

Author's Story of Child Abuse Supported by Justice Department Investigations

By Alison Cohen

Charles Carroll and his brother, Bobby, had the misfortune of being unwanted and hard-to-place foster children in the 1950s. So the powers that be simply reclassified them from "orphan" to "retarded" and exiled them to a state institution for the mentally retarded. There they remained for years, deprived of their civil liberties, devoid of their right to an education, and denied any semblance of a humane existence.

Carroll's memoir, "HARD CANDY: Nobody Ever Flies Over the Cuckoo's Nest," (now in its second edition) reveals the alarming abuses-emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse and pedophilia-endured by the author, his brother, and other residents. It's written in the format of a novel; as a reader, you can easily lose yourself in Carroll's world and think you're reading fiction. But every so often, you'll turn the page to discover a photograph depicting the scene you've just read-a sobering reminder that this is, in fact, a shockingly true story.

"I chose to use the novel format because I felt this was the best way to tell my story," says Carroll. "I think this really allowed me to communicate how I felt at the time things were happening to me. I had the freedom to bring the 'characters' to life and take the reader on the journey with me." And what a journey that is. The author describes-through the eyes of a child, but the sensitive introspection of an adult-a world of living conditions so sadistic, so brutal and degrading, that "child abuse" seems a chillingly inadequate label.

Of course, that was fifty years ago. Such things could never happen today. Right?

Unfortunately, wrong.

"The Justice Department has been investigating state institutions across the U.S.-more than 60 facilities in the last five years alone," says Carroll. "Some of these have been developmental disability and mental retardation facilities. And, lo and

behold, the New Lisbon Developmental Center in New Jersey, where my brother and I were committed, came under their radar screen."

In fact, the book's appendix offers startling evidence that abuses are anything but a thing of the past. The Justice Department's investigation of New Lisbon, in 2001-2002, found continuous violations of residents' civil rights and even life-threatening conditions. Investigations at other institutions bear striking similarities to one another and to New Lisbon: sexual abuse, physical abuse, and verbal abuse of residents (by staff and by other residents, even by other children); failure to report and follow up on incidents; inadequate psychiatric and medical care; inadequate education; inadequate habilitation programs (to prepare residents to function in society); and even a failure to provide basic sanitation. (For more information Google, CRIPA, Civil Rights for Institutionalized Persons Act.)

"When I read the Justice Department reports," relates Carroll, "all of my personal experiences came to mind-the abuse by staff, the attacks by other children, the unsanitary conditions, the feeling of futility when any of us tried to report an incident. In my book, I paint a pretty forthright picture of my life back then, with no apologies and no sugarcoating. But I also try to focus on how I survived, how my love for my brother kept me going. And I really want this book to be a voice for all those other children, victims like me, who can't speak for themselves."

As gut-wrenching as "HARD CANDY" is, it ultimately leaves the reader with a sense of that determination to survive and of the strong bond Carroll had-and has-with his brother, Bobby. "After we were released from the state system, I lost track of Bobby, and not until 1988 did I find him, but then lost him again for another 17 years. In 2005, after I published the book I one day vowed to one day write when I was a kid, I set out to find my missing

brother of more than 46 years. I found him and brought him home. We now share a home in West Creek, New Jersey, vowing never to be divided again."

"HARD CANDY" has been the culmination of a long, hard road since Carroll's days as a state ward. When he was finally released at the age of 16, he had the equivalent of a second grade education. He ended up in California and earned his diploma from Hollywood High School, then went on to earn an associate's degree in sociology and then transferred to California State University for another two years. Right after college, Carroll open his own electrical contracting business in Hollywood, California, which supported him for 30 years.

That's when he found Bobby and started working on the book. He spent six years doing research, and another seven years writing, for a total of 12 revisions. "Facing my past was difficult," says the author. "I cried a lot, and the nightmares began all over again. But I persevered, and it ended up being a very cathartic process-better than therapy. Today, I'm at peace with myself.

The book is available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, on numerous online book retailers, and on Mr. Carroll's website: www.hardcandyblog.com (Available in hardcover, Kindle, Nook and PDF.)

Help Prevent Child Abuse: If you suspect a case of child abuse or neglect, contact your local police, department of child protective services or family and children services, or National Child Abuse Hotline (Childhelp USA) 800-4-A-Child or 800-422-4453(24hours) www.childhelpusa.org

To set up an interview with "HARD CANDY" author Charles A. Carroll, you may contact him at 442-248-2917 or bearwitnesspress1@gmail.com