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Former student alleges months of abuse

by John Sullivan
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BOONVILLE - A former student of a behavior modification school in Jamaica alleges that Randall Hinton, who has proposed opening a similar school on the former Kemper Military School property in Boonville, Missouri, abused him and others during his stay there.

Layne Brown, 23, of Kanab, Utah, told the Tribune by phone last night that he met Hinton at Tranquility Bay in Jamaica in 1997. Staff at the facility used excessive restraining tactics, including pepper spray, duct tape and painful holds, as punishment for not following rules, he said.

Brown said he was put in "observation placement," in which he and other new students were forced to lie on their stomachs for more than eight hours a day for days on end with only brief moments to stand and stretch. The goal was to break the will of the teens, he said.

When Brown resisted by standing up to stretch without permission, the staff jumped on him, he said. At least five muscular staff members subdued him, twisting his arms behind his back past the point where his wrists touched his shoulders, Brown said. The staff then used the pepper spray, he said.

Brown estimated such attacks occurred three times a day and for as long as three or four months.

During that time, the teens were forced to defecate and urinate in black garbage bags tied around their waists like diapers, Brown said. Staff members dragged Brown across the cement floor facedown, resulting in a chipped tooth and scars on his shoulders, knees and chin, he said. One staff member used a hard-bristle toilet brush to "scrub" his body and genitals, he said.

"It was totally degrading," said Brown, who added that he eventually stopped resisting and was moved to a less restrictive environment at the school. "I couldn't figure out why somebody would actually do something like that."

Brown named Hinton, as well as Tranquility Bay owner Jay Kay, as among five people involved in the acts in an affidavit Brown's mother, Terry Cameron, prepared after learning about Hinton's plan to open a Boonville operation. Cameron sent the affidavit, as well as videotape of Hinton admitting the use of pepper spray, to Boonville officials and media, she said.

The video was produced by an attorney whose child also claims to have been abused at Tranquility Bay. It is mentioned in a Boonville police report that recommends further investigation of Hinton, business partner Robert Lichfield and World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools.

Tranquility Bay's Kay is the son of Ken Kay, the current president of World Wide.

Founded by Lichfield, a Utah businessman, World Wide consists of seven U.S. schools and two others abroad. Many of the programs are facing intense scrutiny from law enforcement, elected officials and journalists. At least eight affiliated schools and organizations have closed or been shut down over the past decade.

Many parents vouch for the programs' effectiveness, but opponents say they leave children with deep emotional scars.

Cameron said she was tricked into sending her son to Tranquility Bay for treatment of a drug addiction by officials at a referral hospital known as Brightway Adolescent Hospital in St. George, Utah. Brightway, reported to be owned by World Wide, closed in 1998 under pressure from Utah health department officials. Cameron said she spent about $30,000 in tuition during the nine months Brown attended Tranquility Bay.

Lichfield is helping Hinton revive the former Kemper Military School and its crumbling buildings. The Boonville City Council is considering a contract to sell the property to Lichfield's Golden Pond Investments Ltd. of Utah.

Hinton would lease the property and operate a military-style school with his younger brother Russell Hinton. Randall Hinton denies Kemper would be an affiliate of World Wide, although Lichfield is fronting the money for the venture and is one of only three members on World Wide's governing board.

Brown's attorney, Henry Bushkin of Los Angeles, said the business arrangement between Lichfield and Hinton in Boonville is typical of other schools in World Wide's network. Lichfield usually buys property through a limited partnership, then leases it to the school's operator.

Bushkin said Lichfield typically creates one or several more limited partnerships that buy or invest in the company that owns the school property, thus making it extremely difficult for any attorney to trace any wrongdoing to him or his organization. The schools avoid criminal convictions by opening schools in states with little regulation of private residential treatment facilities for children or in other countries, where U.S. law enforcement has little jurisdiction, Bushkin said.

Ken Kay, president of World Wide, denies any connection between World Wide and Lichfield's interest in private boarding schools. Lichfield's investments in the schools are among many business

investments, which also include grocery stores and office buildings, Kay said. Lichfield could not be reached for comment.

Hinton on several occasions has declined to comment on Brown's allegations, saying only that he believes he and the staff at Tranquility Bay helped Brown overcome his problems.

Brown now lives with his mother, who said he is off drugs, but he said he still has nightmares about his experience in Jamaica. "I still have difficulty trusting people," he said.

Return to Home Page

He warned Boonville residents about Hinton. "He acts like a family man … but there is something there deep inside of him that is evil," he said. "He can pull the wool over your eyes really easy."