



CASE STUDY#04: STEVE (Adopted)

Steve was adopted as an infant. His parents had tried everything possible to conceive their own offspring to no avail. When they finally met after months of being on the list it was immediate and total bonding. He even looked like his proud new parents. His older sister gave even more compassion and love to her new baby brother because she was made to understand that he was "chosen" to be her little brother.

Throughout his developing years Steve proved to be a nearly perfect child. He was an excellent student, gifted athlete and compliant son to his adoring family. His parents felt that by keeping Steve busy and engaged in positive activities he wouldn't have time for trouble and be able to associate with the "wrong influences". As a competitive swimmer Steve had his first association with drugs. a friend gave him "speed" to improve his performance on a relay that was being contested close to an individual race which would tax his energy.

Steve's friend would later recall the incredible affect the drug had on Steve. "It was like he was born for the stuff!" He began to demand it for every race and for every reason you could imagine. Steve's mother noticed the change in her pride and joy. His school work and attendance were the first casualty. At first he would claim to be "too sick to go to school this morning...I'll go this afternoon!" In time this pretense wore off and he just flat-out refused to attend. His appearance went down the tubes as did his desire to please others. Steve recalls that during that phase of his life "all I cared about was drugs, getting loaded...nothing else mattered". He got kicked off the swimming team due to skipping practices. When the truant officer met with Steve and his Mom they decided to try another school to get him away from the negative influences found there. Within a matter of minutes he had made the connections needed to sustain his drug life at the new school.

NOTE: Moving a student from one school to the next without making other changes i.e.. treatment or counseling is folly. Any drug involved kid will tell you that it takes a remarkably short time to "connect" at any school in America (probably the world for that matter). This includes private and church affiliated schools as well!

At this point the downward spiral accelerated for Steve. The "druggie culture" was now evident in his clothing, appearance, personal hygiene and even taste in music. He steadfastly refused to do anything with his family, which had been as close as any imaginable. The family doctor recommended treatment for Steve but California State Law prohibits placing a minor in a drug treatment facility against their will... hence the proliferation of live-in youth treatment facilities in adjacent states. Steve, like so many young druggies, didn't consider his usage to be a problem. He truly believed that he could quit whenever he wanted...he "just didn't want!" As he advanced up the ladder to more expensive drugs money became a problem. First he sold all his own possessions and if asked what happened to his stereo or surfboard or tape collection he would say: "I loaned it to someone". Shortly things belonging to other family members started coming up missing. A power tool from the garage, a portable TV from the camper; things that would not be missed right away. Any attempt at being discreet went by the wayside as Steve needed more and more money to support his burgeoning cocaine habit. He was now up to two hundred dollars worth a day!

Every week Steve's parents would regularly attend their parents support group. The advice was always the same: "You've got to get that kid into a treatment program!" Mom would sob "But he won't go!" Dad was a little stronger but was unwilling to "rock the boat" with his wife.

NOTE: In attempting to protect the rights of young people the laws, in many cases, infringe upon the rights of parents. When a group of supportive parents went to testify in Sacramento advocating for a change in legislation which would allow parents to commit underage drug addicts to residential treatment programs they met with resistance and apathy. Legislators don't want to be associated with any law that even looks like it is designed to infringe upon the rights of teenagers. But what about the rights of parents? If your kid gets loaded, steals the family car and proceeds to kill someone in an accident...the parents are screwed!

In a landmark court case the parents of a 21 year old man were successfully sued by the parents of a 17 year-old girl killed in an automobile "accident". They sued because the parents of the 21 year old co-signed the automobile loan which allowed an alcoholic to drive the car that killed their daughter". All our hearts go out to the victims parents but the critical issue here is this: At what point is a person responsible for their own actions? As a fifty something year old I would hope that my mother wouldn't be considered responsible for something stupid I do even if she did "create the idiot that you see before you today".

So what are we asking for here? Simply that parents, or the juvenile justice system, or counselors or some combination of the above be given the opportunity/responsibility for placing a young drug addict in a mandatory residential drug treatment facility when said youth refuses to enter said program voluntarily. (An encouraging case recently* upheld a wealthy parent's right to send their son to a "boot camp" type treatment program out of the country.

My questions are: a) What if the parents hadn't had a ton of money to defend themselves in court?

b) When do we look at parents as people whose responsibilities for their offspring's liability-type behavior thereby guarantees them some rights to administer corrective treatment to this behavior?

The pendulum protecting kids rights may have swung too far.

Case in point: If your 13 year old daughter (maybe even younger) gets herself pregnant she decides, what she wants to do about it. Legally she isn't even obligated to inform her parents of her condition.

She is automatically emancipated by virtue of her impending motherhood. But of course her parents (or the taxpayers) will foot the bills for whatever decision young miss hot stuff and young mister stud dream up. Call me provincial, or whatever but this doesn't seem fair to me.

Steve continued his druggie lifestyle and both parents got more and more fed up with his stealing and nocturnal lifestyle. His mother was getting almost no sleep waiting for his return every evening (which was actually every morning!) Finally a weird compromise was reached. Parents had an old camper in storage which they moved to the side of their house. This became Steve's "apartment". Mom provided food so she knew he could eat. The locks on the house were changed and an expensive alarm system installed so Steve couldn't support his drug habit by ripping off his parents. Steve's Dad found a carpenter's assistant job for Steve that provided an honest income. Surprisingly enough he kept the job for a couple of years. He even obtained good enough references to obtain a better construction job in another state. He stopped using cocaine and other heavy drugs but was still smoking pot and drinking on weekends.

ANALYSIS: Steve is like many adopted middle class kids in America. Although his adoptive parents provided a loving, supportive, stable home life that he most surely would not have gotten with his biological mother, it just wasn't enough to turn the tide of his genetic predisposition. Both his real parents were heavily drug involved. His father died in a jail stabbing and his mother spent her short life in and out of jail and failed rehabilitation attempts. Many of us want to believe that a loving

environment is all that is needed to turn out a perfectly well adjusted taxpayer. It can make a difference but there are no guarantees. Steve was literally born and bred to be a heavy drug user. He was probably born stoned!

Does this mean that no one in their right mind should ever adopt? Of course not! It does mean that certain children are born with the opposite of a charmed life (even if their adoptive parents try to compensate) It's almost impossible to predict how an adoptive child will turn out. Prospective adopters need to avoid over compensating for their child. Sometimes it seems they "just try too hard" to be perfect so as to create the perfect home for their child. Often siblings of the adopted kids report that they feel that the adopted sibling was given preferential treatment. In hindsight some adoptive parents will admit to this.

NOTE: Prominent Sociologist Erich Fromm is said to have retracted his assertion that nurture is far more influential in life than nature in a deathbed reflection. I haven't been able to find any documentation to support this, but, I will keep looking because my experience with cases like this one adds support to the nature argument.

- The court case mentioned was in the late 1990s when I started writing this book.