

Wake - up call

April 28, 2010

Once again, I awoke late in the night in a panic. Two weeks before, I'd been unceremoniously dismissed from the cabinet of the new governor. My credentials in human sexuality made me a target of conservatives; the other party smelled blood in the water and came after me with a vengeance I could have never imagined. After spending 12 weeks as the Acting Commissioner of the Department and Children and Families, a job I'd prepared for decades to hold, loved doing, and performed well, I was asked to submit a letter of resignation and advised to go to an 'undisclosed location' to avoid the press. The complete shock left me physically ill, spiritually drained and floundering professionally.

I turned on the TV to quiet the anxiety and chose Oprah's latest installment from the DVR menu. Todd Bridges, the child star known as much for his adult dysfunction as childhood charm was promoting his new biography.<sup>1</sup> 'This should lull me back to sleep,' I thought. A few minutes into the interview, Oprah asked her guest to turn to page 68 of his book and read. After gently suggesting that another section might be more appropriate for afternoon TV, Bridges acquiesced and read:

"Pull your pants down" he said (Bridges read)

I didn't want to lose everything he had given me. And so I did.

He put his mouth on me. I got hard. I didn't know where to look or how to feel. I squirmed against the back of the seat. he kept on going, getting into it.

I hoped it would be over fast.

Then it happened. I came.

As confused and upset as I was, I liked the feeling.

"No one had ever talked to me about sex before" Bridges writes. " But somehow I knew it was wrong for a man to do that to a boy." "I was really confused because having an orgasm had felt good"

Bridges, a grown man healthy after decades in recovery, cried the same tears that broke my heart as a young therapist working with sex abuse victims years before.

I was now wide awake. I watched that segment again and again. Thirty years ago, I was writing about the need for everyone involved with child sexual abuse<sup>2</sup> -- cops who investigate, clinicians who treat, parents of victim and most importantly the victim them self to understand that human sexual response is a function of the autonomic nervous system --- an involuntary response to stimuli. I lectured all over the country, training professionals as they prepared to serve the victims and their families.

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<sup>1</sup> Bridges, Todd with Sarah Tomlinson. *Killing Willis*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> *Human sexuality issues in the treatment of child sexual abuse* ( Flanzer, J *The Many Faces of Family Violence*. Charles C Thomas Pub Ltd ,August 1982)

When my son was born in 1983, I stopped traveling. I earned a PhD in social work and moved into the broader field of public human services working with poverty, delinquency, mental health and geriatrics.

I came back to the profession in 2001 and infused sexuality information into my work with the New Jersey Chapter of Prevent Child Abuse- America, to great reviews from parents and professionals. But the broader field of sexual abuse prevention had taken a different turn, constrained by a series of unfortunate coincidences during the decade I now refer to as the neutered 90's. Politics and fear mongering stopped even the most well-meaning adults from discussing healthy sexuality with kids. Good touch bad-touch programs and sex offender registries replaced comprehensive, health education oriented prevention. Basic anatomical truth was nowhere to be found.

How is it that pedophiles are still using sexual arousal to convince children of their complicity? Don't people realize how this guilt buys the victim's silence? Had the anti-sexuality education contingent gained enough political power to silence sex educators?

They certainly had in my state.

Thank you Todd, for the wake-up call.