

Ellen's Place

The children's day care center located down the street, Little Folks, was a privately owned small business, consisting of three single-story pine-framed buildings, surrounded by an old wooden four-foot high white picket fence.

One building, which sat at the street's edge of the property, the owners dedicated to the children aged over two years. This housing sat near a spacious garage that stored many toys for the children's outside use. The third structure, spanning the thirty-foot width of the property, stood apart from the first building, separated by fifty feet of grass, sidewalk, an outdoor playhouse and swing set, and a resident family of gray rabbits.

Toddlers and babies played at the second span of buildings, occupying all but the far room, which was dedicated as the office for the administrator of the facility, a light brown-haired woman of average build and height, named Ellen.

Bill saw her most days when he dropped off Billy or Lou, and prudently every week when he delivered the check for the center's services. Regardless of what challenges she faced, she always received the children pleasantly.

Ellen occasionally had to assist the other care providers in dealing with some problematic child who might have found the surroundings unfamiliar.

"Now you go ahead and sit in this crying room," Ellen calmly instructed whatever toddler had fallen into distress, "And just let us know when you are done, so you can go back with the others." She then sat quietly with the troubled youngster until their fears and expressive temperament passed.

The fantastic program Ellen ran at the center greatly impressed Bill. After all, her kids also spent their early years there, so Bill felt confident about the care she attended to the other children.

"Ellen let me feed the rabbits today!" Billy would tell his father.

Bill and his son walked to the day care before the boy reached school age, in his fourth and fifth years of life, throughout Linda and Bill's period of disillusion and the following pregnancy with Lou. The neighborhood watched the two take this trip every morning, when the seasons allowed, and they became a familiar sight on their street.

The other day care providers showed Ellen great respect, for it was her call as to what additional duties she might have them assume. Every once and a while some young provider of lesser experience slipped, affording the opportunity for the maintenance of the old property to be attended to.

One morning Bill encountered a young care provider, tall and thinly structured with long, stringy black hair, squatted over the old picket fence, scraping years of chipped paint by hand. Her arduous up-and-down motions, which she made with her small scraper, caused her to pant in youthful short breaths, painstaking in the task.

"I can get you some good paint remover for that," Bill offered as he guided Billy into the facility.

She stood up from the chore and considered Bill's proposal for a brief moment. Wondering if this would cause her to lose absolution with her superiors; she realized that this might not be acceptable to use such materials around the youngsters. She frowned.

"That's okay," the laboring provider declined his generous offer, "I like scraping old paint this

way.”

The facility offered great structure to the children’s lives, and Bill greatly appreciated their services. The care obtained for Billy in his earlier years had been inconsistent and changing, sometimes inadequate.

One of the area’s major-chain day care facilities, used before Bill tried Little Folks, left Billy with marks on his forehead. Some demon-child held up toy cars for the other children to collide into as they ran past, and the providers there seemed placated to his actions, as if he himself bore the ‘666’ mark of the devil upon his forehead.

Bill immediately challenged the facility’s young administrator about this.

“We always maintain the proper student-to-provider ratio.” She defended.

“Well, obviously that’s not working!” Bill adamantly assailed, directing her to the marks left on Billy with a raised hand. “Cancel us out of your program!”

In direct contrast to this, Ellen would never allow any child displaying aggression towards the others to remain in their care. Her facility, and small, isolated children’s society, remained safe and consistent.

Linda’s return to employment afforded Lou the opportunity to spend some time with Ellen’s secure community. At fourteen months of age, Linda enrolled her in the program.

Unlike the last time Linda returned to the work force, the stability of Little Folks prevented the issues from Billy’s early childhood years from existing with Lou. Linda was now able to concentrate on their school or day care activities when they returned home, no longer overcome by the demands of motherhood.

The rum still dominated her late evenings; however. A controlled level of indifference festered with her husband, sometimes quelled when marital passion took hold of their late nights.

The years eventually brought Lou into the older children’s building in the day care, and she took Billy’s place at Bill’s side in the morning walks. Linda left for her job before seven in the morning, so Bill assumed the task of seeing the children to their early morning destinations, making up the work hours through many a late night lab testing session.

Lou had two primary care providers in the older children’s building: Miss Trina, a short, stocky dark-haired woman of European descent, who shared with Bill stock market strategies she and her husband used, and Miss Rita, a younger woman who ran most of programs of that building. Bill sometimes just let his daughter sleep late, resulting in arrival at the center after ten in the morning.

“You know because of when you get here, she misses my reading program!” Miss Rita constantly scolded Bill.

“I just figure if she doesn’t have to spend so much time in the day care it might be better for her,” Bill defended.

“I know what you mean,” Miss Rita agreed, “Some of these parents leave their children here ten hours a day!”

Bill smirked. “I don’t get it. What’s the point in even having kids if you do that?”

In the early fall of Lou’s second full-time year at the center, late one blustery evening; Bill sat

with his wife in the front room, their children resting in their beds.

“Do we have to drink tonight?” he lamented, watching as she sipped more of her clear-colored comforts.

“It helps me sleep, you know,” Linda expressed her excuse. “Otherwise I have problems waking up for work in the morning. I have to leave before seven, you know.”

“You once promised me that this would stop.” Bill sadly recalled.

Linda set down her drink, knowing that Bill’s dedication to the family kept him there with her, and she would not have to complain about his beer consumption to counter the nagging.

It was time to tell him what she planned to try, and his role in the design.

“I’ve been to the drug counselor that my work recommended,” Linda declared. “I’m going to an AA meeting, but there’s something you have to do.”

Bill sat silent, his interest growing.

“There’s a program where family members have to go, as part of the counseling,” continued Linda. “It’s known as Alonon.”