomfortable. I had feelings of intimidation. I didn't want to act on those feelings, so I stood up and faced him squarely and said, "You are in my space." I had put my hand on my hip, when I said that. Instead of stepping out of my space, he put his hand on his hip and mocked me with his expression and gesture and leaned closer to me. He did not step back. I am about 5'4" tall and he was about 6'5" tall and broad across the chest. I had a tremendous urge to take my hand and gently push him away from me until he was at an appropriate distance, but I decided to wait and see why he was doing this. I was fully aware that my husband would stand up in my defense if I gave him an indication I wanted help.

I said, "You are also much bigger than I am". I had a full sense of the power of Don's personality and also of his physical strength when he was standing this close to me. Suddenly, he changed from a mocking behavior to the aggressive stance he had described earlier as gangster posture. He pointed his finger at my face, about ½" inch away from right between my eyes. He said forcefully, "I could rob you." He paused, looking me straight in the eyes with menace; "I could take away your woman hood." He paused for a response and when I gave none, he said, "I could kill you."

I looked back at him and felt the full force of his words. I knew that this facilitator knew nothing about my history. Others had confronted me before with this full intent. I looked him in the eyes and knew he was indeed capable of doing these things. I stood my ground, but I was shaken to the core. He had changed his behavior so quickly, I had had no warning and I was frozen in a state of shock. There were 90 other people in the room watching and no one said a word. He shook his finger at me and leaned closer, raising his voice to say, "and could I say I was right?" I was convinced that he could indeed believe that he was right in doing these things. I never wavered in my eye contact, feeling that this was indeed a dangerous man that I could not afford to show fear to. I answered softly, but with firmness, "Yes, you could". He stared at me for a few more minutes in silence. I stared back.

Then he broke the tension by laughing. He dropped his aggressive stance and leaned closer, saying, "You are welcome in my space anytime," in a slightly suggestive manner. I was shocked at his uninvited familiarity and said nothing, neither did I laugh or move back. Actually, there was nowhere for me to move back to without stepping on my husband who was still sitting in the next seat.

Don turned around and walked over to the front of the room again. He continued speaking, as if there was nothing abnormal about his behavior. He went on to prove a point that even murderers can kill people and say they are right, believing it entirely. He said, "even a serial killer has a support group." I thought of Hitler and his support group and realized that Don had a valid point. Don then made the bold and unexpected conclusion that this proved that there was no right or wrong. From there he went on to tell us how words could be powerful shapers of reality and that we would be better to use the words "working" and "not working".

He went on to talk of other concepts. One thing he said hit me hard. He was making a point that everyone in the room had a problem or they wouldn't be at the Seminar. To prove his point, he said that he had heard our children's confessions and had information that we did not have. He said that our children had told us about how we had wronged them. He stated that he had even felt their nails clawing on his arms as he had to wrestle them to the floor." I don't remember why he said he had to wrestle them to the floor, because his statement was so shocking, it provoked a host of questions. I thought, "What is this man doing touching my child? Why is he doing

seminars for all the programs? Why should he have more information about my child than I do? What kind of relationship does he have with my child?"

I was too much in a state of shock, from what was happening, to carefully process my questions and listen to his words at the same time. And he was talking so fast; there was no time to think about things. In order to cope with my emotions and still focus on what had just happened, I found myself start to experience the seminar on two different levels simultaneously: an emotional level and a mental level. On an emotional level, I was truly frightened that this man had been so disrespectful of my space and person to do and say what he had just done and said. I was also beginning to worry about my daughter and what it had meant earlier when he had said that the Parent Seminar was a "watered down version" of that experienced by the teens. I was a bit worried about what more he would feel inclined to do with my daughter, if he had been so bold with me. On a mental level, I was trying to set aside what had just happened and follow the logic of what he was saying. This was an effort, because my emotions were quite strong. But, I have developed a powerful ability to appear calm and rational in the midst of a crisis. I used this talent to follow the content of his words.

He next began to solicit involvement from the audience. He was moving very fast and there was little time to process what was happening. He told people that he wanted them to give him words that represented the "image" that people had about themselves. As people raised their hands, he would point to them and then turn around and write what they said on the board quickly and forcefully. He supplied the first few words to get people started. He wrote words like "tough, angry, perfect, pitiful, clown, comedian, gang, shy, attitude, conceited, know it all, victim, cheap, macho, judge, nerd, nothing's wrong," on the paper. Then he moved quickly on to the next page and solicited words to describe the Magical Child: "precious, joyful, open, curious, innocent, playful, powerful, happy, soft, loving, friendly, moment, natural, cute, spontaneous, smart, trusting, unique, wise, and understanding."

As I was thinking about what he was saying, I started to realize that his questions were not at all open ended. When he had opened the pad of paper and said, "All right now it's your turn to talk. I promise I won't always be the one up here talking all the time," I had expected him to be conducting an open discussion, inviting questions from the parents and then shaping a discussion tailored to what they felt was important. Instead, he seemed to have already decided what he wanted to hear, and was leading the audience in a set of rhetorical questions designed to produce the answers that would support his thesis.

At this point, he stopped and said, "The purpose of Education is to unsettle the mind." And explained that he had had a university professor that had taught him what education was really all about and that this had formed the basis for his assumption. He stated with pride that he was going to do for us in this seminar what his professor had done for him. I wondered who this professor was, and why I should consider him an authority in my life. If unpredictable behavior, mixed messages and flaws in the logic provoked unsettling the mind, then he was doing a good job.

It is my belief that the purpose of education is to expand the mind, giving it freedom, room to grow and lots of opportunity to analyze and weigh differing viewpoints. My educational experience had emphasized freedom of thought and supported diversity. I wasn't willing to accept his assumption that unsettling the mind was the objective. But, coming from an education in which I had encountered many viewpoints, I was willing to try out his hypothesis during the course of the seminar. It was my intention to learn what I could from this experience and to take what I could from his comments, even if I didn't agree with the way that he was approaching things.

Continued in Part 2

Continued from Part 1

STAFF TESTIMONIALS

After the lecture had been going on for about 2 hours, Don asked the staff to come up to the front of the room. Approximately 15 staff members came up at his request. He told us that after we had completed the Discovery Seminar and Focus Seminars it would be our privilege to serve the organization by staffing these seminars. He said that all of these staff members were Discovery graduates and that he was really proud of their achievements in graduating the previous seminars and being here to help us today. He told us that our children were also given the opportunity to staff the seminars in their program, when they had graduated and that this was a real privilege, teaching them leadership and giving them valuable experience. Then each staff person introduced himself or herself by name and gave their testimonial about how bad it had been for them before the Seminars and how wonderful it was for them now that they had graduated. Most of the staff was made up of parents with children currently in the program.

There were two staff members who were teenagers, recently returned from the programs.

There were a few parents whose children had already graduated from the program. I listened to their stories with sympathy. I also realized that these staff members were still in the midst of their emotional crises and were not the trained professionals that I had expected to be filling these roles. I looked around to see if there was anyone else in authority besides Don. I didn't see anyone except a woman in the back that was not yet introduced. Later, she was introduced as someone with 30 years experience as a facilitator in similar types of corporate seminars, whom Don was training in the TASKS format.

This made me feel somewhat uncomfortable. I did not accept Don as an authority in the field of education and he obviously wasn't an authority in the field of mental health. I was wondering who was qualified to conduct the educational and therapeutic activities that we had been told would be part of this seminar. I really didn't have much time to ponder these things before we were moving on quickly to the next part. As you can see, just by the fact that it has taken me 1 to 2 paragraphs to describe my reaction to incidents that took place in a matter of seconds, the whole proceedings were provoking a lot of thought. In fact, the pace at which things proceeded; the amount of information presented without time for absorption; and the conflict between my expectations and what was happening, all caused me to start to feel overwhelmed. In addition, I was finding my emotions more and more unsettled, because I hadn't had time to sort out all of what had happened and why no one had objected.

It seemed like everyone was behaving as though this was perfectly normal behavior; and that this facilitator was qualified to be our leader for the next three days. There were 90 people in the room going along with things. I found myself doubting my own reality and giving into the reality of the group. The reality of the staff seemed to be that this Seminar was the best thing next to the resurrection, and that I was really privileged to be a part of it. The reality of the my parent peers up to now, seemed to be that what was happening was okay with them and there was no cause for concern.

On one level I realized that several of my assumptions before attending the seminar were frustrated. I had assumed that no therapeutic activities conducted during the course of the seminar would be conducted by anyone who was not appropriately licensed in the State of California and governed by the professional ethics set forth by my state. I now realized that there was no one in the room who seemed to have those qualifications. I expected that any educational activities I would be asked to engage in would be relevant and appropriate. I did not understand how Don's personal threat to me was appropriate or relevant. I expected all activities to encourage analytical thinking, diverse viewpoints and freedom of thought. It was obvious to me that the only viewpoint being discussed here was that of Don. His process of working with us did

not seem to encourage analytical thinking and there was no time to think clearly, we were being bombarded with so much information at once.

I was unsettled by the contrast between what I was feeling and thinking and what everyone else appeared to be accepting. But, then I looked at the poster on the wall again with the slogan, "The purpose of the education is to unsettle the mind". Well it was working. And if I were going to get the most out of this program and adopt the "party line", I would have to admit that my mind was unsettled and see where that took me.

REQUEST FOR A SILENT VOW

Now that Don perceived that he had the support of the group, he said it was time for us to make a commitment to continue with the seminar. He quickly rattled off the ground rules of the seminar (see posting on February 26, 1998 4:27 PM EST <http://www.bridgetounderstanding.com/cgi-bin/bbs.pl?read=190>). He then asked everyone to stand and take a silent vow that they would keep these ground rules. The rules, as he stated them, didn't seem that alarming at the time. I did wonder at three of them. I wondered why we were not supposed to disclose the processes of the seminar and what that meant. I wondered why I would need to promise not to engage in any new sexual relationships with anyone in the group. I thought, "What about the Seminar would provoke me to do that?"

I also wondered why I was supposed to promise not to make any major changes in my personal life in the next 30 days. I didn't understand why Don would be interested in my personal life or would even want to know what I was doing with my choices. I didn't see how this was relevant to anything except that maybe he was asking me not to take my child out of the program if I didn't like the seminar. I also realized that the next seminar we were supposed to attend was in 30 days and wondered if that had anything to do with it. But, these questions just flitted through my mind briefly and without emotional impact. My attention was riveted by what was happening in the room.

I was standing along with everyone else in the room. There was only one woman sitting. Everyone was looking at her and there was a great amount of energy directed at her. I felt as though I were standing in the middle of a mild mannered, but focused mob of people. I usually don't attend sports or other activities where people are sharing intense emotions at the same time unless I am sitting near a place I can easily leave if things get "too hot". Its not that I can't take it, it's just that I am so much of an individual, I like my space. I don't like to be carried away with the crowd in a moment of frenzy. I have seen groups of people do some crazy things, including erupting into violence. Usually my choice of preference is to attend a classical concert, where everyone is quiet and respectful and emotions are shared in an understated and refined manner. "Of course", I reminded myself, "This is not a mob. These are just parents like me and we have just been asked to stand and take a harmless vow to show our commitment to Don's rules. You keep rules every day."

Anyway, we were all looking at this woman who was sitting down. Don walked up to her and asked her if she had a problem with the ground rules. I noticed that he was standing too close and that she was visibly intimidated. Her voice was shaking and she was on the verge of tears. She said something about having been through a lot of trauma and that she didn't want to have to be separated from her husband, whom she found a great support. I could see she was in distress. Don explained why this vow was necessary for her. But, I didn't notice his words as much as his attitude. He was confronting her about her choice in a rather aggressive manner, the same manner he had confronted me earlier, with his gangster stance. I felt very uncomfortable to be witnessing this. The message came across very clearly that if I decided to object, I would be treated the same way. I had recently had an encounter with Don that I was still in shock over. I didn't feel prepared to be confronted again.

Someone asked, "What are you going to ask us to do?" and Don responded, "I promise not to ask you to do anything unreasonable."

While we were all silently standing together, I decided to take the logical approach and consider this a contract. Looking back, I might describe my thoughts succinctly as, "As long as they don't ask me to do anything I consider unreasonable, I won't talk about the process or content of the seminar." At the time, however, my thoughts were a bit jumbled and I couldn't have clearly expressed them.

After having two months to think about my experience in retrospect, I realize that I had some definite expectations at the time of that vow. They were so basic, I didn't think about them in words. For example, I expected to be treated with civility and respect. I expected that I would not be put in a situation where I felt I was under pressure to adopt any belief, viewpoint or action that I would not normally adopt outside the environment of the seminar. Yet here I was, taking a vow that I felt pressured into it, after having allowed someone to treat me disrespectfully without my protest. I was surprised at myself. I realized that I was giving into peer pressure. I hadn't known everyone else's actions would affect me so deeply. I decided to put these issues aside and see if perhaps there were some educational reason that Don had put us into this situation.

I had been involved in experiential activities in the past where I had been lied to or put in uncomfortable situations and then within the hour, had been told the truth and given an opportunity question my experience and sort it out in terms of what I had learned. I thought perhaps these situations I had been confronted with in the Seminar would all make sense at some future point. I hoped that I would soon see the relevance and appropriateness of Don's actions and that these insights would help to compensate for my mounting concerns. I realized that the seminar had already departed considerably from what I had expected, but decided to make the most of it, especially if it would help me understand what my daughter was being taught and what processes she had gone through already.

It never occurred to me that my daughter had been asked to take this same vow of secrecy and what the implications of that were. We had been given no information, at any point in time, that would lead us to believe that our daughter was restricted from talking freely with us about the processes she was undergoing in the program during the 10 months she had already been there.

I WAS BEHAVING IN AN UNUSUAL MANNER

At this point, I think it is important to break frame from the chronological account that I have been giving of the Seminar. I was behaving in a manner that was unusual for me by this time in the seminar. I didn't notice it until several weeks after. Let me explain. First, I need to give you a bit more background on a subject that may seem unrelated. But bear with me, it is very pertinent.

In my piano business, I have been working with consumers who are making major purchases for over 16 years. I had begun to notice a trend among my piano customers. Often times, they decided to buy or sell a piano at a point in their life where some dramatic change was happening. Often time's people would be selling their piano after the death of a loved one, because they were moving or getting a divorce. People might be buying a piano a the time of a marriage, a move, a remodeling of their house or a significant re-evaluation of their life that caused them to be looking for something more. When they were in these circumstances, I began to realize that people were vulnerable to sales pressure and might make decisions that they hadn't thought out and would later regret. Our competitors in the piano business engaged in some pretty heavy duty "high pressure" sales tactics. We did not believe in this type of approach.

Our approach might be better described by Jim Cathcart's book "Relationship Selling." Long before reading that book, we had decided that our purpose was to educate customers about the

consequences of their choices rather than persuade them to do something. We assumed that the customer was the one most qualified to decide what met their needs, not us. It was only our job to give them accurate information and full disclosure, not to put pressure on them. When we sensed that a customer was acting on an emotion of urgency and a fear of losing a good opportunity, we encouraged them to sleep on their decision and take their time to think it through and be sure that it was the right choice. Although we were taking a risk that they would later decide not to buy the piano they had been looking at, or to sell their piano, we found that this built trust with our customers. They might decide to wait to buy or sell something. Sometimes they would even buy a competitor's product because it was better suited for their needs. In the short term, we sometimes lost revenue. But over the years, we had developed a reputation for honesty and fairness that increased our business. If someone bought from us or from our competitor, they still referred their friends to us. Often they would tell people that it was much better to start out by working with Piano Finders first so "piano dealers won't eat you alive".

Eventually, we began to realize that it was not the products we sold, but the process we used that people were buying. We also realized that we were not selling products and services. People sent us pictures of their children and their piano after they bought it and kept in touch with us over the years. People preferred to develop trust and long-term relationships with us. The piano or service they were buying just happened to be the subject matter of our conversations.

Realizing that it was the process that was important, not the product we were selling actually caused us to restructure every aspect of our business. We ended up closing down an 8,500 square foot facility, selling off our rebuilding shop. We sized down our overhead to a couple of small offices in downtown Walnut Creek and started to share our knowledge with our clients and former competitors, acting in the capacity of consultants.

Our competitors were pouring money into "blowout" piano sales and discounting their prices. Every time a competitor had a piano sale, we would get calls from people two or three days later that regretted their decisions. If the dealer was willing to let the customer back out of the deal, they usually did not have problems with the customer. Some dealers however were pretty aggressive and would even threaten to sue a customer if they didn't take the piano. I heard of many lawsuits being initiated by customers because of aggressive sales tactics that had been employed by a few of the dealers. People would call our hotline in extreme distress and anger when they felt they had been taken advantage of and coerced into making a premature decision, even if it was a piano they might have bought after more thought. This further served to convince me that it was unwise to put pressure on people to buy something.

My own experience in the piano business has changed the way that I shop and buy products and services. When buying from others, both my husband and I are as interested in the process, as the product. I have begun to examine every relationship I have with retail organizations. If I find myself being pressured into buying something, I choose not to do business with that retailer, even if they have a product that suits my needs. If I feel that a store's displays and music bombard my senses and make me want to buy more than I had planned, I stop shopping there. If a bank or a company I have a long-term relationship has employees who do not treat me with respect, I take it to the manager and ask them to make changes to their policy or correct the problem. When employees or business earn my trust and respect, I will pay more for their products and even write letters of encouragement to the president of the company.

I have not been watching television for several years, because I got tired of the commercials and their effect on me. I don't read a lot of magazines and usually avoid the ads in the newspapers. I throw out the junk mail in my mailbox without even looking at it. To me it is irrelevant. I am not interested in low prices; I am interested in knowing who I am doing business with and what their character is. If they are trustworthy and honest, they will sell me things of quality at fair prices. Having produced a few television shows and studied sales and promotion tactics, I am more aware than most consumers of the devices used to manipulate people into buying a product or

service. I feel that there is no need to manipulate people into buying a product or service. If they have something I need and I trust them, I will buy from them not only once, but many times.

So, looking back on the fact that I took this secrecy vow during this stage of the seminar, I can now see that I was behaving in an unusual manner. Under normal conditions, I would have either objected much earlier in the process or walked out.

WHY I DIDN'T WALK OUT

Somehow the situation had overcome my usual objections to this type of process. I was in a vulnerable position emotionally because of the long-term crises that we had experienced with our daughter. In the past several hours, I had felt myself carried along by a powerful and charismatic speaker; I was experiencing an overload from the amount of information given and speed of delivery. I didn't have time to emotionally and rationally process what was happening. The confrontation by Don had put me into a state of emotional shock and made me feel personally threatened and afraid.

My defenses were down because I was already trusting of Teen Help and expected something different. I felt an urgency to stay and participate in the seminar, because I had been persuaded to believe that my daughter's life depended upon it. I had been told if I didn't attend, our family could not participate in the Parent/Child Seminars that were vital to our daughter's reintegration into our family. I wanted my daughter to come home and I wanted help with the reintegration processes from the program that best understood what she had been through. That was one of the main reasons I was at the Seminar.

Besides, I had already made a significant investment of money, time and energy in this program and my reputation was on the line. If I objected and walked out now, I would have to explain to the newspaper reporter who had interviewed me a few days before why I had done it.

I had referred three people to Teen Help and wanted to believe I had done the right thing. No one likes to feel they have made a mistake and endorsed a company they will later wish they hadn't. I had trusted Teen Help and the results I was seeing with my daughter's progress in the program. I would not have referred families to this program if I had had any doubts.

Besides, I owed R & D Billing, the billing company for Tranquility Bay and Teen Help, a sizeable amount of money and I was paying them off for my daughters care with referrals to the Teen Help (see <http://www.bridgetounderstanding.com/cgi-bin/bbs.pl?read=176> and <http://www.bridgetounderstanding.com/cgi-bin/bbs.pl?read=181> for further information). I was in a financially vulnerable situation and felt an obligation to protect the program's best interests.

All of these reasons contributed to my decision to stay and take the Silent Vow. These were certainly not normal circumstances and I was not behaving in a manner consistent with my normal behavior. I did not, however think all of this through at the time. Rather, I was swept along in an experience that seemed to be accelerating in pace and unusualness. I also assumed that things would eventually explain themselves and that I was through the worst part of the seminar.

WE ARE HANDED A SEMINAR BIBLE

Before the first break, the staff started to handout a packet of information to all the participants. (We were no longer audience members, having all made a commitment to participate and follow the leader). I was thinking of Don as our leader at this point. He had done several things to augment his authority over the group and I felt that we had all accepted him as our leader when we stood together and vowed to stay and obey what he told us to do.

Several things now happened quickly. Don told us that we were to consider this packet of information our bible. He said that we were to keep it with us at all times, study it in our times between sessions and to never be caught without it. He informed us we would be confronted if we were found without it at anytime in the seminar from here on out. At a later point in the seminar, things began to take on a religious fervor. Participants started to clasp this book, with its new vocabulary and concepts to their chest and run back to get it if they left it on a table. I discovered that the content of the book for people became not as important as the fact that Don told us to obey him and that it contained the approved vocabulary. The way that Don used words was difficult to understand because they did not have the standard definitions. I started to realize later that a lot of my daughter's letters contained this same vocabulary. I realized later that someone who had not attended the seminar would not understand the "insiders" meanings for these words.

I was rather surprised at his use of the religious term bible, since this seminar had made no reference to religion up to this point. But I knew that it is common to refer to something as a bible in non-religious settings when it is something that is considered very important and is referred to too often. I was getting used to being surprised by the unexpected things Don would say and to have no time to reflect on their meaning. This made me feel a bit numb and lowered my resistance. Besides, I was hungry at this point. This opening session had extended past lunchtime and my stomach was demanding attention.

Continued in Part 3

Continued from Part 2

I BEGAN TO QUESTION THE REASONS FOR THE GAMES

Don flipped the pad of paper until he had turned to a diagram with nine dots arranged in rows of three to form a square. He said we were now going to play a game. He told us to draw three rows of three dots on an index card we had been handed. I was unclear as to his instructions. I wasn't sure if I was supposed to copy the example of how the dots were configured on the paper in front of us, or I was supposed to follow his words literally, which did not specify a particular configuration. I didn't really want to draw his attention to me at this point, and so did not ask a question to clarify the directions. Instead, I decided to take what he said literally and drew three dots on the page in three rows, but not as was shown on the paper pad in front of us. I thought that perhaps it was more important for me to listen to what he was saying rather than what I was seeing. He then told us that the object of the game was to connect all the dots without letting our pen leave the paper. We were instructed to raise our hands when we had correctly solved the problem and a staff person look at the solution, tell us if we were right and if we were we could go and stand at the side of the room. I remembered having heard of this game before, but couldn't remember what the solution was to the problem. My husband raised his hand and asked, "What if we already know how to do this?" Don answered, "Then keep the answer to yourself." He instructed us not to look at other people's cards, but only at our own.

We all began to solve the problem. It turned out that it was easy for me to connect my dots because of the way I had configured them, and so I quickly solved the problem. I raised my hand; a staff person came over and looked at it and solemnly shook his head "no". I realized that this staff person was one of the teens who had recently returned from the program.

Kendall then raised his hand and the same staff person came to look at his card. Since I was sitting between the staff person and Kendall, I couldn't help but see the solution Kendall had achieved when he tilted it forward for the staff person to see. He had configured all of the dots on the paper identical to those on the pad, and had solved the problem by connecting all the dots without lifting the pen from the paper. The staff person looked at Kendall's card and shook his head "no". I was confused. Why had he said no?

I looked around the room to see what other people were doing. Several staff people were shaking their head yes and at least 20 people were now standing by the side of the room. I decided not to try and solve this problem any more. I thought that perhaps the object of the game was something other than stated and decided to wait and see what happened next.

At this point, Don asked the people who remained sitting why they hadn't gotten the answer yet. He said several things that put pressure on us to finish the problem quickly. He told us that we could ask the staff people for help if we were having difficulty. Several people raised their hands and a staff person came forward with an index card and showed it to them. I wasn't trying to solve the problem anymore. I had decided that it was more important for me to understand what was happening than to win the game and stand at the side of the room. Besides, the chairs were more comfortable and I was content to sit.

I noticed that the cards the staff members showed the participants all said the same thing, "Go outside the nine dots". This instruction would later become a slogan and part of the Seminar jargon. But at the time, it was new to me. I bided my time. Several more people stood up and went to the side of the room, having been told they had the right answer. Kendall had put his card in his pocket and was just watching. After a period of time, Don stopped the proceeding and told people the game was over. He drew a solution on the paper for all to see and said that this was the right answer. I noticed that his solution was not the same as Kendall's or mine. Kendall had solved the problem differently with the same configuration of dots and I had configured the dots differently but still found a solution.

He asked people who were still sitting how they felt and what they had learned about themselves during the game. People started to raise their hands. One man said, "I felt stupid. I couldn't get it. I thought I was supposed to be able to get it and I couldn't do it." Another woman said, "I felt really pressured. I couldn't think clearly when I was so pressured."

I raised my hand and said, "I followed your rules as you explained them and solved the problem but was told my answer wasn't right. Did you intend for us to configure the dots in the same manner as up on that page?" He said, "Yes." Then he proceeded to make fun of the fact that I configured the dots differently. I said, "perhaps you should change the way you describe the rules." He laughed heartily and looked to the rest of the audience and said, "Oh, I'm going to have fun with this one." He then turned to the people who were standing and said, "How did this make you feel?" One said, "I felt relieved. It felt good to know I didn't have to keep sitting there." Another said, "I was happy I got it right. I felt better than everyone else who hadn't."

At this point, I raised my hand. Don acknowledged me and I said, "My husband solved the problem and his dots were configured exactly as you outlined on the paper. Why was he told his answer was wrong? Do all the people standing at the side of the room have the right answer or were the staff being arbitrary in their selection?" He seemed irritated by my question and said, "It doesn't matter. It only matters how you feel." Then he called on someone else.

At this point, I was a bit upset. I felt that somehow he had belittled my comments and questions. This was not at all what I expected from a game whose purpose was education. I was used to a teacher encouraging questions and validating people's contributions, not making fun of them and telling them their observations didn't matter. I was starting to become aware that Don was not going to support analytical thinking. He was placing the emphasis upon emotional response. Later he would call analytical thinking being "in your head" as though it was something very negative. He would shout out to the group as a whole and say, "you're dissociating," if no one raised their hands to answer his questions. I wondered if he knew what "dissociation" meant. I had never heard of a mental health professional concluding someone was dissociating without careful examination and observation over time. How could Don know that everyone in the group was dissociating? I wondered if Don was making a suggestion that we should dissociate.

When he talked, he moved back and forth across the front of the room with a regular rhythm. He seemed to ask rhetorical questions in a metronomic way, while everyone was concentrating on the game. People would be trying to solve the 9-dot puzzle and he would be saying things like, "What are you doing? How are you feeling right now? Are you following my instructions? Are you asking for help?" Over the course of the seminar, I would come to realize that he did not expect anyone to answer these questions out loud. In fact, he would often repeat himself and sometimes would say things that contradicted each other or didn't make sense. Later in the day, it became almost impossible to focus on what he was saying and concentrate on the tasks he had given us. Later, I would find myself losing track of the content of the questions and focusing instead on the rhythm and emotion of his voice. This had a hypnotic effect on me after a while. But, at this moment, I was very much "in my head," which seemed a safe place to be. I wanted to figure out what the purpose of the game was and why Don was behaving in this manner.

Next Don told us it was break time. He played a piece of music, the theme from 2001 A Space Odyssey, and said that each time we came back and heard this music, we were to be seated before it ended. We were also told that we should take our tags off each time we left the room and give them to a staff person. When we came back, we were to find them on the outside table, and put them on again. I later realized that this was the way in which they could tell who was missing after a break. People who showed up at the door were told they had to get their nametags on before they could come back in. Later I was to learn that people who had missed part of the seminar would not find their name tags on the table the next time, and thus were prevented from re-entering. There were also marks on some of the nametags, which I assumed represented a secret code to the staff about us.

We were now hustled out of the room and told that we were not to sit next to anyone we knew next time we came back in. The staff shut the doors behind us and I could hear intense activity inside, and moving of chairs. We were given a short hour to find a restaurant and eat. I had already discovered that the Holiday Inn was not adequately staffed in their only restaurant and decided to find someplace we could eat at with quick service.

A CHANGE OF CHAIRS

My husband and I left in the car, found a restaurant, ate and returned at the designated time. When we entered the room, we separated and sat in different places. All of the chairs were placed with their backs to the sides of the room this time. This was a rather large conference room, and the open space was big. It was disconcerting not to be sitting next to someone I knew and have the room changed as well. I soon discovered that each time we left, we would come back to something different. The period of time without breaks was long. We never knew when our meals were going to be and we were not supposed to even go to the bathroom without permission. After a while, I found myself regressing in my age behavior and noticed that other people were doing the same. We were becoming a group of children following Don, who didn't want to stand out and be noticed for doing anything different than he approved. Through nonverbal communication of the staff and situations that occurred during the course of the day, it became obvious that the definition of the word "working" was what Don thought was right and the definition of the word "not working" was what Don thought was wrong. There was continual emphasis on the fact that there was no "right" or "wrong". But, in practice, it was apparent that there were certain types of behavior that would be supported by the group and Don and other types of behavior that would be confronted Don with the support of the group. I was not consciously aware that my behavior was being modified by peer pressure, but it was.

There were three games before the next break. The way that the games were conducted by Don, made me suspect that the purpose of the game was not what appeared on the surface. I didn't understand what these unrevealed purposes were and would keep observing things that others seemed not to notice, in an effort to understand. I decided we were supposed to figure it out. So, instead of taking you through the entire explanation of the games and all things people did while

participating, I will give you my conclusions about what the purpose of the games seemed to be, what I chose to do and how it affected me.

In the first game, we were all told that a staff person would be placing a name on our backs that we could not see. We were supposed to enter the center of the room and ask the people around us questions that could only have "yes" or "no" answers until we could guess what our new name was from what information we could gather talking to others. The names were of famous people or animals. Everyone entered the center of the room and began the game. While we were engaged in asking each other questions, the staff was circling the room, with pen and paper in hand, writing down notes about our behavior. Don was also walking around us, almost like a sheep dog herds sheep, asking his questions in that rhythmic pattern that had become familiar to us by now. I had almost ceased paying attention to the content of his questions on a conscious level. At one point Don stopped everyone in the room and said, "What are you doing?" in an accusatory manner. He admonished us to not just stand in one part of the room, but to move around and find people in different parts of the room that we didn't know. This got people moving around the room, like bees in a hive. Everyone was busy trying to guess the name on his or her back.

I had decided that the objective he laid out for us, to guess the name on our back, wasn't as important to me as the way I went about doing it. I tried to interact with people in a civil and respectful manner and to help them first by answering their questions, before asking mine. As it turned out, when he called a halt to the game, I was one of the 15 or so people who had not guessed the name on their back.

This didn't really bother me, until he brought us all into the center of the circle. Everyone else who had gotten the right answer was standing on the outside and I was one of the few standing on the inside of the circle. He came up to each one of us and confronted us asking us what was wrong with us that we hadn't guessed the name on our back. When he came to me, he mocked and made fun of me. I found that my mind was starting to shut down. He demanded that I guess what the name on my back was and I couldn't think at all. My emotions were in a state of turmoil and I felt very frightened and intimidated. I felt like a little child who had done something wrong and was being confronted by an angry parent. I couldn't respond, I was frozen into silence. I started to doubt myself.

I wondered if the purpose of the game was to make us doubt our knowledge about ourselves and look to others as the source of our self-image. I also wondered why Don was using tactics that were clearly intimidating and humiliating. I did not feel that there was any logical reason to do this. He eventually moved on to someone else and then called out the rules for the next game.

Continued in Part 4

Continued from Part 3

ALL ABOUT TRUST

The next game was the trust game. My husband has described this in his post at <http://www.bridgetounderstanding.com/cgi-bin/bbs.pl?read=216> and <http://www.bridgetounderstanding.com/cgi-bin/bbs.pl?read=217>, so I will not go into details about the game, I will just tell you my perspective. As I was moving around the room, I felt somewhat battered emotionally. My analytical thinking process had shut down at this point. I found myself going around the room, looking people in the eye and telling them "I trust you", "I don't trust you," "I don't know if I trust you," and "I don't care to say" depending upon what message I was receiving from the person looking at me. I let them take the lead and found myself considering whether I trusted them or not based upon my emotional response, not my reasoning. I ended

telling most of the people that I trusted them. This became a calming and affirming experience for me. I began to feel more comfortable and comforted when I did what everyone else was doing. At every stage of every game, Don was always shouting out questions and giving instructions. There was almost no time during the seminar in which I found myself uninfluenced by his voice and approval or disapproval.

He interrupted the trust game to give us a new condition. He said that we were now to imagine ourselves in a situation where someone we loved dearly was in danger and we were too far away to help them ourselves. We were told to look at each person in the room and decide if we would trust that person to make sure our loved one got to the hospital. This question alone woke up my mind a bit. It wasn't hard for me to imagine this situation because that is exactly how I felt about my daughter. I had sent her to a foreign country to be cared for by people I did not know, a great act of trust.

As I moved around the room and looked at people, I started to realize that I didn't know whom I could trust with this task. I didn't have enough information about these people to make a good judgement. I felt compelled by my previous encounter with these people to give them the same answer as before, but while my brain was engaged I could not. I found myself only telling people that I trusted them, if I could tell by looking at them that they were aggressive enough to demand the attention of a doctor and get help for my child if they encountered resistance. A lot of people told me that they would trust me with this task. Later this would prove to haunt me as I thought about the teens I saw at Tranquility Bay. One of the reasons I have felt it necessary to tell you this long and personal story is because I am concerned for their welfare. It is not enough to bring out my daughter. I keep thinking about those girls and boys there in that remote facility, under oaths of secrecy not to talk about process they were going through, having their communications controlled and isolated from everything on the outside world.

As my mind started to take control again, I started to realize that I had been really trusting of the Teen Help Family of Services and Tranquility Bay. I began to question that trust and to realize that this seminar was not at all what I had expected. But, as I circulated around the room, I became involved in the experience again. Lulled by Don's voice in the background, I began to forget my concerns.

Then Don stopped the process again. This time he told us to think of our deepest and darkest secret, something we would be ashamed to tell even our dearest friend for fear they would reject and shun us. He told us that we were now to tell the person in front of us whether we trusted them or not with this secret. At this point, I felt rather uncomfortable. I didn't know how to understand his instructions. He hadn't given us enough information. Under what circumstances were we supposed to be telling people our secret? I might answer differently under different circumstances. I did not want to ask the staff for clarification, because it appeared to me that they had no authority in the room. (Their role seemed to be to make notes about behaviors that they did not approve of and then make rather negative comments to us about them. This did not build my feelings of trust for the staff. Especially since I felt that many of the comments were unfair and untrue about others in the room whom I had been observing as well.) I did not want to ask Don for clarification because of my previous experiences, so I found myself apologetically telling most people I didn't trust them.

Don stopped us suddenly; saying something to the effect that he wanted us to prove what we were saying was true by telling our secret to the next person we said we trusted.

MY HUSBAND OBJECTS TO THE GAME

This is the point at which Kendall spoke up and objected to the game. (refer to <http://www.bridgetounderstanding.com/cgi-bin/bbs.pl?read=216> and

<http://www.bridgetounderstanding.com/cgi-bin/bbs.pl?read=217> for his version of what happened).

I was standing about 10 feet away and looking at the situation. Once again, I found myself silent in a mob of people supporting Don in a confrontation of someone who was objecting to the situation. Only this time, it was a much more intense emotional environment. I was sensitive to the fact that people were in an emotional state. I was not thinking clearly and was also still in a state of shock. I couldn't say anything and watched mutely. This time, the person being confronted was my husband. I knew his body language and could see that he was very threatened. Don came up to him and adopted his gangster pose, interrogating him for his objections. I felt that Don was verbally attacking Kendall.

I could see that Kendall was in a very vulnerable place and wasn't able to respond to the attack quickly or with his usual vocabulary and control. Kendall looked very upset as he stood up to Don and voiced his objections. He spoke civilly, but his message was powerful. He was stating that he objected to the game on moral grounds and was explaining why. I knew that it took a lot for Kendall to feel provoked enough to say something like this.

I was convinced that Kendall was alarmed and felt strongly about what he was doing. I believed he was sincere and was proud of him for speaking up about it. But I did not have time to think about what he was saying. The nonverbal situation seemed too dangerous to me. I realized how intimidating this must be for Kendall to be surrounded by 90 people all staring at him with great intensity. I felt immobilized to do anything myself. I was afraid of being criticized for "helping" my husband; something that it had become clear was not a positive behavior. I wasn't in an emotionally strong enough state to feel I could withstand the attention being focused on me if I spoke up in Kendall's defense. My defenses were down and I was afraid for myself and for Kendall.

After what seemed like about 10 minutes, Kendall told Don that if Don proceeded with the game, he was going to leave. Don turned away from Kendall and ignored him. Kendall walked out. After a pause Don finished his explanation, and asked us to proceed with the person in front of me. The person in front of me said he trusted me and proceeded to tell me his secret. Don had given us no option to say we didn't want to hear the secret, and so I just listened. But, I was in a state of inner turmoil over what had happened. I couldn't clearly focus on what the parent was saying.

When it came time for me to share with him, I told him, "I'm sorry, but I can't think right now. The person who just left the room is my husband and I am in a state of shock." Several people came up to me and said they did not trust me. This added to my general emotional vulnerability. Then Don called the activity to a halt and had everyone sit down on the floor with a partner and gave us an exercise to perform with that person. Then in the middle of that exercise Don asked us to turn around and face him. He then asked people to stand, take a microphone and give testimony to their experience of the trust exercise. One man stood up and said that he had not told anyone his secret in honor of the man who had just left. Don was about to say something, and I stood up and took the microphone. I said, "the man who just left was my husband. I am really concerned about him. I came in the same car with him and I don't know whether he is okay. I am in a state of shock right now." One of the staff people spoke up and said that she had been outside talking with Kendall and that he was doing fine. She said he would be returning shortly. A little bit later, Kendall came back in the room. I was relieved that he seemed to be okay, but still found myself quite unsettled.

By this time, it was after midnight. Don gave us a homework assignment to do sometime before the following morning when we were to return at 9 AM. He told us not to discuss what had happened at the seminar with our spouses or anyone else that night. He made it clear we were to be spending our time outside of the seminar with the people he had assigned us to and only doing the activities he had instructed us to do.

I however, did not feel it appropriate not to talk to Kendall about what had happened to him. We met after we were dismissed and went up to our room. Kendall told me that he was feeling very upset about the seminar and did not even want to remain in the hotel room to spend the night. I knew that he had been working very long hours the week before and was really tired. I could understand his position in leaving, but personally was too battered myself by the experience to think clearly. I just didn't want to make any decision until I had had some sleep. I recommended that if he left, he write a letter to Don stating his reasons and I would deliver it in the morning. I told him I hadn't decided whether I wanted to continue with the seminar or not, I was too tired. He offered to leave me the car and find another way home, but I told him it was okay for him to take the car. I just asked him to keep his pager with him in case I needed to come home early. Then I attempted to go to sleep while he was writing his letters and packing up his stuff. I found I was just too upset to sleep at all that night.

ASKING HOW THIS WOULD HELP OUR FAMILY

By 7:30 AM I decided to get dressed in a comfortable business suit. I was feeling too vulnerable to dress casual. I went downstairs to find Don and talk to him before hand about my concerns and about Kendall's reason for departure. I had had some time to process what had happened the night before, and although I hadn't slept, I had a clearer perspective than I had five hours earlier. I asked a staff person if I could talk to Don. It was my hope that I could express my concerns in a less threatening environment and also not take up everyone else's time with my objections. I was striving to follow a process that was more acceptable to me and give Don an opportunity to hear my feedback in a situation where I would not be putting him on the defense in front of everyone else. She put me in touch with the head staff person, who told me Don was unavailable.

This parent, who seemed to have made the arrangements for the hotel, and whom I also knew to be the head of the local parent support group, said that he had some time to talk to me. He was very courteous and listened to my situation and questions. I told him that Kendall had left and would not be coming back to these Seminar Trainings. I said that I too was considering leaving. If I stayed, it would be because I wanted to understand what my daughter was being taught in Jamaica. He told me that I should not attend the seminar for my daughter, I should do it for myself. At this point, I had already concluded that this process was not the best thing for me and felt that I was in the best position to decide. But, I did not say this to the staff person. Instead, I told him that I was concerned about how the program handled situations where one family member did not complete the Seminars and others did. I asked if there was any provision in the program for these differences and how they helped the family reintegrate if not all attended the seminar. He told me that he was not in a position of authority to tell me what the program's policy was.

He shared his personal belief that it would benefit me to stay for the full seminar. He said that if I stayed for the third day, I would find it beneficial, no matter how hard it had been up to that point. I began to realize that he had given me all the information he had. He wasn't in a position of authority to make a change to the system, to get Don for me or to address my concerns. He was just another parent, like me, and he believed that these seminars were the best thing for everyone, no matter what their problem. It became clear that if I had any objections to the proceedings or any unanswered questions, the only person in a position to address things was Don. And the only opportunity I would have access to him, was in front of the group. I thanked the parent for his input and went to breakfast.

Several parents saw me eating alone and invited me to join them at their table. I declined, thanking them for their offer. I wanted some space to think this through. I sat down and wrote.

Before the Seminar, there was no mention in any literature that this seminar involved personal therapy for myself. I did not think that I would need to consider how it related to my own personal therapy or our family's therapy with Kaiser. I assumed that I would not be asked to participate in

any process that would be at counter-purpose to my current therapy. I also assumed that if any therapeutic activities in the seminar were to cause adverse psychological effects on me or others, there would be appropriate oversight, trained and licensed mental health professionals available with an adequate safety plan to protect me from harm. I saw no reason to expect that I, as a parent, would be involved in any behavior modification treatment during the course of this seminar. I had clearly understood the term "behavior modification" as used in Teen Help literature to apply to my daughter's treatment at Tranquility Bay, not my own treatment.

Now, however, I realized that this seminar's purpose was to reform the parents. It was not a normal group therapy session that abided by the code of ethics I was accustomed to with Kaiser and Walnut Creek Hospital. Neither my husband nor I had been screened by the program to see if the Seminar was appropriate and relevant to our own personal therapy. Teen Help and Don seemed to assume that we had a problem and whatever our situation was, this was the best way to fix it. Don had made it quite clear, on several occasions that we would not have a child in the program if there wasn't something wrong with us. He had emphasized our need to self-disclose our personal problems and confess our shameful secrets to the group as a whole. I did not feel that this was the type of environment in which it was safe to be vulnerable and engage in such intimacy with strangers. As a matter of choice, I reserved intimacy for those I had known a long time and had sufficient reason to develop a relationship of trust with. I also reserved my personal therapy for controlled sessions conducted by a licensed mental health professional of my choice.

I continued to think things through. I had heard no explanation by Don or others of a safety plan in the case of a psychological emergency. The only mental health professional on the premises that I knew of was someone I hadn't seen and who hadn't been introduced to us by Don. A parent had told me there was a M.F.C.W. with a child in the program that he had been quite devastated to realize that his parenting skills, with all his knowledge of therapy, hadn't worked for his child. The doors were locked to the Seminar room and it was not possible for me to enter and ask questions before things started.

I reflected on my role as a consumer. I was paying over \$2,000 per month in cash and barter for my child's treatment at Tranquility Bay, I had every reason to expect that I had made a wise purchase at the time I did it. I fully expected that all literature and information had been open and honest and accurately described what I was purchasing. In less than 24 hours, it was becoming clear to me that my expectations were being frustrated on every count. I now wanted to know if the people at Teen Help knew what was happening in these seminars. I also wanted to know more about what my daughter was experiencing and it seemed the only way that was going to happen is if I stayed for the seminar.

I considered my role as a parent. As legal guardians, we assumed that we had been fully informed about any procedures or processes that our daughter's behavior modification program in Jamaica involved. We assumed that there was nothing in this seminar that would cause us to question whether we had given our informed consent to the methods used on our daughter or us. What had happened in the past 24 hours started me questioning many things.

So, when I decided to stay for the seminar on the second day, it was because I felt I had no other way of finding out more about what my child was experiencing, not because this was the method I had chosen for my own personal growth. I told myself I would stay in the seminar unless it caused me undue psychological stress or I was asked to witness or participate in anything that went against my deepest personal values. I decided that if I was asked to participate in or witness anything that would abridge the civil rights, freedom of speech, religion, privacy or agency of anyone, I would make an objection or leave. I made a safety plan for myself, planning to leave under these above-mentioned conditions and page my husband and call my therapist if I was in distress. We only live an hour away from Livermore, so I knew Kendall could come and get me.

I went into the second day of the seminar with my boundaries firmly in place and no intention of letting anyone violate them. I also decided to make the most of the experience, guarding my own process of learning and trying to work within the rules of the Seminar.

I feel the need to abbreviate my account, because it has already become much longer than I intended. I find it hard to describe what happened in the seminar, because so much of it was visual, nonverbal and emotional. Also, these experiences had a cumulative effect. Often something wouldn't have bothered me if it were done without secrecy, misrepresentation and coercion. But, the games were combined with intense emotional encounters with 90 people, for 15 hours straight. We were overloaded with information over extended periods of time, and subjected to a controlled environment and restrictive rules that changed seemingly at Don's whim. Added to that were the unique pressures I felt as a parent who had recently undergone trauma in dealing with my daughter and the commitment I had already made to the program.

During the second day, I placed myself in an observer role. This gave me a little more perspective about what was happening. Also, the fact that my husband had left had affected me deeply.

The other participants started to behave like children afraid of offending an unpredictable parent. For example, when we were given too little time to eat in the meal break, instead of questioning the appropriateness of Don's behavior, they were rushing their meals in fear that they would not get back in time to be seated when the music started. During other breaks, parents were complaining about a lack of sleep, long hours, and dehydration in hushed tones, as if afraid of being overheard. There was an atmosphere of unrest, distress and fear in the group.

INTERRUPTED TESTIMONIALS BECAME SELF-DISCLOSURES

I will highlight a few of the incidents of the second day. When we first came in the room that morning, the chairs were organized in the rows facing the front again. Don spoke for about an hour and then said it was our turn to speak about what we had learned the previous day. This was set up much like the Testimony Meetings in my church, where people are handed a microphone and given the opportunity to speak about their insights and experience. I expected that people would not be interrupted once they had the microphone because they were given this freedom the night before in a similar circumstance.

Several people stood up and spoke. A grandfather talked about a letter he had written to someone to express his concerns about their behavior. Don interrupted the grandfather and said, "Why didn't you confront him in person? Don't you know that he would have appreciated a confrontation rather than a letter?" Don looked at me when he said this. I remembered that I had given Kendall's letter to the staff person to pass on to Don. I realized that Don was criticizing my husband's behavior too with his words. Next a woman of about 17 stood up and started to talk. Duane came up to her and interrupted her speaking by saying, "What are you doing with your hands? Look at your hands and how self-conscious you are. You're upset at your mother aren't you." She hadn't said anything at all about her mother. She faltered and fumbled with the microphone, speechless for a moment. Don followed with a new question, now in control of the direction of her testimony, "It's really about your mother, isn't it? Tell us how you feel about your mother." She stumbled out some words of criticism for her mother and started to cry. He backed off and started to be sympathetic as soon as she was producing the appropriate response. The next person to stand up was a young man in his late teens. He too was interrupted by Don and taken on a tangent about his father until he broke down into tears. This time, Don, sensing a growing unease in the audience, said, "It is my job to interrupt your thought processes because they are not working."

I didn't say anything out loud, but I found this very presumptuous. I was also offended by how Don seemed to be leading of people into confessions that they did not seem prepared to make. It

became clear to me that the only type of behavior that would not be confronted was to be vulnerable, emotional, to confess weakness in a public setting and to talk about how our parents had disappointed us. One woman stood up and said to Don, "I am standing up because I am really intimidated by you". I agreed with her. I felt we had all become intimidated by this leader. But, then Don proceeded to interrupt her comments and take control of her testimony as well.

It became apparent that no matter what someone said, this leader was skilled enough to turn the focus off himself and any problems with the seminar and onto the parents, to pressure self-disclosures. I didn't make any comments during this period, but was becoming angry inside. I felt anger in the group as well. I once again wondered what this facilitator did with my child when he was in Jamaica and whether he was encouraging her to magnify our faults and confess private things that she was not prepared to talk about in an unsafe setting. I had never seen a therapist doing this with a patient and began to wonder if this is what some people called "crazy therapy". I was pretty sure this was a flagrant violation of the mental health professional's code of ethics. I began to feel trapped to witness what I felt was Don's inappropriate and invasive behavior. I could physically walk out if I chose. Our daughter had no way of leaving Jamaica or calling me or anyone else if she was in distress. Later, I was to discover that the Seminar philosophy and practices extended into every day life at the program, where twice a day the girls met in "feedback" sessions similar to those of the seminar.

Continued in Part 5

Continued from Part 4

A SETUP FOR FAILURE

Don immediately went into an explanation of the first game of the day. He pulled out his pad of paper on the easel and revealed a scorecard. He began to explain the rules of the Red/Black game. As I sat listening to him shout out a series of rules with the seeming speed of shot out of a machine gun, I found it hard to shift gears from the previous experience and grasp what he was saying.

A grandmother raised her hand and told Don she didn't understand the rules. Don repeated them in exactly the same words only louder and with an emotion in his voice that implied there was something wrong with her for asking. She listened and still didn't understand and he repeated himself again only louder. A father raised his hand and said, "Why don't you explain it in a different way. She obviously doesn't understand it when you keep repeating yourself." Don ignored the father's comment and moved onto the next rule's explanation.

I was not memorizing the rules. I was trying to hear within them what the process was. I was tired of playing games that didn't seem to enlighten me and give me the space to breath and think for myself. I didn't hear anything in Don's description that would lead me to believe that these two groups of people he had made into separate teams would be able to win the game. This was not because it was not possible within the rules; it was because everyone was getting pretty agitated and fearful. And Don had inadequately explained the rules. He had asked the two groups to make decisions without appointing a leader or giving them a process to use to appoint a leader. When I realized that he was not giving us all we needed to succeed, I decided I didn't want to participate. I didn't see how the group was emotionally prepared to go from following Don's dominant leadership to no leadership at all. It seemed to me that Don's leaving them on their own at this point, would put everyone in a tailspin. I predicted that there would now be a competition of ideas and personalities debating how to go about this.

Perhaps on a different day and under different circumstances I would have dived into the game. Perhaps I would have decided to be the leader and help the group achieve the goal. Perhaps I would have followed another leader and contributed to my best ability. But at that moment, I was

feeling tired, overwhelmed, stressed and in need of space and time to think. I wanted to gain something of value from this Seminar for myself, since that was what all the emphasis was about. I knew in my gut that this game was not going to help me right then.

Don was in the process of saying, "You have two choices in this game. You can choose to participate or you can choose not to participate." He laid heavy disgust into the phrase, "not participate" so it was quite clear that this was an undesirable option he didn't approve of.

But at this point, I had already decided on a mental level that Don was not an authority whose opinion I trusted or respected. I didn't care what he thought anymore and was pretty upset with him. However, it was part of my value system to treat him with respect and try to work with his rules while I was in his territory. I raised my hand and he called on me. I said, "I have thought about this game's rules and decided that I don't want to be involved in the competition. I have made a decision in my life not to destructively compete with others and based upon the results, I have exactly what I intend. In my life I have intended not to compete where I can cooperate, so the result is that I have chosen not to participate in situations where competition is inevitable. You have given us two options: either to play the game and participate or play the game and not participate. I don't want to play this game right now. Is there any way I can choose not to participate in this game and still not leave the seminar?"

Don looked at me with some surprise, as if he had never been asked this question before. He swallowed and said, "That's a different way of looking at that phrase", pointing to the poster on the wall I had referred to. He looked a bit put-out by my statement and seemed to be considering how to handle me. He decided to go for the attack, "You came to this seminar to change your beliefs. I can't help you change your beliefs if you don't participate in the game."

I said, "No, I did not come to this seminar to have my beliefs changed. I came to learn about my daughter's program and learn what I could. Look, I don't want to make a big scene. There are obviously others here who want to play this game. Can I choose not to participate and sit somewhere else in the room without taking more of the group's time?"

I could feel that the energy of the group was disrupted by the conversation and realized that if he wanted to keep their obedience and attention, it would be best for him to comply with my request and deal with me later. I hadn't broken any rules by asking these questions, so he couldn't throw me out without looking bad. If he chose to make a big deal of it right then, he would also look bad. Evidently he came to a similar conclusion and decided to give me his consent.

I moved the back of the room and a staff member gave me a chair in front of the staff members, who were lined up against the wall behind me. I noticed several parents looking back at me and not focusing on Don's final instructions. As Don left them to separate into two different rooms, he came back and spoke to a staff member. I was then shown a chair off to the side of the room, in the least obvious place possible. During the game, which lasted about 2 hours, I applied myself to writing on the journal paper I had been provided in my Seminar Bible.

I BEGAN TO PROTECT THOSE WHO WERE HURTING ME

As I mentioned earlier, I was experiencing this seminar on two levels, one I am calling an emotional level, the other a mental level. As I separated myself from the group, I realized that it was so difficult for me to stand against what everyone else was doing in this coercive situation, I started to experience the seminar from a third level, which I will call the Seminar Defender level.

This Seminar Defender perspective was very abnormal from my usual behavior in ordinary life. Normally, as I mentioned before, I would have long ago been upset enough to walk out. But I found myself trying to excuse Don's behavior and to protect him from my criticism and thought

provoking questions. Instead of sitting by the side of the room and writing down my observations about the Seminar from my perspective of the "outside world", I found myself almost completely buying into the Seminar vocabulary and assumptions for the next hour and a half. I began making a list of all the problems with my personal behavior that may have caused me to think that the things in the room that I was witnessing were abnormal.

I am not perfect and so could find many flaws with myself. It gave me a sense of power to blame myself for what was happening rather than to hold Don or Teen Help accountable. I was protecting those who were hurting me. It was so much easier to take all the responsibility for what was happening, because if I did not, I would have to start dwelling on the implications of how what I was experiencing might relate to my daughter's safety.

Listing my faults gave me a sense of control in a situation where I was really feeling out of control, especially in regards to concerns for my daughter's welfare. Being accountable myself for everything that was happening, instead of holding Don and the program equally accountable, gave me a sense of empowerment. As strange as it would seem to me later, I started to experience emotions of joy and contentment. It was easier to focus on my "discovery" and my "magical inner child" than to realize that the situation was threatening and unpredictable. Much of the fear that I was trying to avoid, was fear of what may have been happening to my daughter without my knowledge in Jamaica. From my Seminar Defender perspective I had finally "gotten it" and the result was wonderful and euphoric feeling.

AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND

I began to notice, however, that my mood didn't match the mood of the group. There was a swelling emotion of failure and shame emanating from the participants of the game. Don augmented this by spending 30 minutes walking up and down the aisle firing questions at the group which no one answered out loud. The group looked cowed into submission. I didn't understand why Don was saying all these very negative things to everyone. Essentially the message was that he was disgusted with everyone and their behavior made him sick. He pointed out their faults and mocked them. He said, "What kind of people are you anyway that you can't get together and cooperate with each other. He showed them on the score card that if they had all agreed to vote black, together as a group without deviation, then both teams would have won and there would have been no need to compete. He suggested possible things they could have done to achieve that result.

I felt concern for the parents sitting in the group. I didn't feel it was necessary for Don to badger them. I was downplaying his behavior and didn't realize that normally I would consider this verbal abuse. I was still trying to protect him or perhaps myself from realizing the full impact of what he was doing.

I stood up silently in the back to signify I had something to say. Don ignored me. In times past, he had always called on me when I had a comment. Now, he pretended I wasn't there. I then saw him stop in the aisle in the midst of his pacing and say to a woman, "I could kill you." Then he stopped in front of another woman and said, "I could take away your womanhood" and to a third "I could rob you." He seemed to be saying these things for no other reason than for shock effect. No one objected or made comment about it. These words were worked into the rhythm of his talking and he did not pause speaking before or after saying these things. I didn't really register these words he said at the time he said them. I was in a kind of blissful state and was feeling the hypnotic effect of his voice. It was only later, after I had left the seminar that I could identify how threatening this was. At the time, I was protecting myself from realizing the full impact of what was happening. The feelings of outrage that were struggling to surface through the feelings of euphoria were causing me a great degree of psychological stress.

I remained standing. Don continued to speak. He had slipped into that regular hypnotic rhythm of speech again. He started pointing to parents and asking them, "What's the purpose of the game?" over and over again. People would stand up with a "Yes, Sir" attitude one might expect from cadets in the military and said, "to win the game with as many points as possible." He did this somewhere between 10 to 15 times. I wondered why everyone was saying the same thing. I thought of a lot of different possible answers. To me the games had ceased to be meaningful in the obvious ways.

Don was also making comments interspersed in his speech that seemed irrelevant to me. I wondered if he was talking to his assistant in the back to point out particular things to her. He said, "There is a reason I have asked this same question repeatedly. Notice how many times I did it. There is a pattern here." No one answered him. It was obvious that he did not require answers to most of his questions.

At this time, I felt a need to break the spell. I was still not able to fully grasp what was happening. I had been feeling a growing urge to make a self-disclosure of a personal nature during the entire seminar, despite my decision not to, and his speaking was creating a great tension inside. I stepped out into the aisle and said to Don, "When you are ready, I have something to say."

"I am sure you do." He said sarcastically. "Not now." He said, dismissing me.

I responded, "Just so you know that I am waiting for your convenience." I went back and sat down. He continued with his tirade. After a while, I began to realize that this was a verbally abusive situation. I stood up again, this time in silent protest. This time several parents turned around to look at me, losing focus on Don's words.

Don's assistant (I will call her Sheila hereafter) said to me from across the room. "What is it you want?" in a forceful and direct manner.

I said, "I am watching everyone getting more and more down about themselves and how they failed in the game. I want to give another perspective that hasn't been mentioned here." Joyce walked around the back of the room towards me.

She said, "I don't understand what it is you want." I shifted to my Seminar Defender reality and said, "I want to share a profound and wonderful experience I have had and give everyone here a gift of gratitude for what they have done for me."

I asked permission to approach her and enter into her space. She granted her permission. I walked over and stood face to face with her, with my hands at my sides, as we had been taught in the trust game. I said, "Sheila, I am speaking to you in this way, because it seems to be something that you understand. This is not normally the way I communicate. But you seem really sincere in your question so I will try to answer you the best that I can."

She repeated, "What do you want?"

I said, "I want you to listen to me without interrupting me. It doesn't work for me to be interrupted in my processes. I know and trust my own processes and feel threatened and intimidated when people stand inside my space and when they interrupt me without my permission. I have just had a very profound experience, in which I felt I was following Don's advice and reaching down inside to my magical inner child. And the reason I had this experience is because I was allowed to step outside of the process that everyone else was participating in." I found myself responding to her energy, which although sincere was very combative. I found that my rational mind was starting to protest and with my mind objecting I was still able to not self-disclose, even under great pressure. I decided to stop there.

She said, "Why did you ask permission to stand in my space?"

I responded, "Because that was my way of showing my respect for you."

She looked at me and said, "I don't understand. What do you want?"

I said, "Nothing. You have given me what I wanted. You listened to what I had to say without interrupting. I really appreciate that. There may be others here who need that same consideration." This was all the criticism I could seem to voice for a situation that was clearly out of hand. But I really didn't know what else to say at the time.

At this point about half of the parents in the group applauded. I returned to my seat. Before I sat down Don came down the aisle and confronted me.

"You really needed to do this didn't you," he said venomously.

"Yes I did," I responded.

"You know, you really have problems." He said aggressively.

"Yes I know I have problems. Would you like me to list them for you?" I proceeded to list them for him. Then I said, "and it's okay because I am not perfect. I still have a right to be."

Sheila spoke up and said, "Only you have can give yourself the right to be."

I said, "No, actually, only God gives me the right to be."

Don looked at me, and I felt his anger, "You really have problems, girl."

At this point a staff member from the back said, "Can I give you feedback?"

I turned around to face her and said "yes".

She said, "I see you taking care of your own needs, but leaving others to drown in shark infested waters."

I wasn't sure that I understood her comment. However, I looked at her and said, "Thank you for your feedback I will consider it". Later this comment would make me wonder if indeed the program was "shark infested waters" to the teens in their captivity. Then several other staff members spoke up and gave me their feedback. After each one had finished, I looked them directly in the eye and thanked them for their comment.

When everyone seemed to be finished, I asked if anyone else had something more to say. "Can I sit down now? I asked" No one commented, so I sat down. Another woman across the room said, "Go for it girl."

Sheila turned to confront the woman who just spoke. She said, "Why did you say that?" The woman stood up and turned around to face Sheila. She said, "Because I agreed with Karen. I don't like the way we are being treated." Sheila proceeded to confront her on this and the woman stood her ground. Then they were finished and the woman sat down. Later she left the seminar and I did not get a chance to speak to her or find out her name.

After I sat down, I felt the energy and power that had sustained me through this public conversation, drain from me. I realized that I was emotionally battered. Although I had spoken some things I needed to say. It was not received with any degree of understanding. There was no acceptance for my viewpoint and what I said did not seem to influence Don or Sheila's behavior after I had finished.

PSYCHOLOGICAL RAPE OR THERAPY?

Don walked back up to the front of the room and asked the staff to come forward and give the game participants feedback on their behavior during the Red/Black game. The same staff member, who had given me the comment about the sharks, came around the side of the room. She pointed to a woman in the center isle seat and gave her some very negative feedback. To me it seemed like another verbal attack. The woman in the aisle seat, (I will call her Amy) responded with "Thank you," but it was said in a slightly sarcastic manner, indicating she wasn't grateful at all. Don came down the aisle and confronted Amy with, "Don't say that so sarcastically. That's not the way you respond to feedback. You should be grateful when someone gives you this gift."

"I thought what she said was really mean," Amy responded

Sheila said, from across the room, "You aren't supposed to respond that way, even if it's mean. Silence can be very effective you know."

At this point, Don started to question Amy pointedly until she broke down in tears. Amy then started to tell Don that her former husband had beaten her. She went on to say many things of a highly personal nature. As soon as she became vulnerable and self-disclosing, Don crouched down on his knees so that his eyes were level with hers. He leaned close to her and urged her on in her confession with an emotional intensity I found highly uncomfortable. Then I realized that he appeared to be getting some type of personal satisfaction, almost an emotional high, out of his power over her. To me it was almost like I was witnessing the same emotions that a perpetrator and victim might play out in an act of rape, only there was no physical contact. I was shocked to the core.

I said to my neighbor, "I can't believe that I am sitting here witnessing a psychological rape and doing nothing to stop it." I began to stand up in protest.

My neighbor pulled me back down and said, "It's her turn now. You've had your turn." I turned to look at her in amazement. I remembered that this same woman had confessed to me earlier in the day that she regretted having allowed her son to be sexually abused and have done nothing to stop it. I sat down, realizing that the entire group was participating in this scene and would not welcome my interruption. I gritted my teeth. I kept trying to go along with this Seminar and the apparent agenda on the surface of things, but I kept being slapped in the face by events that seemed wildly abnormal and offensive.

My mind was beginning to shut down again. I found it too difficult to handle the conflict between my reality and the reality of the group. I hadn't slept for almost 48 hours. It was about 3:30PM and we hadn't had a meal break since breakfast. I started to lose focus on the events happening in the room. I found myself entering an altered state of consciousness and wondered if I was dissociating. My rational self was so far away and detached I had lost touch with it. My emotional self was in a high degree of pain. My Seminar Defender self was thinking of ways to please the leader and come back into favor with the group. Don continued speaking, and it was like I was seeing through a haze. Then he played a song over the speaker system. I kept hearing messages in it in addition to the lyrics. It made me want to cry. It made me want to disclose my inner secrets. I felt as though my skin had been peeled off with a can opener and I had no

defenses left. I started to sing another song in my head to try and counterbalance its affect on me. After the song was finished, we were given a short meal break. I tried to talk to a few people, but found myself running from the room with tears streaming down my face. I said, "I have to get out of this room. This is not a safe place to be vulnerable."

In the hallway, I tried to catch my breath. I wandered around rather aimlessly. I realized that I was without a car and the hotel restaurant was closed. I didn't see anyone I knew. I felt lost, alone, frightened and like a defenseless child. I didn't have access to my rational self to protect me and keep my boundaries up. I was shaking and hungry. A few parents took pity on my and took me in their car to get lunch. I found I could not focus on the conversation, which seemed very light and insignificant in terms of what I had just experienced. When we returned to the Seminar Room an hour later, I was not hungry any more, but I hadn't recovered emotionally.

Continued Part 6

Continued Part 5

A PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS

I entered the Seminar room again. The lights were dim and there was music playing in the background. The chairs were arranged now in horseshoe shapes. We were instructed to sit anywhere. I felt very threatened by yet another change in the environment. I had lost all of my defenses and felt I could not withstand any more attacks without breaking down completely. I sat at the top of the circle next to the door, in case I had to leave for self-preservation. Everyone else was being seated.

Don began to explain the activity. He said that these were feedback groups. He demonstrated how every person who was in the group was to take their turn standing at the head of the horseshoe and listen to what feedback others had to give them while they were standing facing him. He emphasized that we really didn't know ourselves very well and that we needed to learn how to see ourselves as others saw us. He implied that if several people in the group shared an impression of us, we would realize that we were indeed different than we thought we were. His premise was that people we didn't know could tell us more about ourselves than those who knew us. He explained the reason was that people who knew us lied to us. They told us all kinds of false things about ourselves, to support our false images.

"Let me give an example." He walked around the room and picked a woman. He asked her to stand up. Then he said, "Now I am going to show you the kind of feedback that makes you feel slimed and dirty. When you receive this kind of feedback, you know someone is lying to you." Then he proceeded to say positive and supportive things to the woman.

Next he demonstrated, "Now I am going to show you the best kind of feedback. This is the kind that is really valuable and honest. The kind you want." Then Don proceeded to tell the woman what her problems were. He was extremely critical. When he was finished, she said, "I don't agree with what you said." Don said, "You don't have to. But, if 15 or more people tell you the same thing, you will find yourself changing your mind." He then instructed her that the appropriate response to feedback was to say thank you.

At this point, I started to find myself shaking and hyperventilating. I knew that if I left now, others would judge me harshly for breaking my contract and for not accepting their feedback. There was a tremendous amount of anger in the room. It had building up all day. But to me what they were calling feedback was verbal abuse. I had plenty of that in my childhood and as an adult had chosen to be treated with civility and respect. I could go on about all the rational reasons why I didn't want to participate in this, but at that moment, I was operating on a strictly emotional level. I

was having a psychological crisis and the internal pressure was so great, it was manifesting itself in physical symptoms. I knew that I needed to leave the room now, for my own safety.

I asked a staff member to find the person I needed to ask permission to leave the room. I said that I was having a psychological emergency. He went to get the head staff person. The person who came was the same staff person I had talked to that morning before the seminar started. I considered him a friend and looked for aid. I said, "I need to leave the room because I am having a psychological emergency." He took my nametag and opened the door for me. He responded, "If you leave now you can't come back." I felt like a broken record. "I am having a psychological emergency," I repeated. I didn't know what else to say. I was shaking pretty badly and my words were not coming easily.

He looked at me as though he didn't believe me, or didn't care, and shut the door. The door was locked from the outside, so I knew that I was locked out. It was about 4:30 PM on Saturday afternoon. I was alone in an empty hall, without support. I couldn't go back in to get help if I needed it. I had no transportation and I was in severe distress. Part of my distress was wondering what might have happened to my daughter and other teens in a similar circumstance if they were far away from all family and government support and unable to call home or get help. I was worried especially about those who might be suicidal.

I stood there for several minutes then gradually made my way up to my hotel room. I curled up in a ball on the bed and called my therapist. I got his answering machine. I called my husband and he didn't answer. I then sent him a page. It was an hour or so before I received a call from Kendall. He told me the portable phone had not been working and he just got my page. I asked him to come get me, because I wasn't in very good shape.

I don't really want to go into a detailed description of what I went through that night and the following weeks. Suffice it to say it was very traumatic. I am even finding it difficult to write about. Just the process of remembering takes me back to reliving it. I think that is why I have been not been able to write about it for two months. This was such a powerfully persuasive experience; it altered my reality and way of looking at things against my will. Although I had moments of lucidity for the next three weeks, I frequently would find my logical thought processes interrupted. I wasn't able to work for more than an hour a day. The most difficult part of it was holding up the reality of my life "inside" the seminar against the reality of my life "outside" the seminar. I couldn't reconcile the different perspectives. And since I wasn't able to think through things logically and get perspective for several weeks, I didn't know why I had experienced these things or what was happening to me. That was the scariest. Also, I was in fear for my daughter. I didn't know if she was all right. This experience had so profoundly shaken my trust; I didn't know what parts of the program to trust and what not to trust.

Now, I look at what happened and I feel I have really been wronged and damaged by this Seminar. I was reduced to a state of emotional and psychological crises that would never have happened under normal conditions. It is hard for me to even reveal what happened because it is embarrassing for me to realize that I didn't leave sooner and that I allowed myself to reach such a vulnerable place. I was also humiliated to think that I had been deceived by the Teen Help Family of services about the nature of the process I had enrolled my daughter in. It was a hard thing to admit that I might have been taken advantage of.

Kendall picked me up and took me home. I went to sleep immediately.

WE ASK PARENTS TO TAKE A STAND

The next morning, I woke up a bit more rested. Kendall and I felt that there was something really wrong with what was happening at that seminar. We each wrote a letter to the Seminar parents, made about 50 copies and took it to back to the seminar while it was still in session.

Both Kendall and I felt unprepared to publish something so quickly without having a lot of time to edit and think about it. But, we somehow felt that other parents might be in a state of distress too and we didn't know how else we could contact them if we didn't go back while the Seminar was still in session.

Also, I remembered that there were many parents that I had talked to on Saturday that were upset by what was happening and questioning Don's credibility. I didn't expect them to change their mind in less than 24 hours. I was thinking that if the Seminar staff and facilitator wouldn't listen to two people who had a complaint, maybe they would listen to more of us. After all, we were paying for the program and as consumers our collective voices should be important to consider. I was looking for reform to the program and did not consider myself to have turned against all of it, just because of one experience.

When we arrived at the Holiday Inn, we introduced ourselves to the manager on duty and asked her permission to hand out the letters to parents at the next Seminar break. She granted permission. We gave her copies of the letters and also wrote out an official complaint to the owner of the Holiday Inn about our experience.

While we were waiting for the Seminar to take a break, we sat out in the lobby and talked with three people who had been through the seminars many times. They were waiting for family members and friends who were completing Discovery for the first time. I told them what had happened to me at the Seminar and asked them if other Seminar experiences they had been to before were similar. I asked if they thought this behavior we had witnessed was unusual. One man, a parent I had talked to the day previous who was waiting for his 17-year-old son to come out of the Seminar, told me that his wife had left the Seminar and he had stayed. He admitted that some pretty strange things had happened in his Discovery Seminar. He said his leader had gotten within inches of his face and grunted like a pig. Before he said more, however, another woman of the group interrupted. She looked at me cold and hard, as though I was an enemy and said, "You should go through the training again. If you stay for the third day, you won't feel this way. I have been through several EST Trainings and I don't find anything in these Seminars that is unusual."

The parent who had been speaking wouldn't say any more. I held out a copy of the letters that my husband and I wrote and asked if they would read them and see what they thought. The EST training graduate picked up the letter looked at it for one second and shoved it away from her. She immediately turned to the other two and began talking to them about something entirely unrelated, excluding us from the conversation as if we were not there. The other two also turned away from us. Some more graduates from previous seminars came in and these three left us to go and talk with them.

My husband and I looked at each other in amazement. We didn't really know what to think, their behavior was so surprising. I didn't understand why they wouldn't even consider another perspective, even if they didn't agree with us. I wondered what had happened to their politeness and their compassion? They were showing these feelings for the new people who had just come in. Why were they not showing them to us? Both my husband and I felt like outsiders who had been cast off for "bad behavior".

Inside the Seminar room we could hear chanting and jumping. It sounded like 90 people all jumping up and down at the same time. We wondered what was happening inside, but of course couldn't see inside with the windows covered. We went over to the acting manager and asked her

some questions. I asked her whose name the Seminar was registered under. She told me it was registered under Teen Help. I asked her what had happened to the buffet we had been told the hotel was going to provide for the guests. She told me that on both Friday and Saturday, there was supposed to be a buffet at a certain time. She said that the chef kept getting messages every hour, delaying the meals because Don wasn't ready to let people go. She expressed her frustrations at the behavior of the group leader and staff, telling us that they had stayed in the conference room more than three hours longer each night than had been scheduled with the hotel. She said that on this particular weekend, there were hardly any staff in the hotel and that they had not been adequately warned about the need for extra staff.

A few minutes later, the Seminar people came out of the room for a break. Their cheeks were flushed and they looked exhilarated. I recognized they were in a state of euphoria similar to the one I had been in the day before, only they had obviously been involved in some heavy physical exertion as well. Calmly, Kendall and I went into the hallway and handed out our letters to the parents who would take them. Kendall told me he saw one parent looked at the letter and at us and ran back into the room to the people who had not yet come out saying, "they're against the program, don't take it."

Within a few minutes, the hotel manager came up to us and said, "It would make it a lot easier for me if you would move out into the lobby." We did as she requested, assuming someone had complained to her. We moved out into the lobby along with two staff people who had engaged us in a conversation. One of them, the parent staffer who had locked me out the night before, was asking me what I wanted. Both Kendall and I told him our objections. He became very defensive and said, "Don't rain on our parade," after asking us to leave everyone alone. The other person was very antagonistic. Other parents came up to us offering extremely negative "feedback" saying how inappropriate it was for us to interrupt them in the process. Some accused us of having no integrity because we had left the seminar and broken our vow. One young woman, the one that Don had pressured into confessing negative things about her mother to the group the day before, came up to us and said, "How can you put your child through something you are not willing to go through yourselves."

All of this was really very shocking to us as well as emotionally hurtful. There were several parents who came up to us and asked for our letter. We distributed all 50 copies in less than 10 minutes. Having done that Kendall and I left the hotel, not desiring to be attacked any further.

THREE PARENTS RESPOND TO OUR LETTERS

We expected that with so many people present, there would be a lot of different opinions on something as controversial as what we had experienced during the seminar. We expected to get phone calls or letters in response to our request. However, we received no communication except for three replies from a week later.

One was a parent whom I had known for several years. She told me what had happened after I left. She said that after the feedback exercise, the entire group confronted those who had waited last to receive their feedback. Then Don had everyone do some guided imagery, imagining that they held a photo album in their hands with photographs of the most significant positive and negative events in their lives. They were asked to imagine themselves going backwards in time to those events. As they reached each one, they were asked to think of ways in which their parents had disappointed them and let them down. They were asked to think of ways they had let themselves down as well. Then they were asked to start beating the chairs with their hands, letting out their anger. She said that there was a lot of self-disclosure on the part of the parents. She told me it was an incredible experience to be in the room and have all those people beating the chairs. She found it cathartic. Then the next day, she said there were a lot of positive activities. Everyone was congratulated on making it through the first two days. They did a lot of role-playing. Don would put on a song and people would be divided up into groups. Each group

would act out and sing the song pretending to be a character very different from one they would portray in their real life. She said that it was really funny to witness a grandmother acting like a little child and being ridiculous. She said that they did exercises, chanting and other activities that were a lot of fun. She said that Don had told them two significant things they were supposed to remember, but she had forgotten what they were.

Another parent called me seven days later. It was Rebecca, whom we had made a connection with at the beginning of the Seminar. She said that she had been in such a state of shock after the seminar, she hadn't been able to do much of anything for a week. Rebecca corroborated what I had just been told about the activities of Saturday night and Sunday morning. She added some new information saying that some of the parents got so violent with the chairs that one was broken. She said that when we had passed out our letters to the parents, others had come and asked Don what he thought and he had said smugly, "We'll send them our love." She said that there had been some horribly heart breaking self-disclosures revealing severe abuse and that she had wanted to go over to one young girl in particular and put her arms around her and comfort her. But that it was not considered appropriate to "help" anyone else and she had had to watch this girl cry inconsolably. She said that for her the process was not beneficial and that she had had to leave in the middle of the third day to throw up because of an extreme migraine headache and the physical distress her body had been under with the long hours and content of the seminar. While she was in the bathroom throwing up, a staff person came and confronted her on her lack of integrity, telling her she had broken her vow by leaving without permission. Rebecca was upset about many aspects of the training and had decided not to go to the next Seminar. She said however, that the Seminar had appeared to benefit many people. She said that on Saturday, Don had spent over a couple of hours in some extremely high pressure sales pitches for the next seminar, which she said was going to cost her about \$1,200 if she went.

The only written response I received was from another parent that I could not recall having met. This was an extremely negative letter and very representative of the types of things people said to us on the third day when we were handing out the letters to the parents. I will quote parts of it:

"My experience of you is that you have such a degree of clutter and chaos going on in your head that your heart hasn't a prayer of being heard. I don't doubt your love and conviction but I think your belief systems are even more important to you. When you walked out on that room, you walked out on your daughter. No one EVER said the training would be comfortable, easy, or that you had to believe and agree with everything presented. ...the choice was yours. However, you made a commitment to be there and an oral agreement to abide by the rules as stated and follow through to the end. You showed yourselves untrustworthy when you broke your word and left. Is your word only good if it is convenient and comfortable and if you feel like it? Would that be acceptable for your daughter? Your agreement with the principles as set forth was unnecessary. Do you think every one of us agree verbatim with all of it? We agreed to stay and see it through."

She continued, "You were never attacked - you were confronted, or rather your belief systems were. You speak of leaders over stepping their bound and that you kept waiting for them to correct themselves. That you would chose to use such a potential productive time so pointlessly amazes me. What self-righteous audacity. What would it really have cost you to just be there, to experience the journey rather than judge it? You would still be you when you left."

"When you walked out those doors, you stepped squarely in the path of your child. DON'T get in the way of mine. Have you thought about the message that sends her? If you can't accept the policies of this program, you are free to leave it. If you feel you need to remove your own child from the program, do it. And be that on your shoulders. Don't you realize that every minute the TASKS staff spends on you is time taken away from our children? How can you justify that? If you don't feel this program is right for you - fine. But don't impact my right to choose it and don't hamper the staff's ability to help our children to their fullest."

When I read this letter, I was amazed at the conclusions the parent came to who wrote it. I could see that we just had an entirely different way of looking at the same situation. She thought I had no integrity because of what I did. I felt I was acting on my integrity to speak up about things that I thought were unethical and possibly illegal. I realized that she wasn't asking for any more information about my perspective, so I simply wrote her a letter thanking her for her feedback and left it at that.

AFTER EFFECTS OF THE SEMINAR

Off and on, for the last two months, I have experienced side effects from this Seminar. I have found it very difficult to write this experience because I keep feeling a strong urge to go back to the Seminars and adopt the party line, contrary to my desire not to. Also, for the first month after the seminar, I felt strong urges to self-disclose personal information to Don and others in Teen Help and to protect their program and keep all of this secret. For the first week, I was extremely vulnerable to outside stimulus. I couldn't listen to music or watch movies without feeling I had no boundaries to protect myself in case of objectionable content. I felt impressionable and found myself dissociating into a state of fear and terror upon many occasions. As time has progressed and now that I have my daughter back safely, I am finding that the effects of the seminar are wearing off. I have felt better every day. I am feeling like my old self again.

GIVING IT THOUGHT AND DISTANCE

I asked myself a lot of questions after this seminar. I felt I needed to ask Teen Help, Tranquility Bay, Resource Realizations and Teen Help Family Companies what their position was and to find out how much a part of the overall programs the Seminars were. I discovered that they felt there was nothing wrong with what had happened to me and that the Seminars were a part of every aspect of the program. Even employees working in the offices of Teen Help had been through the Discovery training as a requirement of employment. Everyone I talked to who had been through Discovery said the same thing to me, that if I stayed for the third day, I wouldn't be so upset and I would see things their way.

I examined my expectations before attending the seminar and compared them to what I experienced. I expected that if I had any complaints about the seminar, Teen Help and Tranquility Bay would accept full responsibility and would take action to address any concerns I might have in a timely and effective manner. I expected that if I could not resolve my concerns with Teen Help or Tranquility Bay, they would direct me to other organizations that had authority and oversight to regulate their activities, so that I could petition those organizations for redress of any wrongs I perceived. I did not expect to discover that I had been deliberately misled about the process and content of my daughter's education and behavior modification program. I did not expect to be so disturbed about what I discovered in the ensuing two months, that my husband and I would be flying to Jamaica to take her out of the program.

As parents, our daughter's welfare is extremely important to us. We assumed that we would be consulted about anything that deviated from the standard practices of businesses, public schools, mental and medical health facilities that operated in the state of California. We had never heard of a public school endorsing a relationship of secrecy between teacher and child. We had never heard of the mental health profession endorsing any person conducting processes that affected a minor's mental health without obtaining written informed consent from the parents. It never occurred to us that our daughter would be subjected to controversial processes in her seminars and required to take a vow of secrecy that prohibited her from talking to us, government officials or any other person unless they went through the same seminars.

Nothing in the literature we received or communications to us had led us to believe that our daughter had been asked to take the same vow of secrecy as we were asked to take; and that

she had been taught to keep secret from us the process or content of her seminars, unless we completed ours. We didn't even know about the secrecy vow until she had been in the program for over 5 months. And the way the letters we received were worded gave us no clue our daughter was being asked to take a vow of secrecy in her own seminars. When both my husband and I walked out of the seminar, we then discovered that our daughter had been instructed not to ever talk to us about the processes or content of the seminars she experienced in Jamaica. So, it was not even on our mind to ask questions about this until we had left the seminar on January 10, 1998.

We had never attended a Lifespring Seminar, EST training, Sensitivity Training or any other of the controversial training that mental health and educational experts claim employ "coercive persuasion", "thought reform", or "mind control" processes on people. We had not read any of the literature on these subjects or even heard of these terms. We were familiar with the term "brain washing" but really didn't know much about it. We had not even heard of the names of Dr. Margaret Singer, Professor Offshe, Steven Hassan and others that had written on these subjects. Our exposure to detailed information about cults was limited and we had no reason to think that this experience would turn out to have elements in common with the behavior of cults like Synanon and others. We did not expect that when we tried to find professional opinion on the processes used in this seminar, after we had left it, that the descriptions of coercive persuasion and thought reform tactics would closely describe our experience.

We did not expect the seminar experience to take on aspects of a religious training, producing parents whom three days later, spouted the doctrine and language of the seminar facilitator with missionary zeal and devotion.

A TWELVE THOUSAND DOLLAR OFFER

When we had finally decided to bring Kyrsten home, (see our postings on <http://www.bridgetounderstanding.com>) **my visit to Tranquility Bay was the most perplexing.** I think that the hardest thing about all of this is that everyone who is a supporter of these seminars seems to live in an entirely different world than the rest of us. They tell me they don't see anything wrong with what happened. Even David Gilcrease, the principal owner of Resource Realizations the company that produces the seminars and Jean Shulter, CEO of several of the Teen Help Family businesses, seem to think these seminars are the greatest thing in the world for every family. (see postings....)

I received a faxed letter on March 16, 1998 from Jean Schulter that stated the following:

"As we discussed during our telephone conversation last week, we feel so strongly that the parent Discovery Seminar would help your family's overall progress, we would be willing to write off your account balance of \$12,017 if you will attend (with an open mind), and complete this seminar. Though parts of the seminar can be difficult, it offers parents a rewarding and beneficial experience which contributes to their family's healing. There is a Discovery Seminar scheduled for April 17-19 in San Francisco. Please let me know if you would like to take advantage of this offer, so we can reserve a space for you. Sincerely, Jean Schulter."

Continued in Part 7

Continued from Part 6

WE NEED HELP FROM OTHERS WHO ARE READING THIS

Writing this out, has been very time consuming. I have been concerned about the impact all of this has had on our family. Both Kendall and I have felt that it is important to make statements as

to what happened, since everyone else is keeping it secret. But this has been creating a drain on our time and resources. We really do need help from others at this point. We have posted the information, but we need to keep our daughter's welfare as the top priority. And right now, she needs our time and attention and help in integrating back into society and pursuing her goals. Our family needs to heal from all of this and learn how to integrate again. We have a plan in place and things are going well, but it is time consuming and draining to go through all these changes.

I need to know what our standards are as a state and a Nation and how this experience compares to those standards. I would like to have our reports reach the appropriate officials in various states, including California, who can answer the following questions.

1. If the facilitator (called Don in this account) were a licensed mental health professional in California and other states; would the ethics and licensing boards endorse his actions and behavior as described in this account? If not, what specific standards or codes would be considered violated and what action would be taken by whom to enforce the State's standards?
2. If Don were not a licensed mental health professional in California and other states, would government officials declare that he was practicing without a license? If so, what specific standards or codes would be considered violated and what action would be taken by whom, to enforce the State's standards?
3. Has the California and other state's Labor Commissioners made exceptions to their labor laws which allows these for profit businesses to compensate parents and teens for labor without workers compensation insurance and payroll taxes? If not, what specific standards or codes would be considered violated and what action would be taken by whom to enforce the State's standards?
4. If these seminars were part of the California public school system's curriculum or happening on a public school campus, would the school board and PTA endorse the requirement for secrecy? If not, what specific standards or codes would be considered violated and what action would be taken by whom to enforce the State's standards?
5. How would other consumers feel if they had been treated the way I was as described in this account? What action would you take, if you were I?
6. What concerns do those reading this have about the safety of our children, after reading this account and thinking about the much more isolated and restricted environment that the kids are placed in while in these programs?
7. What similarities are there between the Lifesprings and EST trainings and the Discovery Seminar that I have described in this account?
8. Do these activities, as describe in this account meet the societal norms? Do we as a Nation support these types of activities as a majority?
9. Are others with various viewpoints willing to take a stand and post their standards on this board and in other places and state how this experience compares to those standards?
10. After reading this account, will other emotional growth schools be willing to say how this experience compares to their own program and if it matches their own standards?

We realize that the government officials and experts who would most appropriately respond to these messages may not read this bulletin board (with exception of Tom Croke, of course, whom

I hope will evaluate my account and post his response). Therefore, if anyone is able and willing to take our accounts and make sure they get into the hands of those who can contribute their opinions, we would be most grateful. We need guidance and to know what the laws are and the position of the public on this.

Thanks for reading this. I know it has been very long.

Karen E. Lile