

8. Barry kept going and we lost them. I lost my tooth and never had it replaced. Of course, it was the first thing my mother noticed when she saw me, the one night I came to stay with her before I left. My dad had died by then and I discovered she'd become good friends with Mrs. Fowler next door. I don't know how she made that change! She seemed pleased about me working in child welfare but, frankly, I was constantly in trouble at work. In fact, I only lasted for about four years in that field. I just felt like all my energies were being zapped to defend my clients from the system that was ostensibly designed to serve them. I refused to do things by policy if I thought it was destructive, or if I thought something was too limiting for the kids. That's exactly what happened at the last place I worked. I went to work there when I was 21, and I told them that I'd done my three years of school which wasn't true but they never checked. This place was a little bit different because the kids weren't really so emotionally disturbed, like those at the secured facilities. It was a residential campus outside Chicago, like 100 years old, for second grade kids who had just started to fuck around, or maybe their families were a mess and there was no place for them to go. It was not a real terrible place but there were some terrible aspects, some holdovers like a military program that looked good to conservative donors. The kids would have to wear these stupid uniforms and march to church on Sundays and so on. Of course, I was screaming about that all the time. A lot of people working there thought it was disgusting too. Some of them didn't 'cause sometimes these places can be magnets for weirdos. You have people with, you know, an unhealthy interest in children, sexually or something like that. I rarely saw this but I did see some people show up that I was suspect about and they were fired soon afterwards. Others are just misguided, like this harsh little old lady who was such a fucking fascist. A total control freak. Her response to the kids having to wear the idiotic blazers for Sunday dinners was going and having her own blazer made that was identical to theirs! So here's this little old lady barking orders while wearing a blue boys' school blazer! She loved that. You also have these very conservative Christians with good intentions but they want to condition society. They're from some lily-white farm town while 99% of the kids are from the inner city. As house parents you live with the kids five days a week, 24 hours a day, and they'd try to impose all these values on the kids. That disgusted me. One guy, thank god they fired him, he was a real psychopath. I kept on him all the time, and threatened to go outside the school if they didn't get rid of the guy. He would discipline these young kids by making them stand attention, for two hours at a time, outside the cottage and shit like that. He was in no way authorized to do that. I don't know why they turned a blind eye to him in the beginning and I was furious. He was another conservative, Christian nut. I also disciplined the kids but it would be for very different reasons. On my very first day there, these 4th graders are reading in the dining room and I saw these big kids, like high school kids, you know, pushing them out of the way. I get

9. pissed off when I see big kids pushing around little kids so I went up to these bullies, grabbed them by the collar and walked them over to the wall. I told them, "Stand there until I tell you, you can come back." I realized this humiliated them in front of the entire place but what's good for the goose, is good for the gander. So immediately I got some respect because they realized that just because I was this, eh, *pinko*, didn't mean I would take bullshit. And that's important when you are a house parent.