

GOING BACK HOME

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My name's Kevin and I'm 15 years old. I'm suppose to be in tenth grade, but I'm in eighth this year. I'm in a special classroom at school. They say I'm slow, I say I'm just plain dumb. I've been at Youth Home for eleven months. I'm goin' home tomorrow, and I can't wait! Oh, the Home is ok, but when I gets home I be cruisin' to my own tunes again.

My teaching-parents, they're pretty cool. They've been helpin' me alot. My therapist, he's ok too. But the relief couple, they sucks! I don't think the Mrs. ever liked me and I'm always in trouble whenever they're in the house. The guys here are mostly jerks, real losers. Couple of 'em are okay; but there's a few puff-heads, a jock who thinks he's Michael Tyson, a couple mouth-breathers who probably dumber than me, and my main-man Randy. I know I'm the coolest in the house, but nobody ever treats me like it. That's ok — I'm outta here tomorrow, right after my discharge conference.

This discharge conference is a waste. Look at 'em all sitt'n around talkin' 'bout me and what I gotta do when I go home. My mom, she did finally make it 'bout one hour late. I couldn' believe she came up here to get me in that rag-box car. The guys, they laughed at me! My therapist said, I shouldn' been braggin' that she was comin' in a stretch-limo to get me. Look at him sittin' there talkin' 'bout the progress I've made at Youth Home. Man, I know I've changed. I'm not the same dude I was a year ago, I'm . . .

"Sorry, I didn' hear your question." My teaching mom said something.

"Back home, are you going to try to enroll in the same type of classes as you now have?" she asks.

"No. I plan to quit school when I get home, cuz there be too many ol' dudes, who probably are wait'n for me to settle business with."

"Kevin, the law requires you to attend school until you attain the age of 16," my therapist says.

"What! I can't quit 'til I'm 16? Man, that's another 9 months! That means I've got to finish this school year and start next one before I'm done, if I live that long!". . . "Will I get to keep you as my therapist still, cuz I may need to talk to somebody if I got to stay in school?" I ask.

"I'm sorry, no. But if you need to talk with someone, I'm sure the

school counselor will be more than happy to listen and discuss whatever concerns you may have.”

I stare at the wall. “Man, I don’t understand how come you can’t still be my therapist. I thought you liked me. Man, you don’t care ‘bout nobody! I don’t know no school counselor there. Why you telling me that?”

Before he can answer, my mom says, “What kind of rules do you have for him here?”

“Mom, why you askin’ ‘bout the rules I been livin’ under here? I can teach you the rules,” I say.

“Maybe you can, maybe you can’t.” Then turning to the therapist she asks, “Will there be someone available to help me enforce the rules, if I need it?”

“I’m sorry, the Home doesn’t offer this service. We don’t have a formal aftercare program,” he says.

I say, “Good, that means you can’t be leanin’ on me all the time. Mom, you don’t need no more help with raisin’ me.” I look at the therapist, “I’ve changed. I handle things better than before. I don’t do drugs no more, I know all ‘bout choices and consequences, I’ve got me some vocational training, I even know how to do my own laundry!”

The adults keep talking and I drift off . . . if I got to be in school, that means some of the ol’ dudes who didn’t get caught will still be ‘round. Hey, what’s that crap mom’s askin’ ‘bout some Big Brother’s program? Wow! I’m sure glad to hear they got a 15-month waitin’ list. I’ll be gone and free by then. But if those ol’ dudes start comin’ ‘round again, that could be bad trouble. I sure want to leave the Home, but now I’m scared ‘bout goin’ home.

“What happens to me if I’m in trouble again?” I ask. They sit like deadmen. “What’d I say wrong this time? Why’s everybody just sittin’ and starin’ at me?”

Finally the therapist asks, “Kevin, are you planning on getting into trouble again? Because if you are . . .”

“No. No, I don’t plan on being into nothin’ I shouldn’t be; but if trouble finds me, what’s gonna happen?”

They’re quiet again.

“Just as I thought, nobody gonna tell me what they gonna do ‘til they do it to me. I shouldn’t asked, cuz here comes mom’s lecture on stayin’ away from bad dudes, stayin’ in school, and gettin’ a job!” “Can I get some help findin’ a part-time job?” I ask the therapist.

“Since the Home has no aftercare funds or services, you’re pretty much on your own in seeking any kind of employment. I’m sorry.”

“Oh man, Youth Home sucks! Everybody’s happy to help me while I’m here, but soon as I goes they don’t do nothin’. And that crap about

there's no money for helpn' — that's jive!"

My mom changes the subject by asking if there is any possibility of getting help for my younger brother. I shift in my chair to stare out the window. I wonder why she had to be askin' help for little Tom? After all, I'm the big brother and I can help Tom.

Still staring out the window, I slouch in my chair. Listen to that! They're tellin' her to seek services for Tom locally. Now what does that mean? Good for you mom! You stuff it back at 'em! You've tried phonin' four other agencies and none of 'em take medicare. Four other places? Tom can't be doin' that bad! What's she mean she's 'fraid he gonna be just like me! Why she startin' to cry! I'm cool! Wait 'til I get home and get my hands on that fool! Tom's breakin' mom's heart.

I'm sure glad we're on our way. This rag-box car better do the two hour trip back to the city. I'm super glad to be outta the Home. I'm free! Least 'till Monday when I go back to school. Man, that scares me.

Made it through the weekend! It's good to be back. My neighborhood's 'bout the same, but the street's different. The street's talkin' heavy stuff goin' down day after tomorrow, and sayin' names I never heard. I've got to stay out of this drug dealin' and keep my booty clean. Richie says to keep one eye lookin' back of me whenever I go out. He sure is jumpy! I need to ask him if little Tom is messin' with anythin', or if anybody is messin' with Tom. Kevin's back in town, and I'm the baddest dude around!

"Mom, I can't believe you're walkin' me to school today!" "Somebody's got to get you properly re-enrolled," she says in her measured strides.

"You're just 'fraid I'll skip. Mom, you should be keepin' your appointment with the electric company 'stead of takin' me to school. Why they always wantin' to shut our electric off anyway?"

We walk in silence, both knowing the answer. I need to get me a job and help mom with these money problems. I wished my therapist were here to do this school thing for her, and to help me find a job. Oh, oh! Be cool, there's the Gonzales brothers.

While walking home after school, Richie asks Kevin, "You ready to get into some lucrative action, my man? I'm talkin' makin' and shakin' more money than you ever dreamed of!"

"Maybe. Maybe not," I say. "Man, I hate school! Why those people always got to be gettin' in my face? Why they stick me in another dummy room? Even the dummies be makin' fun of me. They make me feel like cryin', but I'm too cool for that."

"Wow! Where you comin' from dude?"

"Richie, I can't let down now, not like I use to at the Home. I wished I was still there. Man, I can't believe I wished that! I'm gettin' confused

inside again.”

“Catch you later Kev. I gotta cut over one block and stop by a house and take care some business. Chill-out, cuz it’ll get better. You’ll see.”

“Sure. Later man.” I walk and sort my thoughts: Somethin’s matter with mom. She’s worryin’ too much ‘bout Tom. I think my 13-year-old brother is into somethin’ heavy, but mom and me don’t know for sure what? It’d be good if she got some help for herself. She’s needin’ somebody to talk her worries over with. Maybe she can get some help for herself wherever she can find help for Tom. I hope she got the electric company happy – at least for another month.

At 9:30, Tom comes busting through the front door. He hits the stairway like a stallion and nearly knocks me over as he slides into our bedroom. “I can’t believe it, Kev! Some dudes I never seen before just come by and wasted Richie. I mean Richie is dead!”

“What? Cut the crap, man!” “I ain’t lying. They just pulled up in a car and started firin’ down on him! He’s iced.”

My eyes get glassy. I feel a lump in my throat and a knot begins to grip my stomach. “Why?”

“Word on the street is that Richie was dealin’ at a crack house and stole some dudes’ profits.”

“Tommie, I didn’t know Richie got so deep. I’m really scared now! I wonder if the Gonzales’ be layin’ for me thinkin’ I maybe squealed when I got busted last year? I never talked ‘bout nobody or nothin’. Maybe I need to get me a heater of my own for protection?”

“Kevin, Richie said Steve was dealin’ guns and could get me anythin’ I needed. You want that I go and get you one?”

“If you do, it’ll just be one for protection – insurance – nothin’ more. Man, I’m talkin’ junk! Cops ever stop me I’d be busted to jail, not Youth Home. My head hurts tryin’ to think what to do. Man, I wasn’t havin’ these problems a week ago!”

About the Author:

Mr. Bennett has been working with children and youth since 1974. He is currently Director of Social Services at the Teen Ranch.