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# STRAIGHT LINES

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## A Personal History: The Mayflower Group Brings Straight To Washington

Things were bad for Jean and Dick H. during 1979. Their son had become a "sad, independent, hyperactive monster." Understandably, their Christmas card notes left much unsaid. Luckily, one of the cards went to a Mom who had three children in the Sarasota, Florida, Straight Program. Using Seventh Step awareness, she read between the lines and telephoned immediately. "Is your son on drugs?" she asked. And then she told them about Straight.

This telephone call could be credited with launching the Straight program in the Washington, D.C. area. Little did the Florida Mom know, but she had planted seeds of hope in the hearts of two great organizers. Dick and Jean took their son to Florida a few months later.

Through personal experience, Dick and Jean formed a deep, personal commitment to Straight. Eventually they decided to form a parent support group back home. "We wanted to do everything we could to help save other kids," says Jean. And so they began inviting desperate parents to meet in their living room.

A few months later, however, the couple was disappointed when their son left the program. They admit that his choice "broke our hearts. But rather than give up and be frustrated, we decided to start a parent self-help group in our home," says Dick. Jean put it this way: "Even if we lost our own son, we wanted to do everything we could to help save other kids."

Their group, at first just a handful of couples, called itself "Parental Choice." They met every Sunday, helping each other out and spreading the word about Straight. Soon, many other families had sent their children south, and the group outgrew Dick and Jean's home. They moved meetings to the nursery of the Church of the Apostles, near Fairfax. As the months wore on, word of mouth attracted more and more parents, until they finally had to meet in the church proper. It did not take long for the group to focus on a common dream of bringing Straight to the nation's capital.

"We met every Sunday," recalls Jean.

"I mean every Sunday, even when the Redskins were in the Superbowl."

The Parental Choice group began fulfilling the first requirement for a Washington-area program; Straight said that a minimum of 50 clients would be needed to start up. The National Office was not encouraging at first--expressing doubt that enough people from the area would actually pack their kids off to Florida and make the monthly 1000-mile trip for mandatory meetings.

But this was no ordinary group of parents. Within months, 40 families were involved and Straight gave its formal blessing to organizing a new program. Then the real work began. Dick was asked to serve as chair for the Steering Committee. Bill B. soon joined him as co-chair. He identified their three primary tasks as "getting the message out, recruiting

new parents, and raising funds." Half a dozen sub-committees began to meet during the week. They began to call themselves, near this point, "The Mayflower Group."

The strategy was first to build an informed community support-base before tackling fund-raising, building location, or staffing. At that point their visibility was deliberately low, according to Dick. He and others quietly sought support from city, county, and state officials. Dick also contacted other drug treatment programs nearby. He assured them that Straight would not compete with them for Federal funding, and would attract a different clientele. As a result of this behind-the-scenes work, Dick and his wife began to be invited to address school groups, television audiences, panels, and church groups.

#### RECRUITING FAMILIES AND STAFF

Joyce T. founded PANDA (Parents' Association to Neutralize Drug and Alcohol Abuse) out of sheer frustration. Two drug treatment programs had failed to help her two chemically dependant sons. She decided to organize a parent group to rid schools of drugs. (She laughs at her innocence today.) When Dick H. called her after she appeared in a newspaper article, she felt hope again. She joined Parental Choice, and soon became a Straight parent. Through her PANDA newsletter and speaking engagements, she helped swell the numbers of the group.

Mary O. was another local parent who put three children into the Florida program. All three moved quickly through their programs, while Mom spent much time in Florida. There, she and Lorna M. learned how to do pre-intake and intake interviews. When the job of Intake Coordinator for the D.C. Straight Program opened up, Mary applied. She was a natural for the job since she had been organizing intakes from the D.C. area for some time. She trained parents to do pre-intakes in their homes. Mary herself did intakes. "I would call the information to Florida and a date was set for them to go down.

This went on for about a year. We sent the last out-of-town intakes down in September of 1982."

The first in-town intakes took place the day after the program moved to Virginia; about 25 families were anxiously awaiting the move.

Like many other parents in the Mayflower Group, Mary gave talks, appeared on talk shows, and generally spread the word. She gave about six talks per month--not unusual in the group.

Mary, Joyce, Dick and others worked together to recruit staff for the program. These searches took place for months while other preparations for the program were going on.

One of their first contacts was Mel Riddle, then Coordinator for Drug Abuse Prevention for Fairfax County. Riddle at first paid little attention to Straight. After all, it was in Florida and only a few families were involved. But he began to hear more and more good things. He got curious and eventually the administration sent an observer down to Florida to see what was happening at Straight. The observer brought back positive reports. Of course, we all know what happened eventually--Dr. Riddle was eventually recruited to become the first director of the Washington Area Straight.

#### FUND-RAISING

Rick G. had never been involved in any civic or charitable activities in his life. But then he found himself in Straight, with a son in the Florida program in June of 1981. "When I came back after the first three weeks, I was obsessed with getting Straight to Virginia. I felt this goal was placed here for me to help accomplish. A calling, if you will," says Rick. "I was really enthused, but didn't know what to do. So I tried to make myself always available to Dick H., to do anything that needed doing."

"My major goal was fund-raising. But my biggest problem was fear of being rejected when asking for money. Then one day I walked in to talk to



a major contractor. I was scared to death. After I told him about Straight, he said that his company had had a good year and was looking for a worthy charity. I was expecting a cheque for \$100. To my surprise, he handed me one for a thousand. This kind of response, and many like it turned Nick into a dedicated, fearless fund-raiser.

"I started telling everyone about the miracle that had happened to my family and my son--a kid who had been staring at six months in jail and had gone so far down that he weighed only 100 pounds. People must have thought I was a lunatic, but I always ended up by saying, 'I need your help to bring this miracle to families in this area.' "

This kind of enthusiasm helped the Mayflower Group raise \$450,000 in six short months. As well as soliciting, they held yard sales, horse shows, dances, bake sales--nearly everything but Bingo, which they never quite managed.

A critical moment was one day in June, 1982. This was an interim deadline when Straight required the group to have \$200,000 in the bank before moving on to the next organizing stage.

The group met that night in an elementary school. The numbers going in, according to Nick, were discouraging. They had only \$140,000. "I was really depressed," he recalls. But then an amazing series of events unfolded. First, Joe M. announced that the United Virginia Bank had donated \$20,000. Then, proceeds from a floundering car raffle, zoomed to \$18,000. The Kiwanis Club kicked in \$5000 next. "At that point, people just started making personal cheques," says Nick. "By 9:30 that night, we had reached our goal and exceeded it. People were hugging each other, celebrating. We ran out to a pay phone to tell Florida, 'You can't stop us now!' " Not that they wanted to of course--the D.C. area obviously had something special going for it.

Just after this meeting, the Mayflower Group brought on a profession-

al fund raising consultant. She was impressed at their accomplishments. "You don't need me," she told them. "I need you!"

## LOCATING THE BUILDING

Ted P. learned about Straight in a roundabout way. His wife attended a meeting in Atlanta where she met Jim Hertz, the first director of the Florida program. Their two children entered the program in 1981, and Ted and his wife joined the parent group at home. Since Ted was in real estate, it is no surprise that he was assigned the task of finding a suitable building for the fledgling program.

Ted found a building in the Herndon area. But, to everyone's dismay, county officials were firmly opposed to having a "drug rehab" in their midst--envisioning all the negative stereotypes of such institutions. Quickly, the group decided to concentrate closer to Fairfax, where behind-the-scenes preparations had been more thorough.

But finding a building was not easy. "I must have looked at 50 to 75 buildings in Fairfax County," says Ted. Finally, though, he found a building on Backlick Road which looked just right. (He looked at all the buildings with another Straight parent, Bill K. Bill is a professional house builder.) Originally the building had been a Wilson Sporting Goods warehouse, and then became a photo-processing lab which did a lot of work for the Defence Department. The building was a honeycomb of low-ceiling, 10'x10' cubicles, used for microfilming. The building was expensive though--much more than anticipated by the National Office. They supported the choice, however, after an executive was sent up to inspect the building.

Ted handled the delicate negotiations around obtaining permits for the Backlick Road location. It was complicated. First, a County ordinance had to be re-written, since organizations such as Straight could

not locate on industrially-zoned land. Ted notes, "Normally, this would take 16 months, but we managed to get it done in 30 days."

Everything went well until after the second of three hearings. At that point, a nearby resident panicked and called her County Supervisor, who called Ted. After a meeting, it was decided that the Homeowner's Association in her area needed to learn more about Straight. Ted offered the labors of the parent group to distribute flyers advertising a meeting on short notice. "Parent power can do anything," he said. The group distributed 600 flyers to homes, and two days later met with residents. Two Florida Seventh Steppers came up with Executive Staff and told their stories.

At the final hearing, on September 14, 1982, the County Board discussed Straight's application. Not a single voice was raised in opposition. Straight was given the green light, and the next day remodelling work began.

## CONSTRUCTION

"I'm a home builder. Supervising the construction work just naturally fell into my lap," says Bill K. While Ted and others had been working on the negotiations, he had been drawing up plans for the new program's home. His advance work was important, since there was only a month between the time that the permit was granted, and the target date for transfer of the Florida clients.

The first task, however, was tearing down the old structure, leaving as much as could be used. Bill had an army of amateurs to direct, and a few building trade professionals. About 60 sets of parents worked at the building, often from 8:00 AM into the wee hours of the next morning.

Many women worked at the building by day, their husbands arriving after work. One mother recalls that women did much of the tearing down of the original structure, as well as cleaning and preparing areas for new construction. Men did most of the re-

building. Women also pulled screws and nails from the old materials, sorting them out and cleaning them off for re-use.

After the first few days of work, a sort of "fast food famine" set in. People began to crave home cooking. Women came to the rescue here--signing up to provide a hot evening meal every day. They began to try out-doing each other with delicious lasagna, casseroles, green salads and desserts. "We were eating pretty good, too," says Bill.

Meanwhile, Bill's crew re-constructed the inside of the building, laying in new walls, electricity and plumbing; raising ceilings; and making a parking lot. "Those parents really put in a lot," he says. "Some came in every day. Ted and I gave up our jobs for five weeks. There was a lot of sacrifice."

Fortunately, and to Bill's amazement, there were no injuries--not a single major accident. "That's a miracle in itself," he says. "We had over 60 inexperienced parents, some who could hardly hold a paint brush straight--and they were working on scaffolds and ladders, with people working over people." The closest to a bad accident came when one Dad wheeled a large wheelbarrow up to the dumpster. Somehow his wheelbarrow flipped him up into the dumpster. "He crawled out hoping that nobody had seen him. He was just embarrassed."

Everyone was on pins and needles as completion neared. Would they overcome all the small hurdles between them and the necessary Occupancy Permit? Ted P. relates that Bill was a nervous chain smoker at the time. "He and I made a deal. If I would get the Permit, Bill said he would quit smoking. The day I went down to the County and paid the \$3000 or so for the permit, I brought it back and nailed it up on the wall. I said, 'Give me your cigarettes Bill,' and he took them out of his pocket and hasn't had one since."



## OPENING DAYS

One hundred eighteen kids arrived on a charter aircraft at Dulles Airport. Awaiting them were six school buses, borrowed from nearby churches. Some of the drivers were Straight Dads. Ted P. was one. He choked up as the airplane made the final approach. "My God," he cried. "They're here."

Rick G. recalls sitting on the runway in his bus, watching the plane come down. "We could see the kids. Tears were streaming down their faces. They were home. I just kept thinking, 'I'm so lucky to be able to drive this big old school bus and to see these kids.'"

The next day was the first Open Meeting. Parents greeted their children with a song--"Hello Straight Kids"--(a version of "Hello Molly"). They stood together, awed and joyful, in the building they had all dreamed of for so long. Of that night, they now say things like:

"We gave a lot of love."

"I'm still in awe of the accomplishment of that dream."

"It's the most meaningful thing I've ever done in my life."

"It felt like we were a huge family. It was all worth it."

For these parents, the payoffs for their labors have come in many forms. Nearly all have Seven Step children, with several on staff. Their children are doing well in school and business. One mother reports that the five siblings of her Straight children are straight today. And each parent learned that he or she could accomplish more than they had ever dreamed before.

## Director's Perspective

"I believed in what Straight was doing," explains Mel Riddle as he talks about taking on the job of Director. "I thought the Program was making a difference."

Riddle still believes in Straight and is pleased with progress in the past year. He identifies three important changes here. First, he says, "the program is fully staffed now. We have added a medical director and a family therapist. They have really helped a lot."

Secondly, he points out the growth from 150 clients a year ago, to today's 250. "That's significant growth," he says. Thirdly, he thinks that Straight has greatly improved its relationship with the professional community.

In the coming year, Riddle hopes that the program will move to a larger building. The location, still being sought, will remain in Northern Virginia. This will take advantage of existing good relationships with professionals, schools, and law enforcement agencies. And yes, says Riddle with a smile, there will be plenty more opportunity for parent volunteer work!

For Dr. Riddle, working the Straight program is just as important for staff as it is for parents and clients. "The Steps talk about letting go. If you are a professional who needs to be in total control of everything, you cannot succeed here. Learning to trust the group and staff is absolutely necessary. It has been a growing experience for me. It is just as important for Executives to learn to let go as it is for parents."

## Mark May Tackles Drug Abuse With Straight

Mark May, Washington Redskin guard/tackle, makes an impact wherever he goes to work--whether it's on the football field or working for causes he believes in. He recently agreed to act as a spokesman for Straight, Inc. in the D.C. area. His first assignment comes October 31, 1984. On that day he will speak to a Straight Community Outreach dinner for D.C. public school teachers, counsellors and administrators.

May has adopted Straight because he has seen the tragedy of drugs in the lives of teammates and other acquaintances. Such incidents have persuaded him to use his influence as a sports hero to fight substance abuse. According to his agent, Mr. Joe Band, May believes that athletes have a tremendous influence on youth today. He wants to present a positive drug-free lifestyle as an example, and to talk to young people about the dangers of drugs.

May has previously been involved with the "Team Up Against Drugs" campaign, speaking in area high schools. He was also named recently as Sportsman of the Year by the Juvenile Diabetes Association, for his charitable work.

May, selected in the first round of the 1981 draft for the Hogs, plays a key role in one of the NFL's best offensive lines. A history major at Pitt, May is one of the most articulate Redskins on the speaking circuit. He has written his own cookbook, entitled "Mark May's Hog Cookbook," opened a Northern Virginia catering service, and dabbled in acting and sportscasting.

Welcome to Straight, Mark May! We hope you'll visit often so that we can show you some of the care you've shown for us. And thanks, in advance, for the many families you will help.