

**CHILDREN WHO KILL
THEIR PARENTS**

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B.Ed., University of Lethbridge, 1984

A One-Credit Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Education
of The University of Lethbridge
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF EDUCATION

LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA

September, 1992

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Definitions of Terms.....	3
2. PERSPECTIVES ON PARRICIDE.....	6
Historical Roots.....	6
Traditional Perspectives.....	8
Contemporary Perspectives.....	9
3. MOTIVES FOR PARRICIDE.....	11
Case Study 1.....	12
Case Study 2.....	16
Case Study 3.....	20
4. VICTIMS OF ABUSE.....	26
Wife Abuse.....	26
Power-Based Theories.....	27
Learning Theories.....	27
Child Abuse.....	28
Factors Precipitating Child Abuse.....	29
5. ESCAPING ABUSE.....	32
Case Study 4.....	32
Case Study 5.....	39
Case Study 6.....	49

6.	WHO COMMITS PARRICIDE?.....	61
	Sons Who Kill Their Fathers.....	62
	Daughters Who Kill Their Fathers.....	63
	Sons Who Kill Their Mothers.....	63
	Daughters Who Kill Their Mothers.....	64
	Children Who Kill Both Parents.....	65
7.	DISCUSSION, SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS.....	66
	What Schools Can Do.....	69
	Detection.....	70
	Reporting.....	70
	Helping Children Cope With and Overcome	
	The Effects of Abuse.....	70
	Prevention.....	71
	Community Cooperation.....	72
	References.....	73
	Appendix.....	76

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

People in our society are more likely to be physically assaulted or killed in their own homes by other family members than anywhere else, or by anyone else. This fact is not only true today, but is true throughout the history of Canada, the United States, Western Europe and many other countries and societies around the globe. With this in mind, can we consider the family to be society's most violent social institution? Can we agree with some observers (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1976) when they propose that violence in the family is more common than love?

Indeed, families have been violent for centuries. Only recently have we discovered and attended to family violence as a serious family and social problem. Different types of family violence have been identified and examined throughout the past twenty years. However, in the light of our knowledge, family life remains to be idealized. The home remains to be considered a haven of security and tranquility. Incidents of family violence continue to be drastically underreported. This leads one family violence expert Murray Straus to remark, "We don't like to say blasphemous things about a sacred institution. The family is an absolutely

central institution that fulfills very important functions, and so there's a natural hesitancy to bad-mouth it."

Rose-colored glasses distort our conception of reality for many individuals. The reality is that the family is not always warm, intimate, and loving. The reality is that the home is not always a safe place.

The focus of this paper will be on children that do not have an idealized conception of the family and home. These children commit the ultimate form of family violence. These children are killers. These children kill their parents.

Parricide, the killing of one's parent, is the kind of killing most of us find difficult to accept, much less understand. The purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of this facet of family violence. Perhaps a close examination of the subject of parricide will provide an explanation as to why such a tragic event may occur. Why a young person even contemplates the unthinkable.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are used in this paper and their definitions are explained here:

Family Violence

Family violence is the maltreatment of one family member by another (Alberta Family and Social Services, 1990).

Wife Abuse

Wife abuse refers to physical, psychological, sexual, verbal and economic violence toward a woman by a man within an intimate relationship, typically a marriage. This ongoing or repeated abuse leads to the loss of dignity, control, and safety as well as the feeling of powerlessness and entrapment (MacLeod, 1987).

Child Abuse

Child abuse is a general term used to describe parental or guardian behavior that results in significant negative emotional or physical consequences for the child (Canadian Medical Association, 1985). Child abuse can take several different forms:

Physical abuse is the intentional application of force to any part of the child's body which causes injury.

Emotional abuse consists primarily of verbal attacks upon the child. Such attacks may include persistent humiliation, rejection or the constant reiteration that the child is useless, bad or stupid. This behavior undermines the child's self-image, sense of worth and self-confidence. Forced isolation, restraint or purposely instilling fear are other behaviors which are emotionally abusive.

Sexual abuse includes any sexual touching, sexual intercourse or sexual exploitation of the child.

Neglect is an act of omission which causes any significant emotional or physical consequences for the child. Physical neglect refers to the failure to meet the physical needs of the child. This includes not providing adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter, health care and protection from harm. Emotional neglect refers specifically to the failure to meet the emotional needs of the child for affection, sense of belonging and self-esteem. This can range from passive indifference to outright rejection (Alberta Family and Social Services, 1990).

Parricide

Parricide is the killing of parent by a son or daughter (Mones, 1991).

Patricide

Patricide is the killing of a father by a son or daughter
(Mones, 1991).

Matricide

Matricide is the killing of a mother by a son or daughter
(Mones, 1991).

CHAPTER 2

Perspectives on Parricide

Historical Roots

In Mycenae, Greece, after the close of the Trojan War, a young man of noble birth murdered his mother. He revealed that he had killed his mother because she had dishonored the family. She had committed adultery and killed her husband.

This young man, named Orestes, was brought to trial. It was to be decided not whether he was guilty of murder, but if he was guilty of un-Greek activities. The jury of twelve was split on their decision: six for acquittal, six against.

It was Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom, who sided with the six jury members in favor of acquittal. Orestes was set free.

* * * *

Parricide is an age-old phenomenon. The ancient Greeks were well versed in parent killing. The story of Orestes, written by two Greek dramatists, Euripides and Aeschylus, is just one reminder of this fact. There is also the story of Oedipus, told by the Greek dramatist Sophocles. Oedipus, the mythic king of Thebes, killed his father, Laius. Oedipus later went on to marry his mother, Jocasta.

The ancient Greeks, so fascinated with murder, coined the term

parricide for the murder of a parent. They also initiated the words matricide and patricide for the murder of a mother or father.

The theme of parricide is also seen in the writings of Shakespeare (Hamlet and King Lear); Dostoevsky (Crime and Punishment and The Brothers Karamazov); Eugene O'Neill (Mourning Becomes Electra) and Albert Camus (The Stranger).

Another very famous story of parricide is that of Lizzie Borden, dating back to 1892. Lizzie, however, was a real person who was arrested for the axe murder of her parents, Andrew and Abby Borden, in Fall River, Massachusetts. The story of Lizzie Borden has inspired at least two dramas, a musical, and numerous books and essays. There is also the unforgettable school-yard rhyme:

Lizzie Borden took an axe
And gave her mother forty whacks;
When she saw what she had done
She gave her father forty-one.

Lizzie Borden was found not guilty because the crime was simply beyond the comprehension of the community. The people of the community could not bring themselves to believe, even with convincing evidence, that prim and proper Lizzie could have done such a thing.

Traditional Perspectives

Numerous traditional theories propose that a child who commits parricide suffers from a specific mental disease, which somehow causes the murder (Ewing, 1990). The folk belief that "something came over him" remains near to the assumption. Unfortunately, observations of mental patients in general, contradicts this belief. In actuality, mental patients are less likely to be homicidal than the normal population (Leyton, 1990).

Another widely-held notion of our times is that aggressive, even homicidal, behavior is somehow biologically inherited. The behavior is transmitted from parent to child through some genetic code. To the contrary, cases of adopted children who have committed parricide, suggest that violent behavior is transmitted through a social or psychological mechanism (Leyton, 1990).

Sociologists have long suggested that most homicides are acts of the poor, the disenfranchised, and the oppressed (Mones, 1991). The rich and privileged apparently have alternative means of redress. However, an analysis of all available cases shows clearly that parricide is most likely to occur in ambitious, even prosperous families.

Contemporary Perspectives

Parricide appears largely to have escaped the attention of modern research. Very little is written on the topic. Newspaper and magazine coverage is minimal. What little information that has been reported focuses on the lurid details of the homicide.

The few professionals who have researched and written about juvenile parricide emphasize a common theme: children who kill a parent generally have witnessed or have been directly victimized by domestic violence. The form of abuse varies, however, it is clearly evident.

Dr. Emanuel Tanay, a leading American psychiatric authority on the subject, says that parricide may be adaptive and often has a large element of self-preservation. He concludes that it is generally a reaction to parental cruelty and abuse, a last resort effort to protect oneself.

Similarly, Paul Mones, the only United States attorney who specializes in parricide cases, states that the child who commits parricide is taking the action which is most likely to prevent further abuse. Indeed, the act is one of self-preservation. Mones emphasizes that not all children who kill their parents are victims of abuse. He states that some of these children are acutely psychotic, or are motivated by greed or pure maliciousness. However, through his personal experience of helping nearly one

hundred children throughout the nation in the last ten years, he concludes that such parricides represent an insignificant fraction of the total. Abuse remains to be the common denominator.

Elliott Leyton, a noted Canadian anthropologist and international police and media consultant on homicide, proposes that it is the cultural and familial context that orchestrates violence such as parricide. In analyzing numerous parricide cases, he concludes that at one level there is a great diversity of motive and cause, however, at another level regularities occur. Briefly, he states that parricide tends to occur in niches in the social structure in which parents may become heavily dependent on their children for their own social needs. This reversed dependence leads the parents, often quite unconsciously, to obliterate the identity, to deny the autonomy, of their children. The children become vehicles for their own aspirations. This family may restrict the options of the children to the point where there seems to be no escape from the parental regime. If the family has validated violence as an acceptable solution to a variety of personal problems, a dangerous milieu has been created. The milieu in which parricide is considered the only escape from obliteration.

CHAPTER 3

Motives For Parricide

Each human family is a unique and complex machine. It operates and malfunctions in it's own way. Consequently, families can create a rich variety of homicidal motives. This chapter will explore possible motives for parricide.

As revealed in Chapter 2, children who kill a parent have generally been severely victimized by that parent. Indeed, abuse appears to be the number one motive for the killing of one's parent. Also, the killing of a parent to protect the other parent from abuse is not an uncommon scenario. For this reason a large part of this paper, Chapter 4 and 5, will focus on abuse and the need to escape abuse as a motive for parricide.

Numerous parricide cases are not clearly motivated. The reasons for the killings seen rooted in the juvenile killer's own psychopathology. The following case studies illustrate this assumption.

CASE STUDY 1

STEPHEN

In the early morning hours of August 1, 1989, tragedy struck the Airdrie, Alberta neighborhood. Stephen Arnold Ford had just silenced his parents, Steve and Kathleen, forever. Stephen used an axe to hack his father to death with up to 22 blows. He then attacked his mother, ending her life with another 20 blows.

* * * *

The Ford family lived on a tree-lined street in the quiet community of Airdrie, Alberta. They appeared to be an average family. The parents commuted to good jobs in Calgary. Their children, Stephen aged 17 and Jennifer aged 15, attended the local high school. "They had a few family fights, nothing out of the ordinary," recalls neighbor Diane Card. However, inside the house, a fuse was burning short inside Stephen.

Stephen was abused by a babysitter when he was young. He needed medical treatment for severe nightmares at the age of nine. A physician's report stated that he was so frightened when he went to bed at night that he often wished he were dead. One year later he made the first of two suicide attempts. He slashed his wrists with a knife.

Stephen became a rebellious teen. He would stay out late at

night, sometimes using alcohol or drugs. He then turned to crime. Initially, it was breaking and entering. Then, armed robbery.

As the tension mounted the situation in the household worsened. Verbal battles occurred nightly. Neighbors reported overhearing loud arguments over Stephen's use of the family car. Kathleen began suffering from nightmares. She needed Valium to calm her frazzled nerves. Steve developed heart problems.

At 17, Stephen attempted suicide for a second time. He took 62 of his mother's anti-depressants. A friend found Stephen and his suicide note and called an ambulance. The doctors doubted his chances of survival. After his recovery, he underwent psychiatric treatment for one week. Another friend said that Stephen wanted help, "I know he did, deep down inside."

The Fords turned to a counselor for assistance. Together they set up house rules to help Stephen behave. They moved to the Calgary subdivision of Douglasdale, hoping to begin anew. Things did not get better. A friend of Stephen's suggested that Kathleen and Steve were afraid to push discipline too far. They feared that Stephen would attempt suicide again or commit another crime.

After Stephen quit school, he was diagnosed as having an anti-social personality. He also possessed abnormal thrill-seeking behaviors. Then came an armed robbery charge. His school was also investigating him for assaulting his sister.

Jennifer recalled that around that time Stephen had nightly arguments with his parents, "I just remember hearing them yelling at each other. I don't remember any hitting or threatening or anything."

* * * *

The evening of the murder, Jennifer was babysitting overnight for a cousin in northwest Calgary. Friends of the family now speculate that if she would have been at home, she would have died along with her parents. Her father was to pick her up the next morning at 9:30. However, he never arrived.

Stephen was in the mood to party that night. He and three other friends planned a typical night - beer and movies. They watched the movie, Bat 21, a violent depiction of the Vietnam war. Kathleen and Steve Ford slept upstairs.

After his friends left, Stephen continued to drink and watch television. It came to an end when one of the family dogs urinated on his feet. According to a statement he made later to a relative, that's when he lost it.

The transcripts at his preliminary hearing reported Stephen saying that an axe was the first things that came to his mind. Kathleen and Steve were the second. The transcript also revealed Stephen telling an aunt, "They didn't matter at the time. They were just people...it only mattered later".

After the murder, Stephen packed a few belonging. He stole his parents' money and credit cards, took a shotgun for protection from police and headed east on the Trans-Canada Highway in his mother's car. He stopped in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and went on a mini-shopping spree with his father's Visa card. He then proceeded to Moose Jaw where he took a small room at the Park Lodge Motel.

Around suppertime that evening, Stephen phoned the RCMP in Airdrie. He confessed to killing his parents. He told the officer taking the call, "I don't want to be hurt. I want to be treated good."

An hour before Stephen's confession, Jennifer had returned home. The telephone had signaled busy all day. She feared that things were not right. She recalled walking into her parents' room, "I saw my parents. They were lying on their bed. They were dead. I turned around and I ran out."

* * * *

According to Stephen's friends, the delinquency and attempted suicides were Stephen's cries for help. The help he did get wasn't enough and wasn't in time. (Zurowski, 1991)

CASE STUDY 2

ERIC AND TYRONE

On January 19, 1988, police were called to the Madsen residence in Mission, British Columbia. There they found the bodies of Karsten Madsen, 38, wife Leny, 30, and children Jason, 11, and Michelle, 9. All had died two days earlier of multiple axe wounds to the head. Tyrone Borglund and Eric Peever were arrested for the murder of their family.

* * * *

Eric Peever, 18, is Mr. Madsen's son by a previous marriage. Tyrone Borglund, 17, is his foster child of three years. The two planned and carried out the destruction of their whole family. The absence of a motive puzzles psychiatrists and criminologists alike.

Individual histories revealed that both the killers were emotionally scarred. For Tyrone, it was a history of rejection. At birth he was given up for adoption by his 15-year-old mother. He was adopted by Arthur Borglund. Tyrone thrived in his new home until Mr. Borglund's marriage ended in divorce. After the wife remarried, she severed all contact with her then nine-year-old adopted son. Shortly after, Mr. Borglund suffered a stroke leaving him partially paralyzed and unable to work.

Tyrone and his father quarreled constantly at home. According

to a psychiatrist an "extremely negative and aggressive relationship" developed between the two. The relationship ended in 1985 when Tyrone threatened his father during a violent argument. "He told me if I hit him then I wouldn't wake up in the morning," said Mr. Borglund. The very next day Mr. Borglund went to see his social worker and requested that Tyrone be put in a foster home. Tyrone was taken in by Karsten and Leny Madsen.

Eric had experienced a somewhat milder history of rejection. He spent his earlier years living with his natural mother, Sharon Peever, in Fort St. John. When he became too difficult for her to handle she requested that he live with his father. In 1986 he joined the Madsens, and the father he hadn't seen since he was three-years-old.

A year later Eric's younger brother, Michael, 15, also joined the Madsen family. Lisa Henry, a close friend of Mrs. Madsen, reported that Sharon Peever severed all ties with her sons, "They never even received birthday cards or Christmas cards from their mother."

Mr. and Mrs. Madsen were already busy raising Jason, Leny's son by a previous common-law marriage, and their own daughter Michelle. The older boys were thought to have resented the favoritism supposedly bestowed on the younger children. The resentment may have lead to an unconscious hatred of their new parents.

Tyrone grew suspicious that the Madsens had taken him in only for the \$800 a month they received from Social Services to care for him. He would eavesdrop on their conversations to hear what they said about him. He also became increasingly aggressive toward Mrs. Madsen. A relative revealed that Mrs. Madsen feared Tyrone, especially after he began sleeping with a machete under his bed. He said he was going to kill her in her sleep and she lay awake at nights worrying about it.

Neighbors say that Tyrone ran away from home four times. Each time he asked to be returned. Social Services suggested that Tyrone's behavioral problems were deeper than first suspected and he required outside help. However, the Madsens decided to keep him in their care.

* * * *

On Friday, January 15, Mrs. Madsen took Tyrone, Eric and Michael to the RCMP station for questioning. They were suspects in a break-and-enter at a nearby home. Although no charges were laid, Mr. Madsen grounded the boys for the weekend. Eric was already angry because Tyrone had told him that Mr. Madsen was planning on sending him back to live with his mother. When the boys noticed Mr. Madsen was carrying \$600 in his wallet, they began to plan the robbery and murder.

The next evening, as the family retired for the night, the

three began building their courage. Downstairs they were drinking, doing push-ups and slashing at pillows with the weapons they had gathered. Finally, Eric with a hatchet in his hand, and Tyrone with an axe, made their way to Leny and Karsten's bedroom.

Tyrone delivered all four fatal blows. Eric, after striking once at Mrs. Madsen, ran back downstairs in panic. Tyrone screamed, "Shut up, you bitch," as Mrs. Madsen begged for her life. Jason awakened and ran into his parents room. Tyrone struck him down as he cried, "What are you doing to my mother?" Michelle's life was taken shortly after.

* * * *

Eric, Tyrone and Michael were arrested in Fort St. John three days later. Although Michael was an accomplice in the slayings, his freedom was granted in exchange of his testimony. Eric and Tyrone were found guilty on all four counts of first-degree murder. They were sentenced to life in prison without the chance of parole for 25 years. (Johnson, 1989)

CASE STUDY 3

JEREMY

The precise details of the murders remain unknown. Although charged with the killings of five family members, Jeremy Bamber has yet to confess.

* * * *

Nevill and June Bamber lived in their beautiful eighteenth-century mansion on the several hundred acres of White House Farm. They lived the "good" life in the tranquility and beauty of the Essex countryside. Nevill was a justice of the peace and a magistrate and June kept active in village church affairs.

The Bammers adopted two children, Jeremy and Sheila. The true quality of their family life will never be known. Indeed, there are several hints that the Bammers may have maintained a sterile emotional atmosphere, however, we can only speculate.

Sheila, a divorced mother of twin sons, had a documented history of mental illness and drug abuse. She worked briefly as a model for a London agency. After the murders, the head of the agency described Sheila as being "financially and emotionally alone." She explained that Sheila had worked for them only four or five times before she left the agency in April of 1981. Shortly after they received an application for Sheila from a domestic

agency. They were saddened to see that Sheila's parents were unwilling to spare her the social and physical ordeal of domestic work. Jeremy claimed that his parents considered Sheila to be a poor mother. Rather than offering to take her six-year-old twins in, they discussed placing them in foster homes.

There was a puritanical religious streak in June Bamber that unmistakably influenced her family. Sheila's psychiatrist revealed to the courts the details of Sheila's fixation with evil. When Sheila was seventeen June found her in a rather sexually provoking incident. She called her the devil's child. Obviously the concept of the devil's child lingered in Sheila's mind. When she was admitted into the hospital in August of 1983, she insisted that she should have some kind of exorcism or she would want to die.

Jeremy explained that it was not easy trying to cope with his mother's interest in religion. When his girlfriend, Julie Mugford, began to spend the night with him, June strongly disapproved. She believed that her son's relationship was purely sexual and Julie was just a loose woman and a harlot. Julie told the court of the incident explaining how upset and offended she was.

Mrs. Mugford, The Times noted, claimed that Jeremy told her his mother would allow no opinions in the household. He described her as a religious maniac and blamed her for making his sister mad.

Jeremy's uncle informed the courts of Jeremy's stormy

relationship with his parents. He recalled a conversation he had with Jeremy when Jeremy blurted out that he could easily kill his parents. He emphasized that Jeremy had said he could "easily" kill his parents.

* * * *

According to the testimony of Julie Mugford, Jeremy initially planned to tranquilize his parents and then shoot them. He would then set the house on fire. His second plan was to make it appear that his mentally disturbed sister has shot their parents. He would get in and out of the house without leaving a trace.

Julie also explained how Jeremy tested his ability to kill. He strangled several rats with his bare hands. Apparently he was heartened by his performance and decided to go ahead with the murders.

Jeremy fired his .22-calibre Anschutz Semiautomatic rifle twenty-five times into the bodies of his parents, sister and her twin sons. According to the Pathologist report, the first four shots inflicted upon his father failed to disable him. Mr. Bamber suffered two black eyes and extensive bruising to his face indicating a violent confrontation. Jeremy ended the struggle with four fatal shots to his father's head. The twins were killed in their beds as they slept.

The Pathologist report concluded that Jeremy shot his sister

once through the neck. He then placed the rifle across her chest suggesting she had killed the family and then shot herself. Realizing the rifle with the bulky silencer was too long for her to have shot herself, he removed it and placed it back into the family's gun cabinet. Jeremy then shot his sister one more time through the neck. Once again he placed the rifle across her chest and left the family Bible beside her.

Jeremy then returned to his own home and called the police. He told them that while having a telephone conversation with his father, his father suddenly shouted, "Please come over, your sister has gone crazy and has got a gun." His carefully orchestrated plans were a success. The evidence clearly indicated that Sheila had committed the crime. The police virtually closed the investigation.

Hours after the murder Jeremy bragged to his girlfriend that he should have been an actor. He authorized the police to remove and destroy any damaged or bloodstained objects from the house. He removed the family silver, china, paintings and guns indicating he would need money to pay death duties. For the family funeral he treated himself to an expensive designer suit and an extravagant tie. The evening after the funeral, Jeremy and his girlfriend got drunk on champagne and cocktails.

Jeremy's spending spree continued. He began to spend money in expensive restaurants and hotels in England and Holland. He eagerly

awaited his million-pound inheritance.

As the days passed Julie Mugford's loyalty to Jeremy diminished. She later explained how she was feeling the guilt for both of them. Jeremy professed no guilt. She went to the police and reported her conversations with Jeremy.

* * * *

On September 9, 1985, Jeremy Bamber was charged with all five murders. The judge, in handing down five life sentences, told Jeremy that his actions in planning and carrying out the killing of five members of his family was evil almost beyond belief. He thought Jeremy killed his family "partly out of greed" because although he was well off for his age, he was impatient for more money and possessions. Jeremy still protests his innocence. (Leyton, 1990)

Commentary

Can we conclude that these children who committed parricide were acutely psychotic? Indeed, the evidence suggests they were. However, some might suggest there were other motives behind their behavior.

Perhaps Stephen blamed his parents for the abuse visited upon him by his babysitter. His severe nightmares could have been a

result of this abuse. Stephen's delinquent behavior and suicide attempts may have been cries for the attention he so desperately needed. Was Stephen angrily lashing out at his unattentive parents when he ended their lives?

Eric and Tyrone had experienced a great deal of neglect before they entered the Madsen's family. Perhaps they believed that the Madsens truly rejected them as well. Friends and relatives assumed the boys resented the favoritism supposedly bestowed on the younger children in the family. Could this fear of further rejection and resentment have motivated the boys to annihilate their entire family?

Jeremy stated that his mother was a religious fanatic. Could her behavior have caused extreme anxiety within the family? Could Jeremy have been attempting to escape this anxiety when he brutally lashed out his family? Or could it have been pure maliciousness and greed that motivated his behavior?

We can only speculate.

CHAPTER 4

Victims of Abuse

Violence against women and children of all socio-economic and cultural groups has been acknowledged as one of the most serious problems of today's society.

Wife Abuse

Wife abuse refers to physical, psychological or sexual abuse of a woman by a man within an intimate relationship, typically a marriage. The abuse is such that the survival and security of the abused is endangered.

A report, *Battered But Not Beaten: Preventing Wife Abuse In Canada*, published in 1987, estimates that one in eight women living with a male partner experiences some kind of abuse from their partners. Police estimate that they become involved in only 10% of wife abuse incidents.

Homicides involving family members accounted for approximately 40% of solved homicide cases in Canada between the years 1974 and 1987 (Statistics Canada 1988). Men who killed their wives or common-law partners accounted for 37% of the offenders.

There is no clear explanation as to why men abuse their

partners. Despite the difficulty in understanding wife abuse, two major types of explanation have emerged over the last decade. Each explanation will be summarized in the sections that follow.

1. Power-Based Theories

Theorists from this school propose that violence against women is generally socially created. Society's power structure makes men dominant over women. It has created separate and unequal roles for men and women. Male dominance is also reinforced through institutional rules and structures. Staff members from the Women's Research Centre in Vancouver explain: "Wife assault is a reality in our society because men have the socially ascribed authority to make the rules in marriage; and because violence against their wives is accepted in the eyes of society" (cited in MacLeod, 1987). Further research on power dynamics suggests that in families where the woman is dominant in terms of decision-making or earning power, or where the woman is perceived to be superior in some other way, the male often uses violence to shift the balance of power (NiCarthy, 1986).

2. Learning Theories

Learning theorists basically argue that violence breeds

violence. Witnessing or suffering violence teaches people to use violence to try to solve problems or deal with stress (MacLeod, 1987).

As many as 80% of children of abused women witness the abuse of their mothers (Sinclair, 1985). Indirectly, they also become victims. They grow up in a family atmosphere of tension, fear, and intimidation. They become confused about intimate relationships. If the woman decides to leave her abusive partner, the child's living arrangements are dramatically affected. The separation and divorce can have negative effects on the child's development. The child may experience guilt about positive feelings for their father or be anxious and fearful about contact with him.

Child Abuse

Child abuse is a general term used to describe parental or guardian behavior that results in significant negative emotional or physical consequences for the child.

Children living in homes where men abuse their partners are at risk of being abused themselves. Research has indicated that in one out of three families where the mother is abused, the children are also directly abused. The children who witness the abuse of their mothers and are also abused themselves, demonstrate the most

negative long-term consequences (Hughes, 1982; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980).

Studies conducted on abused women have documented that children may also be at risk of abuse by their mothers. The cumulative stress of being abused may diminish the mother's coping skills and undermine her confidence as a parent (Bowker, 1988).

It is estimated that in Canada one in five children experience some form of abuse. The true prevalence of child abuse in general is difficult to determine because of the private nature of family interactions and the lack of a commonly accepted definition.

In 1984, the Report of the Badgley Commission estimated that one in four girls and one in ten boys are sexually abused before they reach the age of 18. In over 75% of the cases, the perpetrator was a family member or someone well known to the victim. Most child sexual abuse is committed by males.

Dr. Marilyn Heins of the University of Arizona College of Medicine groups the factors precipitating child abuse into four categories (cited in Check, 1989):

1. A parent who has the potential to abuse a child. Often this parent is or has been a victim of abuse herself, is isolated, does not trust others, and has unrealistic expectations of children.
2. A child who exhibits behavior that elicits a strong

correction reaction from a parent. Typically, such behavior includes crying in an infant or disobedience in an older child.

3. A stressful situation or incident.
4. A society in which corporal punishment is viewed as an acceptable means of discipline.

Dr. Heins suggests that all parents have the potential to abuse.

"But most of us keep our murderous capabilities in check because we have impulse control, inner resources, and support systems" (cited in Check, 1989, p. 42).

The Canadian Child Welfare Act states that, "any person who has reasonable and probable grounds to believe and believes that a child is in need of protective services shall forthwith report the matter to a director." Each province has laws which describe conditions and behaviors considered serious enough to require the government or its agent to intervene. However, despite the law, it is believed that many cases are never reported.

Children who are abused may exhibit various forms of impairment. For example:

- their general health may be negatively affected.
- they may experience learning disabilities or be permanently disabled.
- they may have a poor self concept and low self-esteem.

- they may learn it is OK to hurt those they love.
- they may become mistrustful.
- if sexually abused, they may become confused about their sexuality.
- they may feel victimized and powerless.

Research indicates that the response of children to witnessing abuse or being directly abused differs greatly. The duration and severity of the abuse is a significant factor. Protective factors such as a good relationship with the mother, a good network of social support outside the family, and the resilience of the individual child, can influence the degree of negative impact on the child (Staus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980).

The effects of child abuse may be manifested in a variety of behaviors, such as running away, prostitution, aggressiveness, submissiveness, and depression. Even more tragic, some abused children commit suicide and some abused children commit parricide.

CHAPTER 5

Escaping Abuse

There is a definite correlation between child abuse and parricide. In fact, the majority of children who kill a parent have been severely victimized by that parent.

This chapter presents three case studies on children who have committed parricide to escape abuse. Mark depicts a child who has experienced physical and emotional neglect from the time he was a small child. Cindy brings to us a story of incest, the sexual abuse of a young girl by her own father. A tragic story of extreme physical and psychological abuse is seen in the life experiences of Michael.

CASE STUDY 4

Mark

On June 1, 1985, Mark Z. was arrested for the murders of his mother and sister. Autopsy reports revealed that Mrs. Z. had been shot twice. Mark's sister, Tanya, had been shot approximately 11 times. The weapon used was a 22 calibre rifle taken from a gun case within the home.

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Mark's evidence and that of psychiatrists established the background facts leading up to the offense. There appeared to be general agreement as to the physical, family, and mental history of the offender.

Mark lived with his mother, father, older half-brother Michael and younger sister Tanya. He recalls a problematic and painful childhood. He believed that his parents showed him little love or affection. Despite efforts to please, Mark often felt put down by his parents. According to Mark, the only time he received attention was when he did something wrong. Then he would be disciplined.

The discipline Mark's parents imposed upon him usually took the form of grounding. "Excessive" was the term Mark used to describe the discipline. One example he provided was when he was suspended from school two weeks prior to the end of the term. As punishment, his parents forbid him to ride his bike or go fishing for the entire summer.

By the time Mark reached the first grade, Mrs. Z. slept in every morning. Therefore, he had to get ready for school alone and prepare breakfast for himself and his sister. The situation became progressively worse as Mrs. Z. began staying in bed during the lunch hour as well.

Mark had a bed-wetting problem until the age of 10. The

problem was largely ignored by his parents. He found it difficult to discuss any of his problems with his parents. He also explained how he was sexually assaulted by a stranger when he was thirteen. Once again, his parents were aware of the incident and it was never discussed.

In May, 1983, Mark's brother, Michael, left home to live with his paternal aunt and uncle. Michael had developed a drug problem and was getting into trouble with the law. As the two boys were very close, Mark missed his brother very much. Mark was also very attached to his aunt and uncle. However, his parents severed all ties with them and forbid Mark to visit them. Mark explained how his parents had become overly protective. He felt he no longer had any freedom.

Mark did very well during the first term of the 1984-85 school year. However, in the second term he began skipping school and his grades declined. His homeroom teacher noticed that he had become sullen, quiet and foul-mouthed. He began smoking.

In March, 1985, he told one of his friends that his parents caught him smoking. He went on to say, "I should take the guns, shoot my parents and sister, get some money, and get the car and just go out and live a free life". His father had a collection of guns in the house and Mark knew how to use a rifle. He and his father had gone hunting over the years.

In May, 1985, Mark had shot a pellet rifle out the back window of his house. As a result, his father locked up all the guns and ammunition. Mark also had thrown his sister against the kitchen wall hard enough to make a hole. He told his friend that he beat up Tanya regularly and hated her. He explained that he never liked her. He believed that she "got away with" more things and she did not have as many chores.

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On the morning of May 31, 1985, Mark stayed at home while his parents went to work. This was the sixth day during May that he skipped school entirely. He spent the morning at home with a friend, Jimmy, watching a movie called "Lone Wolfe McQuade". Jimmy left that afternoon at approximately 2:15.

Once again Mrs. Z. had been informed that Mark had skipped school. Shortly after Jimmy had left, she called home. She yelled at Mark and told him he would be grounded. Mark became very angry. He broke into his father gun case and ammunition box, taking a rifle and ammunition clip to his bedroom. There he sat alone for some time. He later reported thinking, "I wanted to run away. I wanted to kill myself. I wanted to kill them".

His sister came home from school and went to her room. A while later when two of her friends called on her, Mark told them she was not at home. Mrs. Z. returned home about half an hour later.

Leaving the gun in his room, Mark came down the steps to meet her. She immediately started yelling at him for skipping school and told him he would be grounded for a month. Mark walked back up the stairs.

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Court documents revealed the following evidence. When asked what happened after he returned up the stairs, Mark replied:

I went upstairs because I was so mad and got the gun. Q: What did you do? A: I came downstairs, I stopped about three quarters of the way to the bottom and I shot my mom. Q: Then what did you do, Mark? A: I went upstairs and shot my sister too. Q: Do you know how many times you shot your sister? A: No. Q: Was it a lot? A: Yes. Q: I know it is difficult for you but is there any way you can tell His Honour how you were feeling when this was going on? A: Very angry.

After the killing Mark covered his sister. He moved his mother to her bedroom and covered her up. He recalled making a telephone call to a friend. He then took his mother's purse and car keys. He drove to Jellybean Park, where he stayed the night with Jimmy and his parents at their trailer camp. They played video games, went out for ice-cream and went to the beach.

(Regina v. M.A.Z., 1987)

Commentary

Neglect is a form of child abuse. It is defined as an act of omission which causes significant emotional or physical consequences for the child. Emotional neglect refers specifically to the failure to meet the emotional needs of the child for affection, sense of belonging and self-esteem. Physical neglect refers to the failure to meet the physical needs of the child. This includes not providing adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter, health care and protection from harm.

In Mark's mind he was abused. He recalled a very unhappy childhood. According to Mark, his parents showed him little love or affection. Although he tried to please them and gain their affection, his efforts were in vain. He said that the only time he did get their attention was when he did something wrong. Perhaps that is why Mark experienced behavior problems in school and at home. This may all have been cries for attention.

A large part of Mark's unhappiness stemmed from his inability to discuss his problems with his parents. His bed-wetting problem was ignored. The fact that he was sexually assaulted by a stranger was also ignored. Indeed, this indifference shown by Mark's parents would undermine his self-esteem and his sense of belonging. It is not difficult to understand why Mark believed that he was not loved.

Should a child in grade one be expected to get ready for school

alone and make his own breakfast and his sister's as well? Should a child in grade one leave the house in the morning without even so much as a good-bye from his mother or father? Should a child in grade one be expected to come home from school and make his own dinner while his mother stays in bed? Once again, it is not hard to understand why Mark believed that he was not loved. It is not unfair to conclude that Mark truly was emotionally and physically neglected.

The severing of ties between Mark and his brother was also very damaging for Mark. The closeness the brothers shared provided Mark with a sense of family, a sense of belonging. When he was forbidden to see his brother, Mark experienced a great sense of loss. Likewise, his inability to visit his aunt and uncle whom he was also close to, caused Mark much unhappiness.

Mark expressed a need to run away and live a "free" life. His referral to suicide or the killing of his parents may have been what he believed to be the only routes to freedom. Mark was very angry.

CASE STUDY 5

CINDY

"I killed my daddy, I killed my daddy," were the words Cindy Baker cried to the police officer on the other end of the telephone. After the call, she held the body of Henry Baker in her arms. It took two large men to wrest her away from her father's body.

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Henry and Elaine Baker lived with their three daughters in a sprawling home in the nicest neighborhood of a large Southwestern city. Henry was a wealthy businessman and Elaine was a successful interior designer. Their intelligent and beautiful daughters, Cindy, Nancy and Kerri, appeared to live a storybook life. They owned numerous credit cards from fancy department stores and attended an elite private school.

Henry's children were his number-one priority. He loved all three of his daughters very much. Cindy was his favorite. He referred to her as, "My little princess." However, Cindy's life was anything but a fairy tale. She lived a bizarre, nightmarish existence playing the dual roles of favorite daughter and sex slave.

Henry began sexually assaulting Cindy when she was around nine years of age. At this time she was unaware that her father was doing anything wrong. He had always been very physical with his

daughters, tickling and hugging them. When he asked her to rub his neck she thought nothing of it. After she had rubbed his neck he asked her if she wanted him to rub her neck. Cindy said yes. He started rubbing her all over her body, not just her neck. He put his hand in her underwear and rubbed around between her legs. She thought it was just part of the back rub. Henry told her that the back rubs should be kept secret from everybody else in the family. This made Cindy feel very special.

The "back rub" sessions changed just before Cindy was to enter the seventh grade. As she rubbed Henry's shoulders one evening, he told her that she could do something else to make him relax. He unzipped his pants and asked her to hold and rub his penis. She remembers being very frightened by it. After he climaxed, she thought she had hurt him. He held her in his arms and told her how much he loved her for making him feel so good. Although she hated doing this it seemed much less unpleasant than having him squeezing her nipples or sticking his fingers in her vagina.

Cindy was fourteen when Henry first had intercourse with her. They had spent the evening alone at the family beach house. When he came in her room to say good-night, he told her that they were going to try something different now that she was older. He told her to move over and lie on her back. She was very frightened. He said to her, "You know I wouldn't hurt you, princess, don't you?" He opened

her nightgown, and had sex with her.

The next day Henry went to the jewelry store and bought his daughter a \$300 pair of gold earrings. Later that evening they shared a candlelight dinner. Feeling he had won her over, he forced her to have intercourse again. When she told him she felt bad about what they were doing, he told her it was just a way of showing love for each other. He told her how good it made him feel and asked her if it made her feel good. She said yes because she knew that is what he wanted to hear.

After that weekend, Henry didn't touch Cindy for what seemed to her like a long time. She thought that her father had second thoughts about what he was doing or perhaps he was even afraid. When he came in one evening to say good-night he asked her if she was thinking about telling anybody about what they were doing with each other. He told her that talking to anyone would cause terrible problems for the family. Perhaps the police would get involved and he would have to go to jail and she would be taken out of the house. He started to cry and told her how much he loved and needed her. She hadn't seen him cry before. She felt sorry for him and started to cry as well. Several days later, the forced sex started again.

Cindy eventually learned how to cope with what her father was doing to her. From the moment he would lie on top of her, she would drift away. She explained, "It was something like playing

make-believe. You make yourself think you're someone else living in a different place." Cindy was doing it for her family.

When Cindy was fifteen she made her first desperate attempt to escape her father's abuse. She went to the Greyhound station and bought a ticket for California. After several hours on the bus, she became frightened. She got off and called her father. He was obviously very angry when he arrived to pick her up. He told her that he was very worried and that she owed him an apology. She apologized but he didn't seem to care. He didn't talk to her the whole trip back. She went to bed feeling horrible. When he came into her room the next morning, he was no longer angry. He got into bed with her.

Cindy began getting sick often. She had always been very healthy. Now it seemed to take a lot of energy just to get out of bed in the morning. She started getting diarrhea and became so nauseated that she couldn't keep her food down. She would have to go out to vomit between classes. Her immediate fear was that she was pregnant. She went to a clinic and found out she wasn't. The doctor asked her if she was nervous or was worried about something. Cindy couldn't tell her the truth.

One evening Cindy was in her room and couldn't stop crying. She went into the bathroom and got a bottle of pain medication. She took whatever was in the bottle. This was her second attempt to

escape her father's abuse. The next thing she remembered was being in the ambulance with her father.

Cindy was placed in a exclusive private psychiatric hospital to be treated for depression. She remained in a locked ward for forty-five days. It was better than being at home. At least when she went to bed at night, she knew she was safe.

The period immediately after her release from the hospital was what Cindy described as being some of the best times she had experienced in many years. It was the way things should have been. There was no touching. Henry was just a normal father. Unfortunately, these good times did not last long.

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Cindy's mother had gone away on another extended business trip. The older daughters no longer lived at home, so Henry and Cindy would be spending time alone. Nothing had happened with her father for a few months, so Cindy wasn't worried. Things went fine for a few days.

Sunday evening started out normal, in fact good. Henry and Cindy had gone out to eat and talked about Cindy leaving for college. As they were driving home, Henry told Cindy he had bought her a special graduation gift—a car. Cindy was so happy that she cried. Later at home, Cindy went into the living room to watch television. Henry came in and sat very close beside her on the

couch. He told her how much he was going to miss her when she went away to college. Then he put his arms around her and started kissing her neck. She tried to get away but he just held her tighter. He put his hand under her skirt. He begged her, "Please do it tonight." He said it would be the last time. Cindy kept saying no as she desperately tried to pull his hands away from between her legs. She started to cry and finally broke away. As she ran up the steps, Henry yelled things at her he had never said before. He called her a "bitch" and a lot of other names.

Cindy was very angry. She took the shotgun from the closet and went into her room. She thought if her father would come into her room, she would tell him it had to stop. Perhaps the gun would frighten him into leaving her alone. Ten to fifteen minutes later, she heard her father coming up the steps. As the doorknob turned, she raised the gun. Henry took a step into the room and turned to her. Cindy fired the gun before he could say a word. She couldn't remember firing the gun the second time. This third and final attempt to escape her father's abuse was successful.

As Cindy stood over the body of her father, she couldn't believe it was him lying there. She screamed, "Get up! Please get up!" Then she began shaking him and telling him she was sorry. Cindy went back to the closet to find more shells, but there weren't any. She wanted to kill herself. She went back to him and held him

in her arms for a long time. Then she called the police.

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Cindy was charged with manslaughter. She served two and a half years in a state reformatory for youthful offenders. During Christmas of 1989, she returned to her hometown for one reason. She went to visit her father's grave and placed a bouquet of flowers on his headstone. (Mones, 1991)

Commentary

It is estimated that one in four girls and one in ten boys are sexually abused before they reach the age of 18. In over 75% of the cases, the perpetrator is a family member or someone well known to the victim. Most sexual abuse is committed by males. Sexual abuse includes any sexual touching, sexual intercourse or sexual exploitation of the child.

Every year thousand of young girls are sexually abused by their fathers. These abusive fathers frequently suffer from serious psychological problems, specifically a lack of control over sexual and emotional impulses. Incest is not an accident. It is rarely spontaneous, and almost never occurs only once. To the contrary, it usually occurs over the long term, in deliberate, escalating stages.

The security of the sexually abusive father lies in their child's silence. When the child is very young, up to ten years,

silence is guaranteed through the child's pure trust and respect for the parent. It is not until a child is eleven or twelve that she begins to question her parents' behavior. Now the embarrassment and self-blame for what is happening to her ensures passivity. Direct threats may also come into play.

The incestuous behavior and the twisted relationship forced upon Cindy by her father followed the classic pattern of sexual abuse. Her early years of silence were based upon her love and trust for her father. By the time she became aware that her father was sexually abusing her, she was horrified and embarrassed about the whole situation. As happens in so many cases of incest, her father then attempted to buy her silence. When he could see he could no longer exploit his daughter's ignorance and inexperience, he shifted the burden of the relationship onto her shoulders. He told her that talking to anyone about what they were doing would cause terrible problems for the whole family. He told her that if the police would get involved, he could be sent to jail and she could be taken out of the house. In other words, the problem of incest that she helped create, was now her problem. The survival of her family was tied to her continued silence.

Many abused children learn to disengage or remove themselves from reality in order to numb the emotional or physical pain of abuse. Cindy was no exception. While her father was having sex

with her, Cindy would drift off-transport herself to another world, a safer place. She described her "drifting away" as being similar to the game "make-believe". You make yourself think you're someone else living in a different place.

Most abused children take the path of least resistance. They learn to adapt to their environment and accept the abuse inflicted as part of life. They do not run away for the same reasons they don't tell anyone that they're being abused: they fear punishment if caught; they don't want to abandon friends and family; they are economically dependent on their parents. Cindy did attempt to run away, however, like so many other children in her position, fear brought her home.

Suicide is often considered to be an escape route for abused children. If the child has not attempted suicide, there is a high probability it has at least been considered or openly talked about. Cindy's attempt at ending her life proved futile. Not only was she unsuccessful at ending her life, others did not regard her behavior as evidence that something was wrong with Cindy's relationship with her parents. Despite the advances made since in early 1970s in the identification of sexual abuse, it appears that numerous mental health professionals lack a sophisticated understanding of the problem.

Child abuse cuts across all class boundaries. There is no

correlation between a child's economic class and her ability to deal positively with abuse. Wealth is by no means a shield. On the contrary, the middle-class and affluent youth are the least able to protect themselves from parental abuse. The more money a family has, the more they are able to control and maintain privacy in their lives. They generally live in more isolated surrounding, protecting themselves from the scrutiny of others. Teachers, social workers, and police are also less inclined to interfere or take action when the family is respected and powerful. Consequently, the plight of children like Cindy is simply overlooked.

As heinous and injurious as incest is, few daughters ever resist. Most do not report the abuse or talk to others who could help. They react with utmost passivity. They silently carry on with their lives, crippled by emotional problems. Some of these victims pull themselves together, but many do not heal. They may even permit the cycle of sexual abuse to continue into the next generation by marrying men who are just like their abusive fathers. Very few, like Cindy, choose a different solution to such an appalling dilemma. Very few, kill their fathers.

CASE STUDY 6

MICHAEL

In mid-April, 1985, Michael Alborgeden filed a missing person's report on his father, Craig Alborgeden. He reported that he hadn't seen or heard from his father in three days. Three days after the report had been filed, a fisherman found Craig Alborgeden's bullet-riddled body under a boat dock. It was determined that he had died about four days earlier. Five hours later, Michael Alborgeden was arrested for the murder of his father.

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Peggy and Craig Alborgeden began dating in Junior High. From the very beginning Peggy began covering up about her relationship with Craig. She wore heavy makeup not to make herself look more beautiful or grown-up, but to conceal bruises. She avoided physical education class at all cost because it would mean taking a shower and revealing bruises that makeup would not conceal.

Although Peggy thought Craig would stop abusing her, he did not. The abuse Craig inflicted upon her got worse and worse. Each time he lashed out at her, he warned he would kill her if she ever told anybody. Each time he would apologize and promise he would never hit her again.

Peggy became pregnant with Michael before she entered High

School. Even this did not change Craig's behavior. When she was in her ninth month, he punched her so hard in the stomach that her water broke. This complicated the delivery, however, both the baby and mother survived.

When Peggy had turned twenty-one she decided she had enough of Craig's beatings. She called her mother to tell her she was coming home. Unfortunately, Craig overheard the conversation. As she hung up the phone and turned around, he punched her in the face twice. He made Peggy call her mother back to tell her she had changed her mind and would be staying with Craig. When he finally allowed her to see a doctor three days later, she was immediately hospitalized for several days. He had broken her jaw so severely that it had to be wired shut for over two months. This was not her last trip to the hospital. During the next twelve years she would be treated for concussions, broken bones, and cuts. It was from his mother that Michael first learned to conceal the truth about Craig.

Michael did not escape his father's violence. He, too, became a victim. However, Craig never hit Michael in front of his wife. He was afraid she would take action against him. Michael never spoke of the abuse. He also feared that his mother would take some action and Craig would retaliate against him.

Peggy and Craig's marriage finally ended in divorce. Initially Michael lived with his mother. However, four months after the

divorce of his parents, Michael was arrested and put on probation for breaking into a neighbor's empty house. His mother then decided it would be best for Michael to get out of the area and go live with his father.

When Michael went to live with his father, he hoped that there would be a change for the better. Indeed, along with the abuse, he and his father did have good times, even great times. Craig was very generous with Michael. He bought him motorbikes, cars, and several hunting rifles. They went on numerous camping trips together and Michael worked along side his father at the service station.

Michael's new living situation seemed to be happy for a brief, very brief, period of time. After only two or three days of living with his father, things began to change. Once again, Craig became abusive.

Michael did not show any overt signs of depression or other emotional disturbance. He did not turn to drugs or alcohol to release his anxieties. He did not isolate himself. He denied the reality of his relationship with his father. He made up for his homelife by establishing a very active social life. Along with making new friends, he started going steady with a fourteen-year-old girl named Jennifer.

Over time, Michael grew accustomed to Craig's patterns of

behavior. In what Michael referred to as "good" weeks Craig would only kick, hit, or slap him perhaps twice. In the "bad" weeks he would get assaulted every day.

Craig called his special punishments GPs, short for "general purpose". These were the punishments Michael would receive every day regardless of his father's mood. Michael described a GP as a hit for no reason. His father would walk by him and just hit him with a closed fist on the chest, arms or legs. The other hits were inflicted when Craig was angry. Michael also learned to accept death threats as part of his life.

Around the age of ten, Michael no longer cried when his father abused him. Craig wanted his son to "take the punishment like a man." If he did cry after a beating, he would be hit again. Michael learned to block his feelings and deny the pain. The idea of discussing his abuse with anyone was simply out of the question. Not only was he very embarrassed about the situation, but his father constantly reminded him it would be bad for his health to complain to anyone.

A neighbor recalled an abusive incident when Michael was about twelve. Apparently Michael had fixed the fence in the backyard but it was not up to Craig's standards. He tore a board off the fence and hit Michael in the back of the neck with it. The blow knocked Michael to the ground. Another neighbor recalled, "Mike was always

bruised. I saw Craig beat him several times on the back with a garden hose because the boy did not roll up the hose as Craig had wished."

Craig intimidated those who knew him. Few adults ever dared argue with him. If they did try to intervene on Michael's behalf, Craig quickly put a stop to it. A friend, Kenny Stuggans, witnessed Craig abuse Michael countless times. Only once did he have the nerve to stick up for Michael. Craig punched Kenny in the stomach and said, "Keep your fuckin' mouth shut or you're not going to walk away." Kenny never attempted to interfere again.

Michael's girlfriend, Jennifer, soon came to understand Michael's relationship with his father. One day after school, she and another friend were watching television with Michael. Craig came in furious with Michael because he had left some wash unfolded on the couch. To avoid further embarrassment for Michael, she and the friend left the room. Several minutes later, Craig called them back in. He said, "I'm done thumping on him now." Michael had red marks all over his face and neck. This was not the last time Jennifer saw marks on Michael's body.

Jennifer tried to get Michael out of the house as much as possible. She recalled one evening when she called Craig asking permission for Michael to go for a walk. Each time she called, Craig remarked that Michael could go if she would bring along a

leash. Jennifer ignored the comment thinking it was just another way for Craig to belittle his son. However, on this particular evening, Craig sounded different. Knowing he was serious, she found a yellow rope in the garage and took it along with her. She believed this was just another silly little game they would have to play to get Michael out of the house.

When Jennifer arrived at the Alborgeden's, Michael and his father were in the living room. Craig told Jennifer to tie the rope like a lasso and she complied. He put the rope around Michael's neck and made him leave the house on all fours, like a dog. Jennifer, horrified and nervous, held the other end of the rope.

Michael's friends came to a point where they could no longer tolerate Craig's abusive behavior toward Michael. After much persuasion, they convinced Michael to discuss the situation with the school vice-principal, Mr. Hastings. They accompanied him into the office for the interview. As soon as they had taken their seats, Hastings brusquely asked Michael if he was being abused. When Michael didn't respond, he turned to Jennifer and asked her if she thought Michael was being abused. She replied, "Yes, Michael is abused." Hastings turned to Michael and said to him, "I don't like you, and if you're not going to say anything, you can just leave." Michael finally broke down and told the truth. Michael and his friends picked up on the vice-principal's skepticism. Hastings

concluded the visit by saying, "I hope you don't think you could just bullcrap me around just for nothing."

This was not the meeting that Michael and his friends anticipated. Hastings reacted as if Michael had done something wrong. Michael knew now that escaping his father's abuse was almost impossible. He had no where to turn. No one would believe his story.

Several weeks later, Mr. Hastings requested a meeting with Michael and his father. Michael prayed that finally he would get help, that someone would take action against his father. Once again the meeting was not what Michael expected or hoped it to be. Hastings sat on the opposite side of the room with Michael's probation officer, Ms. Haller. Michael sat beside his father. Hastings said to Michael, "Are you being abused in the home?" Michael looked at his father and lowered his head. He quietly replied, "No." The meeting then turned into what Michael described as a "what is wrong with Michael show." The abuse investigation came to an end.

Craig's mental state began to deteriorate after the final divorce papers came through. His depression appeared to worsen daily. He hated his wife for leaving him. He hated himself for pushing her away. Michael continued to be the ever-present target of his father's anger and frustration.

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On that fateful Friday evening, Michael didn't get home until one-thirty in the morning. He had gone skating with friends and was suppose to be home shortly after eleven. He was very late, and he knew his father would be very angry.

When Michael came in his father was lying on the couch, apparently asleep. As Michael quietly walked past to go to his room, his father yelled, "You always gotta push it. Every time I give you a break, you always gotta push it! Come out here!"

Craig then told Michael he had two choices, "You kill me, or I kill you." As Michael continued to walk to his room, he heard the cocking of a rifle. When he turned back, he found himself looking down the barrel of the gun. Craig threatened Michael again. Although he didn't believe his dad was serious, he took the weapon.

Craig began taunting him. "I hate you. You're not my son! I never intended to have you. I hate your mother. If you don't kill me, I'm going to kill you, then kill her, and then kill myself!"

Then, Michael shot his father. He couldn't remember how many times he pulled the trigger. He recalled later, "After I pulled the first time I kind of like blanked out...I just kept pulling it till it stopped."

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Michael received the maximum prison time allowable-four years

for involuntary manslaughter. He would also serve another two years for using a gun in the commission of the crime. Being he was only sixteen at the time, he would serve his time in a facility for youthful offenders.

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About a year before Michael killed his father, he wrote him a poem.

FATHER AND A SON

A father and me is closer than
the wind blowing against a tree
closer than the fish and the sea.
For with no father there would be no me.
And I hope my Father can see that my love
is stronger than if we were
three. Father I am telling you
this because I want you to love me.
So just remember Father these words
are coming from me, "I love you so
much I just hope you can see."

love always,

Michael

After Craig read the poem, he tearfully confided to a friend that he didn't know how to love his son. He wished he could show affection instead of hitting him. He concluded, "But that's the way my dad brought me up. Never in my whole life did my father ever tell me, "I love you." (Mones, 1991)

Commentary

Child abuse is a general term used to describe parental or guardian behavior that results in significant negative emotional or physical consequences for the child. Physical abuse is the intentional application of force to any part of the child's body which causes injury. Emotional abuse consists primarily of verbal attacks upon the child. Such attacks may include persistent humiliation, rejection or constant reiteration that the child is useless, bad or stupid. This behavior undermines the child's self-image, sense of worth and self-confidence.

Traditionally parents have been given unfettered authority over the lives of their children. The adage, "spare the rod and spoil the child" reflects the widely practiced belief that physical punishment is a necessary ingredient in each child's life. Indeed, the exercise of strong parental authority is essential to healthy, normal development. However, for reasons ranging from ignorance and immaturity, emotional illness to sadism, and the fact that they were

mistreated by their own parents, many parents abuse their influence and power over their children. They brutalize their children with their fists and words.

Michael was physically and psychologically brutalized from the time he was very young. As a little boy, he would cry when his father hit or screamed at him. However, when Michael's father decided he should "take his punishment like a man," Michael learned not to cry. If he would cry after he was beaten, he would be hit again. He learned to block his feelings and deny the pain. This was his only means of survival.

In our society physical or sexual abuse is somehow considered to be much more damaging than psychological abuse. However, this assumption is simply not true. Psychological abuse can be just as crippling and have as lasting and debilitating effects. Like Michael, so many children experience physical or sexual abuse combined with psychological abuse. This combination appears to have the most detrimental long-term effects.

We all take a loyalty oath when we are children. We learn that "family business" is sacred and private. This loyalty is crucial to human development because it fosters an individual's identity with his family. Michael didn't tell of his abuse, in short, because nobody tells. He was also very frightened and embarrassed. Like Cindy and so many other abused children, Michael took the path of

least resistance. He learned to adapt to his environment and accept the abuse as part of life.

Numerous adults had either directly or indirectly witnessed Michael's abuse. Few ever attempted to protect him. If someone did attempt to intervene, Michael's father quickly and forcefully put a stop to it. Even the school and social workers failed to help Michael. This convinced him that there was no escaping his father's abuse. No one could help him.

Unfortunately, Michael's story is not unique. There seems to be a tradition in our nation for not becoming involved in the family affairs of others. Therefore, each day people look on as a parent abuses his child. Almost no one intervenes.

When a child like Michael kills his father, we have to wonder if it was only his finger on the trigger. Is a parent not partly responsible for his own demise because of the abuse he inflicts upon his child? Is this parent even more a tragic victim because he himself had been victimized by his own parents? How about the families, friends, neighbors, teachers, and social workers who do not intervene? Are they to be held accountable? We have to wonder.

CHAPTER 6

Who Commits Parricide?

The majority of children who kill their parents are white middle-class boys between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. They do not have a history of delinquency. Most have never been arrested. If they do have a record, it is usually for victimless crimes such as shoplifting or vandalism. They tend to be mediocre or above-average students. They are generally loners, anxious to please their peers and overly polite to adults. They are generally abused children.

Preteens very rarely commit parricide. Those who do kill a parent most often kill their fathers or stepfathers. Spousal or child abuse is the most common motive. The older the children are, the more likely they will kill a parent.

Most abused children who kill their parents suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. This is a psychiatric disorder associated with being exposed to extraordinary events or traumas outside the range of normal human experience. This disorder has also been found in vietnam war veterans, concentration camp victims, and those who have been raped. It is one of the few kinds of psychiatric disorders that is considered a normal response to an

abnormal situation.

Some abused children who commit parricide have also been diagnosed as suffering from what is commonly known as The Battered Child Syndrome. This syndrome characterizes a clinical condition in young children who have received serious physical abuse. Radiologists, orthopedists, pediatricians and social workers have described the condition as unrecognizable trauma. The trauma is a significant cause of childhood disability and death.

Sons Who Kill Their Fathers

Historically violence has played a prominent role in relationships between men. From birth, most males are socialized by cultural attitudes and norms to be aggressive. They are trained to see violence as both an acceptable way to solve a conflict and as a method for asserting authority. Consequently, boys receive the brunt of physical punishment. Many fathers feel it only appropriate to "give as good as they got." Likewise, many fathers believe it is important for a boy to have a few fistfights while he is growing up.

Patricides committed by sons is the most common form of parricide. In light of our history of violence, we should not be surprised by this fact. Most of these boys have been both severely physically and psychologically abused by their fathers. Cases of purely psychological and sexual abuse do exist, however, they often

have a history of early physical abuse. As a result of their father's domination and mistreatment, these boys often develop submissive, non-aggressive personalities. Although they do not appear to be outwardly aggressive, they have definitely learned to solve their problems in violent ways.

Daughters Who Kill Their Fathers

In our culture, women are trained not to be aggressive. Consequently, women of any age are extremely unlikely to kill. The few patricide cases involving daughters is minuscule compared to patricides committed by sons.

Sexual abuse is the most common motive for a young girl to kill her father. A child who kills a sexually abusive father is responding not to one or two incidents, but a series of assaults over her life. While each assault may not be life threatening, the cumulative effect of the assaults is what is integral to understanding the child's perception. When she kills her abusive father she is taking that action that is most likely, in her mind, to prevent further abuse.

Sons Who Kill Their Mothers

Society may understand or at least accept that a boy could be led to kill his father, however, to kill one's mother is

unacceptable, unforgivable. Mothers are regarded as saints and motherhood as inviolate. Sons are suppose to love, obey and protect their mothers. Raising a hand to a mother, let alone killing her, is the ultimate taboo.

Matricides by sons are the second most common form of parricide. Like patricides, matricides generally involve killings of abusive parents.

The boy who kills his mother generally has a history of excessive domination and early physical abuse by his mother. This abuse usually evolves into psychological or sexual abuse. When the beatings stop around the age of thirteen, there is nothing concrete for outsiders to observe.

It is extremely rare for these boys to be able to understand and talk freely about their abuse. Consequently, the motive for matricide is frequently murky. Only those who have witnessed the boy's upbringing can begin to understand.

Daughters Who Kill Their Mothers

Conflict between mothers and daughters can be just as ferocious as that between fathers and sons. However, women in general, fight with words rather than fists. Cultural and biological differences between men and women may help explain why women kill so much less often than men. Although we do not conclusively understand the

phenomenon, the fact remains that matricide by daughters is by far the rarest form of parricide. As the participation of a boyfriend or brother is nearly always a significant factor, we have to wonder, if but for the male, the killing might not have taken place.

Children Who Kill Both Parents

Double parricides are infinitely more complicated to understand than a patricide or matricide. To complicate the situation even more, the child frequently kills a sibling as well. Although these cases involve a higher percentage of severely mentally ill children, the reality is that the majority are not legally insane.

These cases follow a fairly predictable pattern. One parent, usually the father, is abusive. The mother is frequently a co-conspirator in the abuse, actively condoning the father's mistreatment. She informs on her child and takes absolutely no steps in protecting him or her from the father's wrath. Typically, these parents are not interested in their children's well-being. They are not interested in raising independent, secure, and caring children.

Why children lash out at siblings is unclear. Perhaps the child sees all other members of the family as allies of the enemy parent. Whether they are quite passive or fully active, they have become players in the oppressive game.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion, Summary and Implications

The murder of biological kin is a rare event. It appears to have been so in all epochs and in all civilizations. The stunning inadequacy of international agencies responsible for the collection of criminal statistics makes it almost impossible to make any global statistical statements on this form of homicide. Canada is the only country that appears to take this knowledge vacuum seriously. The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics in Ottawa provides detailed and reliable long-term evidence. Table 1 (see appendix) shows the incidence and character of familicide, the killings of one's biological kin, in Canada between 1962 and 1987. It clearly demonstrates that familicide, more specifically parricide, has remained relatively constant over time, especially when population is taken into account.

However rare, parricide remains to be the most profound of taboos in all societies. It directly contravenes a universal religious and cultural principle—children must venerate their parents. It is the definitive act of rebellion against the society's rules and order.

Some perpetrators of parricide are psychotic, however, most are

not. In the vast majority of reported cases, only a small fraction of the children were said to be mentally ill. Likewise, most of these children are not intellectually dull or mentally retarded. Most score near or above average intelligence on IQ tests.

The single most consistent finding in parricide research is that the majority of children who kill a parent have witnessed or have been directly victimized by family violence. Most of us have only a generalized notion of how physically and psychologically devastating violence within the home actually is. Statistics concerning the prevalence of family violence are not accurate due to the average person's overwhelming reluctance to discuss, let alone report, abuse. There are literally millions of people who are beaten and maimed by love ones every year.

Most family violence is perpetrated by parents against their children. Only in very recent history has society openly admitted to the fact that many parents abuse their children. Until the late 1970s, it was like child abuse had never existed before. Children never spoke of their physical, sexual and emotional battering. Relatives, friends, doctors or lawyers ever bothered asking about it. Even today, the problem remains to be shrouded in ignorance and is usually met with silence.

Society is chronically unable to accurately gauge the extent and severity of child abuse. Society also chronically fails to

recognize the degree to which children are vulnerable and unable to protect themselves. Most people consistently overestimate the victims's ability to reveal the abuse and ask for help. Abused children have no choice but to attach themselves to and identify with those who care for them. The overpowering urge to maintain and strengthen the attachment is complicated by feelings of confusion and guilt after an abusive incident. Many of the victims also struggle with overt threats from the abuser. They are told that if they ever tell anyone about the abuse, they will be beaten, killed, or that another member of the family will be hurt. These children do not run away for the same reasons they do not tell anyone that they're being abused; they fear punishment if caught, they don't want to abandon friends and family, they are economically dependent on their parents.

Children learn at an early age that the words of adults carry far more weight than a child's. They learn that adults who are confronted with abuse will commonly deny and lie about their behavior. A child who has heard a parent's lies accepted even once, accepts her fate. Her hope that anyone will rescue her is extinguished.

Abused children learn to adapt to their environment. They rarely complain to their parents and spend a great deal of time trying to please them. Never having known any other life, they may

not even recognize that they are abused. Some learn to survive by figuring out the pattern of mistreatment. Others survive by denying the pain and shutting themselves off from all feelings. They learn to take the path of least resistance.

Some abuse victims go on to lead functional lives although they often have to cope with problems of intense rage, low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. Others are crippled for life. They may suffer drug or alcohol dependency or develop a range of chronic psychiatric disorders. Others allow the violence to continue into the next generation by becoming a victim-spouse or worse, a child abuser.

There some abused children who do not quietly endure their abuse. They do not report their parents or run away. They choose another solution to their dilemma. They choose to confront their parent. They choose to kill their parent. This is the ultimate manifestation of family violence.

What Schools Can Do

Children from violent homes can cause many difficulties for themselves, their classmates and their teachers while in school. Some of these children display their distress by disruptive behavior; some are unable to concentrate and others withdraw into

themselves and seem impossible to reach.

The school is the major institution in our society concerned with the development and welfare of children. There are several roles that it can play in addressing the issue of family violence.

Detection

For some abused children, the school is the only place where they have contact with adults other than their caregivers. The attendance in school may be the only opportunity for the abuse to be detected. School staff must be aware of childhood appearances and behaviors that may be indicators of abuse. They must also know how to respond if a child tells about being abused.

Reporting

It is a legal responsibility to report to child welfare authorities any suspicions that a child is being abused. Schools should have procedures in place to ensure that a child abuse report is carried out properly and quickly.

Helping Children Cope With and Overcome the Effects of Abuse

Many abused children display a great amount of undesirable behavior learned in their families or that comes from the trauma affecting them. Punitive discipline methods by school staff can

intensify the effects of the abuse. Positive experiences, rather than negative, can help overcome the hurt these children are experiencing. The school must provide opportunities for abused children to achieve some success and thereby improve their sense of self worth. If they can experience positive relationships with adults within the school they may learn more positive way to relate to people.

Prevention

Teaching children about child abuse and how to get help for themselves can help prevent or put an end to abuse immediately. There are also numerous initiatives that can help prevent abuse in the long run. Teaching children how to sustain positive human relationships, how to effectively communicate their thoughts and feelings, how to hear others communicate their thoughts and feelings, how to solve problems, make decisions and resolve conflict, will help them develop into mature adults. Teaching about child development and child rearing will help children become parents who are less likely to abuse their children.

Community Cooperation

Although the school can play a significant role in the whole issue of child abuse, it cannot address the problem on its own. A variety of agencies and individuals must work together to alleviate the problem. The complexity and severity of the issue calls for a joint effort.

Family violence is everyone's business. Family violence can be prevented. Indeed, it is one area where each individual can make a difference. Children are often unable to protect themselves from abuse. Therefore, it is the responsibility of adults to intervene on their behalf. By not intervening, adults are actively reinforcing the offending parent's omnipotence as well as the abused child's helplessness.

Societal attitudes must change. Not one more child should be abused by the hand of a parent. Not one more parent should die by the hand of a child.

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Appendix

TABLE 1
INCIDENTS OF MULTIPLE MURDER WITHIN THE FAMILY
BY A SON OR DAUGHTER,
CANADA 1962-1987

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NATURE OF INCIDENT</u>	<u>NUMBER OF INCIDENTS</u>	<u>NUMBER OF VICTIMS</u>
1962	Son killed wife & 1 parent	1	2
1963	Son killed 2 parents & 1 sibling		
	Son killed 2 parents	2	5
1964	None	0	0
1965	Son killed 2 parents		
	Son killed 2 parents & 4 siblings	2	8
1966	Son killed 2 parents		
	Son killed 2 parent		
	Son killed 1 parent & 1 relative	3	6
1967	Son killed 1 parent & 1 relative	1	2
1968	None	0	0
1969	None	0	0

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NATURE OF INCIDENT</u>	<u>NUMBER OF INCIDENTS</u>	<u>NUMBER OF VICTIMS</u>
1970	Son killed 2 parents		
	Son killed 2 parents, 1 sibling & 1 relative	2	6
1971	Son killed 2 parents & 1 sibling	1	3
1972	Son killed 2 parents	1	2
1973	Son killed wife & 1 parent	1	2
1974	Son killed 2 parents & 1 sibling	1	3
1975	Son killed 1 parent & 1 sibling	1	2
1976	Son killed 1 parent & 1 sibling	1	2
1977	None	0	0
1978	None	0	0
1979	Son killed 1 parent & 1 step-parent	1	2
1980	None	0	0
1981	Son killed 2 parents		
	Son killed 2 parents		
	Son killed 2 parents	3	6

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NATURE OF INCIDENT</u>	<u>NUMBER OF INCIDENTS</u>	<u>NUMBER OF VICTIMS</u>
1982	Son killed 2 parents		
	Son killed 2 parents		
	Son killed 2 parents & 1 sibling		
	Daughter killed husband, 1 parent, 1 child	4	10
1983	Son killed 2 parents		
	Son killed 1 parent & 1 relative		
	Son killed 2 parents, 3 siblings, 1 relative		
	Son killed 2 parents	4	12
1984	Son killed 2 parents		
	Son killed 2 parents	2	4
1985	Son killed 1 parent & 1 sibling		
	Son killed 2 parents, 1 sibling & 1 relative		
	Son killed 2 parents & 1 sibling		
	Son killed 2 parents	4	11
1986	None	0	0

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NATURE OF INCIDENT</u>	<u>NUMBER OF INCIDENTS</u>	<u>NUMBER OF VICTIMS</u>
1987	Son killed 2 parents & 1 sibling		
	Daughter killed 1 parent & 1 sibling	2	3
		—	—
	Totals	37	93