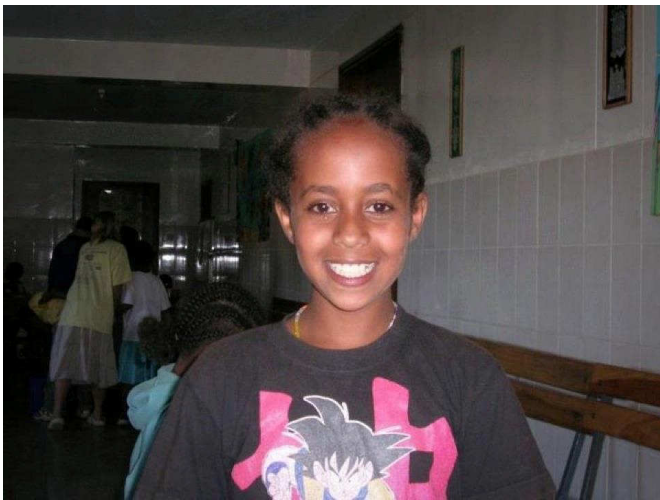


Children's Healthcare Is a Legal Duty, Inc.

136 Blue Heron Place, Lexington KY 40511
Phone 859-255-2200
Web page: www.childrenshealthcare.org

Number 1, 2014 © by CHILD, Inc.
E-mail: admin@childrenshealthcare.org
Written by Rita Swan

Equal rights for children under the law



Hana Williams

Photo courtesy of Ethiopian Community in Seattle

Belief-related deaths of adopted children

Deaths of Washington State children in abusive fundamentalist families were the catalyst for a study by the Children's Ombudsman and then a bill.

In 2011 thirteen-year-old Hana Williams died at her Sedro-Wooley home in Skagit County from horrific, sadistic abuse and neglect. She and a deaf boy named Immanuel had been adopted three years earlier by Carri and Larry Williams from an orphanage in Ethiopia.

Though the Williamses already had seven biological children, acquaintances said they were motivated by evangelical zeal to adopt more. They chose Hana and Immanuel from videos and did not meet them until they were brought to the United States by an escort. After the adoptions were finalized no outsiders knew what was happening within this isolated, homeschooling family.

After Hana's death investigators learned a lot. In the home they found Michael Pearl's book, *To Train Up a Child*, and the plastic plumbing line he

recommends for hitting children and babies only a few months old. The children were like robots and showed no empathy or concern for Hana. One claimed Hana was possessed by demons. Although Immanuel had also been abused, he told investigators that "people like [Hana] got spankings for lying and go into the fires of hell."

Some of the Williamses' punishments mimicked Pearl's "creative," eye-for-an-eye advice. He recommends punishments of cold-water baths, putting children outside in cold weather, depriving them of food, giving them bad-tasting food, and making them sleep on the floor, all of which the parents imposed on Hana. When Hana cut the grass too short, Carri cut off Hana's long hair that she took such pride in. By the day Hana died, her head had been shaved bald three times. When Hana would not wear the clothes the mother picked out, she was forced to stand outside with only a towel around her. Hana and Immanuel were forced to eat sandwiches deliberately soaked in water.

The children told investigators that their mother often said she disliked Hana and didn't want to look at her "grumpy face" but loved her because God made her.

Pearl emphasizes that happy children and parents are the goal of his training program. Grouchiness and rebellion are grave infractions in his world.

In three recent criminal child abuse cases investigators have found the parents were heavily relying on Pearl's books in their discipline practices.

INSIDE

Homeschooling's invisible children	4
Evangelical adoption dangers: book review.	4
Faith death is catalyst for repeal bill	6
Pediatricians oppose exemptions and funding	7
Shades of gray in child neglect	8
Secret lives in extreme religions: book review	9
Oregon's faith-healing homicide: book review.....	10

In fairness the torture of Hana went way beyond anything Pearl specifically recommends in his book. On the other hand I couldn't find that his book sets any limits to punishments and hitting of children.

Training with switches works better on babies

Pearl believes in hitting young children and babies with switches as a training and conditioning technique even if they've done nothing wrong. He admits that his method is harder to use on older children but nevertheless endorses it for that age group. The Williamses thought they had succeeded with their biological children but were frustrated with their older Ethiopian children. Carri told a neighbor that once Hana turned 18 and they could get her out of the house, she was sure she could succeed with training Immanuel. She and Larry tried to change the orphanage's records on Hana's birthday so she would be older.

Parents determined to change her age

After Hana died the birthday became a legal issue because the crime of homicide by abuse applies only if the dead child is under sixteen years old. At trial, defense attorneys tried to prove that Hana was sixteen. Nevertheless, Carri and Larry Williams were convicted of assault of Immanuel, manslaughter of Hana, and for Carri, homicide by abuse. In October, 2013, Larry was sentenced to almost 28 years and Carri to almost 37.

Members of the Seattle Ethiopian community visited Hana's grave many times and had hoped to erect a headstone on it. After the sentencing, however, the Williamses ordered a headstone. The funeral home director told the press it would list her birth year as 1994 rather than 1997 that the orphanage gave as her birth year. Mrs. Williams will likely try again on appeal to show that Hana was 16 and get the homicide by abuse conviction overturned.

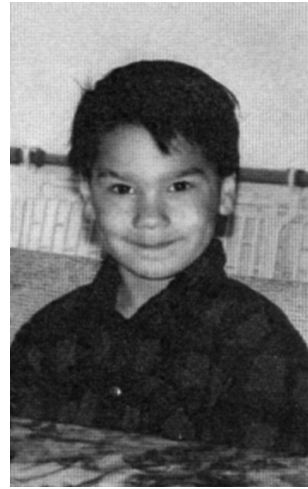
The Ethiopian Community in Seattle at www.ecseattle.org has established the Hana Fund to "prevent cases of abuse and assault in adoptive families."

Many failures in faith-motivated adoptions

More of the horrible details of the Williamses' treatment of Hana and Immanuel are in Kathryn Joyce's excellent article on Slate, "The Tragic Death of Ethiopian Adoptee Hana Williams, and How It Could Happen Again." Joyce interviewed

ten Ethiopian adoptees in the Seattle area, all of whose adoptions failed. The youths all ran away from home or were kicked out by their adoptive parents. Joyce said all were adopted into large families and most, though not all, of the adoptive parents were motivated to adopt by evangelical theology. One woman had adopted 24 children from Ethiopia, several of whom were later kicked out or ran away, but she was praised in the media as "Super Mom."

Parents leave adopted boy dying on the floor



Christopher Forder

Hana got more justice from Washington State than another adopted child, Christopher Forder. Reportedly the father, Robert Forder, called a family meeting as the 8-year-old boy lay dying on the floor in 2002 at their Seabeck-area home. Knowing Christopher's body was covered with scars and bruises, he told

the seven children they had a choice. They could bury their brother in the backyard or call 911 and risk having the state take them away. Then the father went to bed.

His threat would terrify many children especially the four adopted ones. No matter how bad their current home is, they don't want the state to take them to an unknown place.

Like the Williams family, the Forders lived on an isolated, gated acreage and the children were homeschooled.

No medical care for pneumonia

The pathologist gave Christopher's cause of death as pneumonia and manner of death as "undetermined." He was not willing to say with "reasonable medical certainty" that the boy had been abused or neglected even though Christopher had received no medical treatment for the pneumonia, had many scars, cuts and bruises, and his height and weight had dropped from the 75th-95th percentile when he was adopted to the 5th percentile four years later at his death.

The lack of medical treatment was not accidental. A neighbor had come to the Forder home to help once when Christopher was severely injured, but was rebuffed. The Forders did not believe in “Western-style medicine,” but only “home-remedy-type stuff,” she reported. As reported in the 2006



Kimberly Forder

CHILD newsletter issue 3, the Forders were said to be part of the Quiverfull movement, which advocates large families as a religious duty to increase ranks for holy war against secularism.

An unpaid volunteer, a court-appointed special advocate (CASA) for the surviving children, petitioned the court for a hearing to consider removing them.

The Department of Social and Health Services testified at the hearing that the Forders admitted abusing and neglecting their children, but the Department did not think the surviving children were at “imminent risk” of serious harm and also argued that the CASA had no status to petition for removal. The Department won and the children stayed in the Forder home.

Family moves to Liberia, adopts triplets

In 2006 the Forders announced that God was calling them to move to Liberia with their four adopted children, do missionary work, and adopt triplets there. Also that year their grown biological children began talking to law enforcement about the abuse and neglect of Christopher. One said her mother beat Christopher about six times a day. She beat him for not chewing his food correctly and locked him in an animal pen without food, water or blankets. The boy swiped dog food and scraps from the compost pile, court papers say.

When the mother, Kimberly Forder, returned to the United States to get medical treatment for herself, she was arrested and charged with manslaughter and homicide by abuse.

Dad abandons 7 kids at orphanage

Robert promptly left all seven children at a Liberian orphanage and fled. He is believed to be still in Liberia. Later the U.S. State Department

brought the children to Washington State and they were placed in foster homes.

Because the pathologist would not rule that Christopher had been abused or neglected, the state’s case was dependent on the testimony of the siblings. Eventually, serious contradictions were seen in their stories, and the state allowed Kimberly to plead to second-degree manslaughter. She told the judge she should have called 911 for treatment of his illness, her attorney said not calling was “all she was guilty of,” and the prosecutor said her admission met a prosecution goal of Forder’s accepting responsibility. “Christopher Forder had a voice today, and he’s never had one before,” the prosecutor said.

Forder was sentenced to 27 months in jail, released early for being “a model prisoner,” and, according to her father, is seeking to regain custody of her children.

Justice?

Is this justice? Did Christopher have a voice? His mother did not acknowledge nor was she held accountable for the boy’s physical injuries or severe drop in weight and height. Those were the evidence of long-term abuse and neglect.

Inadequate forensic work

If the pathologist had done his job thoroughly, there would have been a better case for the prosecution. Only five counties in Washington State have medical examiners. The rest have coroners, some of whom have no medical qualifications. They may not always delegate cases to forensic pathologists, who are trained to prepare evidence that will stand up in court. The pathologist who did Christopher’s autopsy had been fired years earlier for misconduct and maintaining “a sexually-charged workplace.”

A report and a bill on abuse of adopted kids

In 2012 the Children’s Ombudsman produced a report on “Severe Abuse of Adopted Children.” HB1675 was introduced in 2013 in order to implement some of its recommendations. It was a very modest bill increasing qualifications of those doing preplacement reports and requiring records on failed and subsequent adoptions.

Religious conservatives complain

It also required that the parents' "planned approach to child discipline and punishment" be discussed in preplacement reports. Immediately religious conservatives protested so this exemption was added to the bill: "The fitness of a parent shall not be based on the person's sincerely held religious or philosophical beliefs and practices regarding child discipline and punishment that do not otherwise constitute a violation of state law."

Even as amended, the bill died in both 2013 and 2014.

Sources include *Seattle Times*, Aug. 29, 2006; *Kitsap Sun*, March 5, 2008; *Religion News Blog*, Nov. 1, 2013.

Invisible children

The webpage, Homeschooling's Invisible Children at www.hsinvisiblechildren.org, has scores of gruesome, heartbreaking examples of abuse and neglect of isolated home-schooled children.

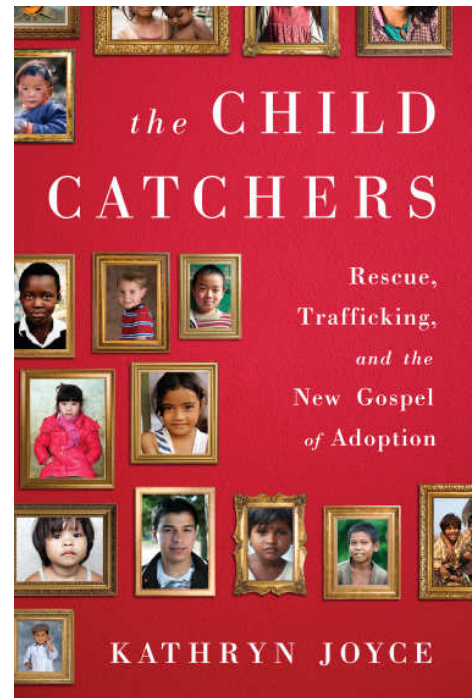
The authors are affiliated with the Coalition for Responsible Home Education, which advocates more protective policies on home schooling.

Like CHILD, the authors and coalition acknowledge that home schooling can be in the best interest of children. It certainly, however, needs more regulation.

Washington State has weak regulations. For example, its home schooling parents do not have to get their children vaccinated, sign an exemption form, or even report to the state whether their children are vaccinated if the children do not enroll in any public school classes.

Adoption: rescuing children or catching them?

Distinguished investigative journalist Kathryn Joyce has followed her book *Quiverfull* about the Christian patriarchy movement with a groundbreaking book on adoption especially as motivated by religion.



The Child Catchers: Rescue, Trafficking, and the New Gospel of Adoption has chapters on both domestic and international adoptions. Joyce finds the root of most problems for both in lack of respect and empathy for the birth parents and the conviction that adoption is a Christian mandate.

Religious doctrine motivates adoption

The evangelical push to adopt children is bolstered by several tenets of their faith. To them foreign adoption is a means of fulfilling "the Great Commission" of Matthew 28: 19, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Also, adoption mirrors the imagery of the saved Christian being born again as "a new creature." As St. Paul writes, "When we were children," we "were in bondage under the elements of the world," but Jesus "redeems them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Galatians 4: 3, 5) Caring for widows and orphans is praised as "pure religion" in James 1:27. And adoption gives pro-life parents the opportunity to show that they care about the welfare of born children as well as fetuses. (And to show that there will be homes for babies born to mothers forced to bring them into the world.)

More useful repentance proposed

Some Southern Baptist clerics promote adoption of black children as a way of repenting for their

denomination's opposition to integration and the civil rights movement. In practice more children from Africa than African-American children are adopted, and Joyce suggests that a more practical repentance for the Southern Baptists would be to work to change the public policies that severely harm the African-Americans already around them.

Suffering of "Arrows for God" divinely ordained

Joyce shows us many injustices when adoption is bolstered with a divine mandate. "Suffering is part of a loving God's plan" and therefore "the existence of orphaned children is not an accident or failure of God's plan," an evangelical adoption agency proclaims. (97) The anguish of an unwed mother pressured to give up her baby, the famine, war, or natural disaster in a foreign land, misrepresentations or mistakes that get children adopted against their birth parents' wishes—well, all that suffering is part of God's plan.

The determination to add to the fold of saved Christians leads easily to wiping out the adopted child's cultural heritage. Adoption is believed to make the child "a new creature." Hopegivers International aims "to rescue one million orphaned, abandoned, and at-risk children who will be sharpened as Arrows for God, and launched back into society to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to the world." (61)

Haitian kids must be rescued from Satan

Many who see themselves as saviors or agents of Christ exaggerate the deprivation in the child's situation before adoption. For His Glory Adoption Outreach claimed that Haiti was "dedicated to Satan in a contractual form," echoing Pat Robertson, who blamed the 2010 earthquake in Haiti on a pact with the devil that Haiti's independence fighters supposedly made to win freedom from France. (9) One mother blogged that she dived into dumpsters to get her four adopted children. Evangelical organizations often refer to children targeted for adoption with the biblical phrase, "the least of these." Biblical imagery of rescue and ransom is also common.

Number of orphans greatly exaggerated

The number of children in need of adoption has been wildly exaggerated into the hundreds of millions. In reality many of the children adopted from foreign countries are not orphans at all. They may

have been placed in a care facility temporarily with parents visiting them frequently until their living circumstances stabilize. They may have a network of kinship care in their home country.

Many parents in foreign countries who give up their children for adoption believe the child is only going away for a short time to get some education



Kathryn Joyce

or English skills and will return to them. In Guatemala there was outright kidnapping of children. In Vietnam adoption facilitators reportedly used poor families' hospital bills as leverage to get new parents, many of them illiterate, to sign over their babies. When countries prohibit out-of-country adoptions, the number of children in "orphanages" plummets—most likely because adoption facilitators are no longer pressuring parents to place them there.

Many care facilities in foreign countries get thousands of dollars for each child they give up for adoption. The adoption brokers and lawyers command large fees for their services.

Evangelical adoption forces have political clout

Stateside, the scope and political clout of the evangelical adoption movement is astounding. In some congregations over a hundred children have been adopted from foreign countries.

When the United Nations called for a moratorium on adopting children from Haiti until oversight

could be instated in accord with the Hague Adoption Convention, some evangelicals leveled vitriolic accusations that UNICEF's agenda was holding children hostage. U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu joined the fray warning that Congress might cut off funding to UNICEF if the agency did not change its position.

The belief that adoptive parents are carrying out Christ's mandate may foreclose rational analysis and concern. The authors of *Orphanology: Awakening to Gospel-centered Adoption and Orphan Care* warn parents not to be swayed by opposition to their "mission": "As our level of obedience to God increases, so will the attack of the enemy." (73)

"The narrative of adoption as child rescue," writes Joyce, "usually drowns out the more critical interpretation—that adoption is an industry driven largely by money and Western demand, justified by a misguided savior complex that blinds Americans to orphans' existing family ties and assumes that tickets to America for a handful of children are an appropriate fix for an entire culture living in poverty." (6)

This is a very powerful book with a varied cast of characters. Some adoptive parents try to act in the best (secular) interest of the child but end up with extreme financial and emotional costs for themselves and their children. Other parents use their adopted children as indentured servants or abuse them. Some evangelical adoption promoters seem purely naïve; others seem to consciously mislead and deceive. And some evangelical promoters of adoption speak out against that "savior complex" and call for more fairness to all.

Should faith healers be allowed to adopt?

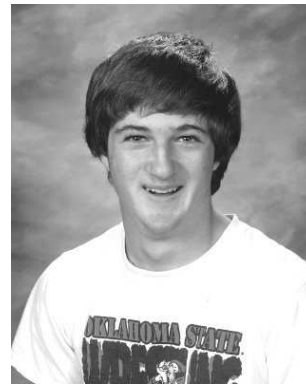
CHILD wrote to Joyce about the state laws prohibiting adoption agencies from "discriminating against" Christian Scientists. In our view parents who do not intend to provide medical care for sick children should not be allowed to adopt children. We know of Christian Science parents in Massachusetts who were required to provide medical attention for their adopted children for only the first year. CHILD has members who were adopted into Christian Science homes and suffered permanent injury from medical neglect. The states never required the adoptive parents to provide any medical care for them.

After legal adoption state has little oversight

The hard fact is that once a child is legally adopted, most states have little oversight of the child's welfare. Few states keep records on failed or subsequent adoptions and such data can be hard to get. The adopted child's records may be closed and his name and social security number may be changed. Homeschooling and international adoption make oversight even more difficult.

Faith death spurs Washington bill

A criminal case in a teen's death was a catalyst for a Washington State bill to repeal a religious defense to criminal mistreatment and religious exemption to neglect.



Zachery Swezey, 17, died in 2009 at his Carlton, Washington, home after his appendix ruptured. His parents were members of the Church of the Firstborn and got him no medical care.

They were charged with manslaughter and criminal mistreatment.

The parents argued that a religious defense for Christian Scientists should be applicable to them and depriving them of it violated their right to due process and equal protection.

Prayer qualifies as medical necessary health care

In 1997 the church got this incredible exemption from criminal mistreatment of children and dependent adults:

It is the intent of the legislature that a person who, in good faith, is furnished Christian Science treatment by a duly accredited Christian Science practitioner in lieu of medical care is not considered deprived of medically necessary health care or abandoned. Revised Code of Washington 9A.42.005

The legislature has designated prayers by Christian Science practitioners to be "medically necessary

health care” for helpless children sick with any disease whatsoever.

The provision was not in either the House or Senate bill on criminal mistreatment. No public hearings were held on it. No committees discussed it. Instead it was added on the initiative of a six-person conference committee tasked with reconciling the House and Senate bills.

Do Christian Science practitioners report medical neglect?

Okanogan County Superior Court Judge Christopher Culp refused to dismiss the charges against the Swezeys. He ruled that the legislature could have had “a rational basis” for giving Christian Scientists and not other faith healers a religious defense to criminal mistreatment because Christian Science practitioners are state-licensed and mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect.

The church’s practitioners, however, are not state-licensed. And while they are mandated by state law to report child abuse and neglect, we strongly doubt they report the Christian Science children deprived of medical care. The laws exempting the parents from neglect and mistreatment charges certainly indicate that such children are not neglected. The church’s lobbyist declined to answer when a reporter asked him if his practitioners report medical neglect.

Equal protection bill introduced

In 2014 Senator Mark Mullet, D-Issaquah, sponsored SB6295 to give children equal protection and send a message that all parents must provide necessary medical care regardless of their religious beliefs. Senators Rodney Tom, Jeannie Darneille, and Jeanne Kohl-Welles co-sponsored it.

The bill repealed the religious exemptions for Christian Scientists at RCW 9A.42.005 and RCW 26.44.020(16) and added this provision to the reporting law:

Cultural and religious child-rearing practices and beliefs that differ from general community standards do not, in and of themselves, create a duty to report under this section unless there is reasonable cause to believe the practices and beliefs pose a danger to the child’s health, welfare, or safety.

Church wants parental freedom to withhold medical care

The Christian Science church opposed the bill, claiming that it “would be severely limiting to the choices of parents throughout the state of Washington, and more importantly, to the health of their children.” The bill promotes the assumption that medical care is the only “legitimate” health care “that is necessary,” the church complained.

CHILD’s position is that medical care should be the only health care that the state *requires* parents to provide, but parents are free to provide other measures in addition.

Bill dies, will be reintroduced in 2015

The bill was endorsed by Seattle Children’s Hospital, American Academy of Pediatrics Washington Chapter, CHILD, and Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys. CHILD member John Merrell came from Everett to testify for the bill to the Senate Human Services Committee. The committee passed the bill, but the floor leader in the Republican-controlled Senate would not schedule it for a vote even though Mullet had designated it as his priority bill.

I made two trips to Washington to build support for the bill. Senator Mullet is determined to introduce the bill again, and CHILD will, of course, continue to support it. CHILD especially wishes to thank long-time member Matthew Barry for his considerable work to enhance legal protection for children in Washington’s faith-healing sects.

Pediatricians oppose religious exemptions and public funding for spiritual healing practices

In October, 2013, the American Academy of Pediatrics released its strongest policy statement to date against religious exemptions. The Academy calls for a child’s health and “future autonomy” to be protected when medical treatment “is likely to prevent death or serious disability or relieve severe pain.”

The statement acknowledges that parental autonomy, privacy, and free exercise of religion are important social values, but argues that those should

be limited when necessary to protect children from serious harm.

It states that the AAP, its chapters, and health care providers should “work to repeal religious exemptions to child abuse and neglect laws.” The exemptions deprive children of equal protection. They may cause confusion for parents, child protective services agencies, prosecutors, courts, and law enforcement. Although “the exemptions could be revised” to require religious objectors to get medical care for serious illness,” outright repeal is “preferable because it provides greater clarity,” the AAP says.

Medicare should not fund unlicensed custodial care provided without medical diagnoses

For the first time the AAP has taken a stand against public funding for Christian Science practitioners and nurses. It points out that “religious non-medical health care institutions” get Medicare and Medicaid funding even though they are exempt from medical oversight requirements and that the Christian Science church has been trying to get reimbursement of bills for their prayers mandated by federal and state law. (The church calls these prayers “treatments.”)

“Coverage for unproven care by unlicensed practitioners is poor public policy for several reasons,” the AAP states. “Fundamentally, public funds should be spent on established, effective therapies. In addition, religious nonmedical health care institutions provide custodial rather than skilled nursing care, a benefit not covered in other institutions. Given patients’ exemptions from undergoing medical examinations, it is not possible to determine whether patients of religious nonmedical health care institutions would otherwise qualify for benefits. Because providing public funding for unproven alternative spiritual healing practices may be perceived as legitimating these services, parents may not believe that they have an obligation to seek medical treatment.”

The policy statement recommends that the AAP, its state chapters, and providers work “to prevent public funding for religious or spiritual healing practices.”

The AAP released its first statement against religious exemptions in 1997 and its second in 2006. Each has been well-publicized on the

national wire services. The full statement can be found at the In Focus section of CHILD’s webpage, www.childrenshealthcare.org.

Shades of gray in neglect of children

by Will Jaffee



Now at the end of my third year of medical school, I have only the bare minimum eight weeks of pediatrics rotations under my belt. Still, like every other student, I have plenty of frustrating stories of neglect.

For some children, no one can find mom, let alone dad, if mom even

knows where he is. Others appear as emotionally starved as a puppy let out of its crate when you pick them up. And still for others, Grandma is unable to tell you when the illness started because she’s pulling double duty between work and child care of three grand-kids.

The extremes of child welfare are as easy to spot as any extremes, but here I want to briefly share some thoughts (and personal confusion) about that odd gray area in between. Some parents bring their children in *monthly* for minor problems that do not need a medical professional’s attention (“What can we do for you?” “Well he coughed a few times last night.”). For others, it’s difficult to get them in for a yearly checkup, if at all. While the former may cause an increase in emotional anxiety in the child, the latter leads directly to more ER visits, which is bad for everyone.

Kids with no support system can’t arrange one

While on inpatient pediatrics, one can’t help but notice the same diversity of family structure that one sees on the adult wards. That is, some patients have full-fledged support systems complete with visits from friends, while others hold the solo post, alone in their room, in need of a ride home, which

may be wherever they happen to be hanging their hat for the time being. The obvious difference is that children can't arrange anything. Indeed, many weren't even in the hospital because *they* made poor lifestyle decisions, but because the parents waited for an awful GI problem to get better over the course of weeks, didn't call their primary because they weren't sure if they had one, and showed up at the ER with the infant sitting in its own excrement in an obviously old diaper.

Cases like that left this self-described bioethics guru feeling generally gray, like someone had dropped a thick fog over my applied-ethics toolkit. That is, I knew something was off, but couldn't quite figure out the best way to fix it. In our Patient-Centered Medicine course, we're taught all about the SOAP note (Subjective reports from the patient, Objective observations of your own, your Assessment (diagnoses), and your Plan). It was usually fairly smooth sailing through the S, O, and A, but that damn P always felt incomplete. It's easy to look up the correct mix of antibiotics and doses, but what happens when the infant goes home? Are there diapers there? Did they pay the water bill so they can bathe the child?

How can doctors motivate disengaged, apathetic parents?

Complicating the matter, how do I confront a parent if they pretend to be asleep when we walk in the room? (I joked with doctors about how tired all the fathers were, allegedly being sound asleep on a couch in the room at any hour of the day.) How, if they continue blankly staring at their phone the entire time you're examining their child, do you convince them that they *need* to have a follow up plan with their pediatrician? I never thought the old adage about bringing a horse to water would apply to the fundamentals of parenting.

Luckily, these children were the minority (not a *tiny* minority, but a minority nonetheless). Even many of the unplanned pregnancies were seeds for a bigger yet still healthy family. Nonetheless, they leave you wondering about the various shades of neglect that exist, and the types of difficult conversations you have to have to motivate apathetic, usually accidental, parents into becoming preventative-care-driven mentors for their children (62% of pregnancies are unplanned in my current state). Indeed,

this very issue is one in a long list of understated, under-discussed goals of being a primary care physician, and I may spend the better part of my career perfecting it.

Will is a new CHILD member.

Beyond Belief: The Secret Lives of Women in Extreme Religions

edited by Susan Tive and Cami Ostman

Reviewed by Josy Fox

"Beyond Belief" takes us into the lives of 26 women and their encounters with hard-line religions from far corners of mainstream worship. All of the contributors to this volume are published writers who have delved into their past experiences with religious traditions that they have been raised in, rejected, or revisited after much scrutiny. These subjective flashbacks provide an intimate byway into the remote practices of Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, Hassidic Judaism, and Christian Science, as well as fundamentalist faiths and dogmas from across the globe.

Women struggling for autonomy

An underlying theme throughout these vignettes is the search for authenticity and autonomy—a way to *be* in the world that pairs logic with emotion. A young woman in one religious sect cannot let her voice out freely and sing along with the other congregants—because she is female; only the males are allowed to be carried away by the music.

A naive young teenager who is about to take part in a group baptismal procedure to sanctify hundreds of women who died centuries ago is queried by a hierarchal gentleman elder of the creed to disclose if she has ever "sinned" before she can be deemed worthy to be a participant in the pending ritual. The sin she finally realizes she is being questioned about deals with that forbidden area she has not yet personally discovered—sex. But it is the provocative nature of the inquisition which rattles her so much that she feels tormented that simply wondering about it may have tainted her.

Concomitantly, the theme that resonates from within the cited dogmas is an aggressive attempt to demean, to disempower, and, in many cases, to

castigate females, as though they are born guilty, without the defense of their innate innocence.

Unwittingly these recollections divulge underlying threats (fears) buried within the framework of the structured forms of worship that serve to suppress (twist) the followers into a predetermined construct (control) of how to lead their lives.

Guilt and secrets used to control women

Natural human impulses, part of physical and cognitive developmental milestones, are scorned by the dictates of these radical believers. A power struggle of individual autonomy versus an authoritarian group mentality comes to life in these accounts that editors Susan Tive and Cami Ostman have sought out in this book, subtitled “The Secret Lives of Women in Extreme Religions.”

Many of the “secrets” evoke an unrest that evolves into courageous departures from the status quo or an exposé of what draws them back to the belief system that they’re unable to part from. One woman refuses to follow in the footsteps of her religious and cultural heritage that prescribes an arranged marriage. A young lady assaults herself in a group self-flagellation ceremony that makes her feel accepted as an obedient member of her cultural denomination. Another woman is taunted by the subtle advances of a charismatic pastor who uses his position of authority to exploit his disciples.

The accounts within “Beyond Belief” comprise a communal outpouring of confidences aired by a minority of chroniclers exposing a ruling crowd authority. Yet the “crowd” is actually a minority in American society. Few people outside these religious groups know the inside story, the full agenda, the overall impact on the individual and each person’s connection to the world at large.

Religion-based medical neglect

One striking reminiscence highlights the dilemma of a 12-year-old in a Christian Science family who has fallen off a bicycle on a hard-edged embankment and suffers a painful blow to her head. Rather than taking her to a doctor when she could possibly have had a concussion, her parents rely on prayer to heal her. The former 12-year-old, Lucia Greenhouse, looks back on her childhood in her published memoir “fathermothergod: My Journey Out of Christian Science,” that outlines in further detail “secrets” unbeknownst to the mainstream



Lucia Greenhouse

public. In Christian Science theology’s rejection of medical science, even something as basic as immunizations is withheld from children in the 48 states with a religious exemption. Yet outbreaks of measles, for example, penetrate all religious boundaries, resulting in abuse to the public at large.

What hearts, minds, and bodies tell them

The outrageous controls of these women’s lives in childhood and adulthood are well documented by their struggles to reconcile those messages with what their hearts, minds, and bodies tell them, by their forthright observations, and by their ultimate transitions. While freedom of religion may be a right as invoked by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, freedom of speech offers the same kind of protection within the First Amendment, providing an opportunity for the voices in “Beyond Belief” to shed their secrecy.

Josy Fox has been a grant writer for numerous nonprofits in the medical field (raising funds to support health clinics for children) as well as in the social services (raising funds to support domestic violence advocacy groups). She is currently working on a collection of short stories.

In the Name of God by Cameron Stauth

Reviewed by Angie Jabine/Special to *The Oregonian*
Reprinted by permission

Many Oregonians still vividly remember the 2010 news photo of a baby girl with a huge, inflamed growth on her face that completely covered her left eye. Her parents were members of the Followers of Christ, a small fundamentalist Christian sect in Oregon City that rejects medical treatment in favor of prayer. When a disenchanted church member alerted Clackamas County authori-

ties to the girl's plight, she ultimately received medical attention and kept her eye.

Sixteen-month-old Ava Worthington was not so lucky. In 2008 she was essentially asphyxiated by a fluid-filled cyst on her neck — one that could easily have been surgically drained. A year later, Dale and Shannon Hickman's baby boy, born two months prematurely at home, died without any of the life-saving medical care that preemies usually receive. And in 2010, 16-year-old Neil Beagley died in agony from kidney failure due to a common urinary tract blockage that could have been repaired years earlier. All three were children of the Followers of Christ. (*Note: Beagley died in 2008.*)

Informant and advocate speak out

In the compulsively readable “In the Name of God: The True Story of the Fight to Save Children from Faith-healing Homicide,” Portland reporter Cameron Stauth interweaves two parallel narratives, both equally compelling. One tells the tale of a fiercely secretive community that closed ranks when police officers, child welfare workers, and local news media, including *The Oregonian*, tried to find out why and how Followers of Christ children kept dying. The families were polite but tight-lipped—all except one secret informant whose cooperation with outsiders was critical in bringing these families' cases to trial.

Stauth's second narrative centers on Rita Swan, a soft-spoken Michigan mother. Swan lost her own toddler to bacterial meningitis in 1977 after relying on healers from her Christian Science church to cure his illness. Swan could not accept that her son's death was due to her lack of faith, as some in her congregation had implied. Instead she left the church and embarked on a nationwide campaign to uncover similar deaths and to reform state “religious shield” laws that relied on a broad interpretation of the First Amendment to protect faith-healing parents against charges of child neglect or homicide.

Church's powerful adversaries

Swan's adversaries were some of the most powerful people in America. Although worldwide Christian Science believers now number around 80,000, in the 1970s, they included President Richard Nixon's key advisors John Ehrlichman, Robert Haldeman, and Egil Krogh. Federal mandates during Nixon's administration offered broad

protections to faith-healing practitioners, and even permitted Christian Science hospitals, whose medical personnel were trained in metaphysics, not medicine, to bill Medicare at the same rate as medical hospitals.

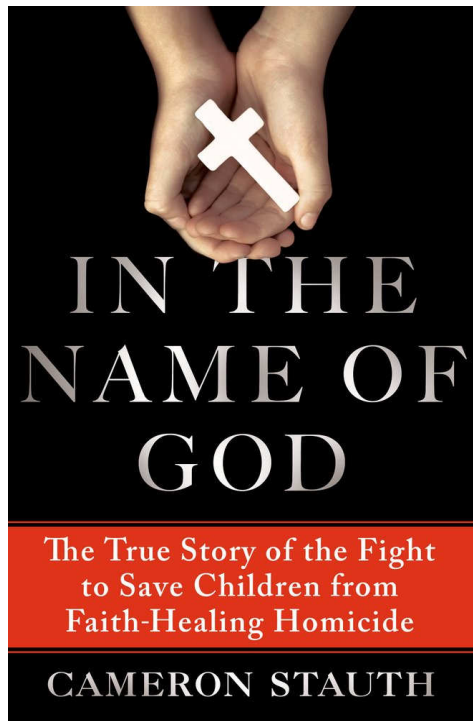
As late as 1998, 40 states had broad religious shield laws. In Oregon, despite its largely secular population, the law was exceptionally broad, allowing a religious shield even against homicide. As Swan later told Stauth, Oregon is “*so liberal, and so tolerant, that sometimes it doesn't see danger.*”



Cameron Stauth

Stauth interviewed dozens of people inside and outside of law enforcement, but his key source within the Followers of Christ appears to be “Patrick Robbins,” the disillusioned informant who secretly kept Clackamas County police apprised of various children's ill health. Without Robbins' detailed descriptions of the congregation and its gatherings, Stauth might never have been able to recreate them so vividly. But Stauth appears to use considerable artistic license in recreating certain more private scenes, such as Neil Beagley's state of mind as he built a parking space on his family's land for his Camaro, just three months before his death in June 2008. And Stauth's fondness for various disparaging nicknames for Clackamas County — “Clackistan,” “Clackalackie,” “Clackatucky” — can occasionally lead his book into the more lurid environs of the “true crime” genre.

But overall, “In the Name of God” is a highly nuanced story, presented by a reporter whose past books reveal his skepticism about the virtues of



modern medicine and his openness to the mysterious power of prayer. Stauth came to see that the Followers of God seldom questioned their own strictures, but they weren't stupid or incompetent. As one Clackamas County prosecutor put it, "these folks have cell phones, landlines, computers, and TVs. We're not talking about Appalachia here."

Incomprehensible rejection of medical care

Furthermore, they raised their children to be admirably self-reliant, especially the boys, earning their own money and saving it to buy their cars, apprenticing in their dads' small businesses. And in each case described in this book, the parents cared deeply about their children's health crises, scrupulously recording their eating and sleeping, and calling on the prayers of the family members gathered around them. As Stauth layers detail upon detail, the reader is left wondering how such close and devoted families could be so perversely willing to sacrifice their children for the sake of their beliefs.

Decades of work against religious exemptions

If Stauth's depiction of Swan verges on hero worship, he builds a strong case: Swan has worked for decades, doggedly and persistently, state by state, to reform excessively broad religious shield laws. In Oregon in 1999-2000, buttressed by reporting by The Oregonian, KATU, ABC's "20-20," and medical examiner Dr. Larry Lewman, she

engineered a bill that would finally make it possible to prosecute Oregon parents who refuse medical care for their children.

Even so, justice will continue to be meted out unevenly, depending on the evidence and resources that prosecutors can bring to their cases. As Swan noted after the 2011 trial of Dale and Shannon Hickman, the parents whose premature boy had died within hours of birth, the Hickmans faced sentences more stringent than those meted out to Brent and Raylene Worthington or Jeff and Marci Beagley, who had allowed their sick children to suffer needlessly for months and years before dying.

Faith deaths still happen in Oregon

And despite all efforts to protect U.S. children, religion-based neglect will not go away. In August



two Albany parents who belong to the Church of the First Born — which shares forebears with the Followers of Christ —

pleaded not guilty to manslaughter in the death of their 12-year-old daughter [*Syble Rossiter above*] due to complications of diabetes. Their other two children are in protective custody while the parents await trial.

Angie Jabine is a Portland writer and editor.

About CHILD, Inc.

CHILD works to stop harms to children related to religious beliefs, cultural traditions or quackery. CHILD provides public education, amicus briefs, and does a limited amount of lobbying. CHILD believes children should have equal protection of the laws and therefore opposes religious exemptions from child health and safety laws.

To join or donate to CHILD, go to Memberships and Donations at our web page, www.childrenshealthcare.org or contact CHILD from the contact information on the first page. Dues are \$40 a year or \$15 a year for a full-time student. Donations to CHILD are tax-exempt.