



## **CASE STUDY #7: CHRISTIAN (The Genius )**

Christian was a smart ass equally defined by both terms. He was, without a doubt, one of the most intelligent kids ever to participate in the 37 years of “I CARE”. He was difficult for other group members to tolerate because he looked down upon their average intellect with a combination of scorn and envy. The latter coming from a social insecurity that afflicts people of the upper echelons of the “gifted and talented” strata. (I was surprised to see a full chapter devoted to these kids in a Special Education course required to clear my counseling credential.)

Somehow I always felt that these kids would, excel or at least survive, in the traditional social school setting. It is common to think that being “smart” somehow insulates a kid from the pedestrian concerns of their “normal” peers. ) In reality some gifted students have many difficulties at the hands of classmates who scorn them for “thinking they are better than we are, or even worse “being a school boy” therefore a nerd or geek.

I had a brilliant young man, with whom I had some fantastic and heavy discussions, confessed to me that he was getting in trouble and flunking classes so much in hopes that the other kids would respect him more. Talk about a total waste of talent! If this happens as much as I fear we are losing a lot of potential that might help solve some major problems in this country just so some truly gifted people won’t feel ostracized by their classmates.

This is a solvable problem to be discussed in another book. His stay with us corresponded with the boom of computer programming on the home style equipment. He quickly became an expert on “hacking” into previously secure sites. At first it was for fun then later for what he wanted to have without paying for musical recording equipment; “ass-kickin” speakers and all the other stuff needed by a young technocrat. He worked at great length to obtain the most sophisticated computer equipment necessary to enhance his cyber theft.

At the apex of his career he hacked into a major credit card company and had thousands of dollars of professional recording equipment sent to a neighbor’s house thinking it could not be traced to him. Note, there is as much difference between a professional crook and an amateur as there is between playing Wii football and being tackled by a 345 pound defensive end in the NFL! Christian just wasn’t a good crook! Getting caught was not pleasant although Christian was treated as a juvenile by the legal system.

After some time at the “ranch” he appeared before a progressive judge who gave him a choice of going to big boy prison or working off his transgressions helping the credit company create a better hack-proof system. After fulfilling his obligation Christian was hired by that same company as a full time programmer. Christian had many skills and talents that placed him at the advantage of most of his peers in our program. He was a quick study in that he would see the purpose of what we were doing long before everyone else. He would blurt out things like “Aw you’re just trying to get us to take ownership for our problems”, or “Yeah, you say you care about us but you won’t tell us how to get over on Russell.” (the vice principal in charge of discipline). He was at once tremendously insightful and terribly naive.

One night he came in with a massive shiner. He said he had gotten jumped by a bunch of “skinheads” at the movie. “They beat me up just because of the way I look. It just isn’t fair!” (At the time Christian was wearing his hair in super glue spikes all over his head. He kinda looked like a porcupine on steroids.) When we agreed with him that it was unfair to judge and discriminate against

someone solely by their appearance, he continued to rant about how he would like to take a gun and settle the score.

When we asked him to consider the way shooting them might affect the rest of his life he replied "You just want them to get away with it". We further attempted to reach his rational side by asking what lessons could be learned from this assault; hoping for something philosophical like: forgive them and being grateful that they have to be them and I get to be me, or something practical like only go to the restroom with a group of friends.

We ended the discussion by offering him the opportunity to pulse the entire group for their input on how to handle the situation. (This technique usually works because people in these frustrating situations need to be listened to.) Being as oppositional as he was Christian just blew it off by saying something to the effect that "They don't care and neither do you!").

It is interesting to note that among the 6,200 some students who have completed our exit interview at the end of their session with us Christian was the only one to say that he wouldn't recommend "I CARE" to his friends who needed support dealing with the issues in their lives. Talk about an outlier!

Analysis: Christian was as defiant as anyone we have worked with. You might think that he ended up in prison for life or something of the sort; but you would be wrong. After his career as a computer programmer got boring he became a police officer in the inner-city specializing in work with troubled teens. Isn't life grand?

