

Guiding Hands Adolescent Services, Inc.

Kidnapped Teen Alleges Abuse at 'Boot Camp'

Daily Journal, September 11th, 1996.

A 19-year old Palo Alto woman whose parents hired private investigators to transport her to a "boot camp" for troubled youth has sued the camp and the investigators for abducting her from high school and forcing her to undergo an ordeal of harassment and deprivation in a New Mexico desert.

In Eymil a Pathfinders Way Inc. CV760600, Charleen Eymil said the operators of the camp constantly abused her verbally, harassed her sexually and denied her such basic amenities as privacy, rest regular food, clean clothes and shelter.

Plaintiffs attorney James McManis said his client's parents contacted the Pathfinders wilderness program on the advice of a counselor who was helping them with "a very stormy relationship" with their daughter. They did not, however, know their daughter would be threatened and mistreated.

According to the complaint, the camp hired West Shield Investigations and Security Consultants, of Newport Beach, to bring Eymil, then 17, to New Mexico. Two West Shield employees, posing as detectives for Santa Clara County Child Protective Services, convinced officials at Mid-Peninsula High School that they had to take custody of Eymil for her own protection. After taking her away in an unmarked car, the two "detectives" — including one who was armed — flew Eymil to New Mexico against her will inducing cooperation with threats of physical harm.

Camp officials in New Mexico were no kinder, according to the complaint, which describes militaristic confrontations and taunting and physical abuse. Eymil was forced to eat nothing but rice and lentils for the first week and was denied proper health care after long days of walking over difficult terrain.

Two former West Shield employees, named as defendants in the complaint, were convicted earlier this year on criminal charges of unauthorized use of a badge in the abduction.

A criminal charge against Cheryle Eymil, the plaintiff's mother, who allegedly telephoned the school to tell officials that the "detectives" were going to take her daughter, was dropped "in the interest of justice," according to Santa Clara County Deputy District Attorney Cynthia Sevely. Sevely said Eymil had since reconciled with her parents.

Also named as defendants in the civil complaint were Pathfinders director Mike Parr and other camp officials, the transportation company, West Shield employee Allen Philip Cardoza, and Miriam Boden, the Bay Area consultant who referred Eymil's parents to Pathways.

Calls to Pathfinders were not answered.

Steve Detata, West Shield manager, said if the charges against his former employees were true, the impersonations and threats were conducted against company policy. A youth camp that was also run by Pathfinders in Colorado was investigated by authorities earlier this year after children were said to have been physically abused and denied adequate care.

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