

THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY POSSE AND THE TWO DESPERADOS

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Back when we all believed that we could tell the sane from the insane, we called them "asylums"; later, when we thought we could find a germ that caused the problems, we called them "hospitals"; now, during our period of enlightened confusion, we call the place I work the "Adolescent Treatment Center." I wonder, however, even these days: "Asylum from what?"

There are some days that are those kinds of days at the Center. There are, in fact, more of those kinds of days than there are those other kinds of days when everything is calm and rational. For instance, there was another of those days the day Carlos climbed on the roof a few years ago.

He sat on the roof, chucking gravel randomly at pedestrians crossing campus. Once in a while, Carlos would raise his chin and howl like a mad wolf. I had been assigned to "check on him." I stood on the ground, asking for his attention to discuss the matter. Once in a while, he would toss a rock in my direction, with half an effort. I could see small mounds of gravel on the roof that once lay in the driveway.

After I had stood on the hot sidewalk for a period of time, I saw a tall figure approaching. Soon I could make out the gray pinstriped suit, the blue shirt, the dark blue tie, the grizzled hair smoothed into place, the furrowed brow. The Executive Director had arrived.

The Director contemplated Carlos sitting on the roof. Carlos was throwing the pebbles up into the air and trying to catch them. Carlos howled, then cackled gleefully.

"You, Carlos, what are you doing on that roof?" The Director stood on the grass a few feet away from me. I examined his wing-tipped shoes. One of his shoelaces had broken, and he had repaired it by tying the two pieces together.

"Hey, Doc!" Carlos said, throwing a rock at the Director. "Catch!"

The Director moved his body without moving his feet, arching his side like a matador, to allow the rock to whiz by without touching him. His eyebrows rose on his forehead until they were closer to his hairline

than his eyes. I wanted to compliment him on his poise and grace under fire, but I decided to wait to see what he would do next.

"Get down off that roof right now! And quit throwing rocks! You could hurt someone!" The Director pointed his index finger at the roof as he said "roof," then swept it down to the ground. His finger trembled slightly.

Carlos looked down for a moment. When he looked up, the smile was gone from his face. He seemed to be thinking seriously. Then he said, "Oh. Gosh, sir, I guess you're right. I didn't think about the consequences of my behavior. I...I don't mean to hurt nobody."

The Director glanced at me. His eyes seemed to say that he had as little use for me as he had for this situation.

Carlos looked sincere, but not too sincere. I did not trust him for a second.

"Sir? I will be glad to come down now, but I have one little request first. It is important to me, and it will help me calm myself down. Okay?" Carlos was standing on the roof, rubbing his curly black hair boyishly with one palm. His supplicating eyes pleaded for trust from the two adults who wanted to help him. The Director said, warily, "Okay, son, what do you need?"

"Need? What do I *need*?" Carlos paused, pondering the implications of this question. "Well, since you ask so kindly sir, what I need is for you to go back to your office. Lean over your desk and take your dick out. Then fuck yourself." Carlos smiled.

The Director turned and glared at me. I froze my face into a landscape devoid of all emotion. Then he walked briskly away down the sidewalk.

Carlos was howling again, and he was tossing rocks. One hit me on my shoe. I decided to try again. "Carlos, you have to come down some time."

"No, no, I'm going to stay up here forever."

"What will you eat?"

A pause. "I'm not hungry."

A few minutes later Danny came out of the cottage onto the porch. "Hi. What's happening?"

"Go back inside, Danny. Nothing's happening here."

"Hey Danny, I'm up here!" Carlos yelled.

Danny came out on the grass, where he could see Carlos. "Hey Carlos, why are you on the roof?"

"Why not?" philosophized Carlos. Danny considered the question.

"Danny, go back inside the cottage." I felt very nervous about how these events were developing. Danny studied me carefully. His piercing blue eyes seemed to examine me like an x-ray machine. I saw myself as he must have seen me: a young, inexperienced youth worker wearing old, dirty tennis shoes and worn-out blue jeans, standing on the grass under the hot sun, helpless to get a kid off the roof.

Danny moved close to me. He whispered, taking me into his confidence. "It's okay, man. I'll help you get him off the roof. Don't worry."

"Hey, what are you two whispering for?" Carlos asked, in a voice that suddenly sounded tentative and vulnerable.

"Shhh..." Danny whispered to me, then turned to Carlos. "Nothing man. I was just telling him he better leave you alone, right?"

"Right. I'll bash somebody's brains in with one of these rocks if they fuck with me," Carlos affirmed, but he still sounded unsure.

Danny strode confidently closer to the cottage. He was wearing his Van Halen t-shirt and his black jeans. Those were the same clothes he was wearing the other night when he punched another boy in the mouth for calling him a puke-face. I moved closer to him, although I had no idea what I would do if he did whatever it was that I was afraid he was about to do.

"Carlos, can you tell me what upset you? You know you can talk to me. We can solve this problem together." Danny's approach sounded familiar. He sounded like all of us youth workers who worked there. I began to wonder whether this might not work out all right, after all. We do try to encourage the residents to help the other kids when they are in trouble.

Carlos told him, "I don't want to talk about it," though. Then Carlos walked to the other side of the roof where we could not see him. We both had to walk all the way around the cottage, through a gate in the fence, and around a tree before we could see Carlos again.

"We're brothers aren't we, Carlos?" Danny asked him. "We swore we would always be bros, right, Carlos? Do you remember when we cut our wrists and became blood brothers?"

Carlos, who had been sitting with his head tucked between his legs, with his folded arms covering his face, slowly lifted his head and looked

steadily at Danny. "Yeah," he replied thoughtfully.

My hopes soared. I was going to have help in solving this sticky problem. If it kept going in this direction, I might not be fired after all. All you have to do is to learn to trust these kids after all, I thought. They could be good kids. They could help each other.

"I'm coming up there with you, bro, so that we can talk." Danny trotted over to a tree and began to climb. This immediately struck me as a bad idea. "Uhhh....Danny? Wait Danny, let's talk about this, okay?"

Already up on the lower limb, Danny turned to me with a hurt expression. "What's wrong? Don't you think you can trust me?"

I gauged the distance between me and the tree. I could run over and grab Danny's leg, but then what? And what if I missed? Danny was then bound to join Carlos on the roof, throwing rocks at the Executive Director too. No, it was better to stand where I was, looking casual about it all, and to reassure Danny that I trusted him. And hope for the best.

"Sure, I trust you, Danny," I said, too nonchalantly after too long a pause. "Let's just discuss this a little."

But Danny was climbing again, saying "It's okay, I'll talk to him." Then he too was on the roof.

I heard the gate open behind me. I turned to see the shift supervisor striding across the lawn toward me. Ken the supervisor, was new, having been hired recently after working for years in the Youth Council, with delinquent boys. Since I had been working at the treatment center, I had noticed that he was a decisive person who had some new ideas about behavior management with the residents. I was glad to relinquish my command to him.

Not that he asked what I thought. "Why are these boys on the roof, instead of in the cottage where they are supposed to be?" he asked.

I rummaged through the answers that came to mind to select one that would fit: because they climbed on the roof; because one of them was upset about a cancelled family visit and the other was trying to help him; because I did not know what to do to get them down. None of these seemed to be the kind of answer that might please Ken, so I just shrugged my shoulders.

Ken frowned. "This is the kind of behavior that I have been talking about. We simply cannot tolerate this kind of dangerous behavior any longer," he said to me. I nodded my head.

"Hey, Bozo! Leave him alone! Come up here and get us if you think

you're so tough!" Carlos yelled down at Ken. Carlos flipped another rock down, skipping it on the grass near Ken's shoe.

By this time Danny was standing beside Carlos. The two of them began talking quietly, and then they sat down to talk more. Oh please, I thought, if there is any justice in the universe, let them both come down off the roof without falling or hitting someone in the head with a rock.

I explained the history of events leading up to the present predicament to Ken. Ken explained the present emotional state of mind of Dr. Evans, our Executive Director, to me. Ken explained that we must take action.

"If you both are not back down here by the count of ten, you will be restricted to your rooms for the next two days," Ken announced to the boys. The boys looked at each other.

Danny countered. "Hey man, I'm trying to help him. I'm trying to help you. Why are you on my case?"

"One," Ken answered. "Two."

Both of them stood up at the same time. They looked worried and they started walking toward the tree. Ken smiled at me.

"Three." The two boys paused at the tree. Danny put one foot on the top branch. "Four." Danny stopped, his attention caught by something we could not see, on the other side of the cottage. "Five."

"Hey Carlos, look. It's Betty." Carlos was looking now, too. "Six." Both of them raised their arms in the air. "Hey, Betty! Over here! We're on the roof! Hey, baby!"

"Seven." The count was slowing down, although I did not think anyone but me noticed.

The two boys began whistling shrilly. "Hey, Betty!" Danny ran up to the peak of the roof, waving his arms. He took off his shirt and began waving it around. He flexed his muscles, posturing in the poses used by the body builders in the magazines he read. His weight lifting had firmed his muscles in just the few months I had known him. I thought that he looked like he was in much better shape than I was.

"Eight." Ken walked over to the tree and began climbing, quickly. The two boys did not see him coming, since both of them were standing at the peak of the roof, whistling and yelling. Ken reached the roof and stepped onto it. Carlos, who had unbuckled his belt and began to slide his pants down to moon Betty after the fashion of the current fad on campus, turned around to position his buttocks. As he did so, he saw

Ken. Carlos called to Danny, who turned around. The three of them were perfectly still, as though they had been slung into place in a game of "statues."

Carlos zipped his fly and buttoned his jeans, but he did not cinch his cowboy belt. Instead, he pulled the belt out of its loops slowly by its big metal buckle. He glared at Ken and held the belt by the punched end, dangling the buckle in the air just off the roof, moving it menacingly back and forth.

"Hey, Ken. You wanna hurt us, huh?" Carlos asked. "You the sheriff that wants to bring law 'n' order to this frontier pueblo, Ken?"

"Frank, go inside and get some more staff out here," Ken said to me in a steady voice. "Do it quickly."

I walked quickly out through the gate and into the front door of the cottage. Inside, the residents were meeting in the living room. One large, heavy boy propped his chair back against the far wall, with his eyes closed. Another boy, who was wearing sunglasses in the dim room, sat across the circle from him, nervously bouncing on his seat and talking loudly at the large boy.

"You don't respect nobody's rights. You think you're the only person on this planet. Well, I got news for you, dude. We're on this earth too, and we got rights." The small boy's words seemed to bounce off the other's broad stomach like bullets ricocheting off Superman's chest.

"Like now. You don't even give me the respect of opening your eyes when I talk. Isn't that right?" The boy looked frantically around the line of faces of the other teens in the group, hungrily searching for support. None was offered. Two younger boys in the group giggled to each other as they whispered secrets.

Steve, the senior Youth Worker in the cottage, sat silently outside the circle. He shifted in his chair, then said: "Well, I think we need to remember what we are trying to do in this group today. Gene, can you tell me what upset you? You know you can talk to us. We can solve this problem together."

My eyes finally had adjusted to the dim interior of the cottage. I could see Steve. I tried to speak in a calm voice: "Steve, I need to talk to you right now!"

Everyone turned immediately to look at me. Twelve young eyes examined my face. Steve paused, then told the group to continue. He came over and pulled me into the dining room. "What do you need?"

I explained the situation outside to him. Steve said, "Okay, let's go,"

and walked briskly out the front door. I followed. As I left the cottage, I saw twelve eyes follow me. "Stay inside and go on with your meeting, guys." I heard no one agree to follow these instructions.

Outside, Steve was already in the back yard by the time I reached the fence. As I went through the gate, I heard him say, "Okay, guys, are you still both on the roof?"

Steve then saw Ken on the roof, crouched like Bruce Lee confronting the Chinese Mafioso, his own belt wrapped tightly around his left fist. His shirt was off. He looked like a fashion parody of the two boys. I suddenly had the impression that he was as adolescent as they were, but not as original.

"Well, we was going to come down, Stevie, but Wyatt Earp here wants a shootout at the O.K. Corral," Carlos said, conspicuously ignoring Ken, who crouched a few feet in front of him. Carlos kept his eyes on Steve down on the ground, but the belt in his hand twitched as though it were a live snake, a reminder to Ken.

"Ken, can we talk for a minute?" Steve asked politely.

Ken turned his head partially without taking his eyes off of Carlos. "I'm busy right now, Steve."

Steve said, "I think it is real important that we talk right now."

I heard a snicker from behind me. I turned around to see all six boys from the cottage standing in the yard, observing the events. I started to tell them to go back inside but I doubted that they would do so. So instead I frowned to express my official disapproval of their presence and turned back to the action.

Ken was climbing down the tree. He dropped from a high limb onto the grass, without falling down, and strode over to Steve. I joined them. We were going to have a team huddle. I felt like grabbing each of them around the shoulders, bending to put our heads next to one another, but then it occurred to me that neither of them would probably go for that.

Ken began. "We have a dangerous situation here, Steve. I think we need reinforcements."

Steve returned the volley. "Well, Ken, I think I can talk to them."

Ken: "I don't know, Steve, I think this has gone beyond talking. I think it is time for physical confrontation. I do not believe we can allow them to get away with this kind of behavior."

Steve: "Good point, Ken. I agree that we have to confront this behavior. I also believe, however, that everyone involved will be a lot safer if I

can talk them down off the roof."

Ken: "Steve, I have been through this kind of situation many times in the state schools. The best thing we can do is get some pillows and blankets to use as shields against their weapons and to take the high ground."

Steve, looking up at the high roof, said: "Ken, go inside and run group. I will be in with the boys in a few minutes."

Ken, with a slight sneer curling the edge of his lip: "It's your funeral. Fine, do it your way. From here on, whatever happens is your responsibility." Ken walked toward the group of boys. "Okay, fun's over. Inside. We have work to do. No more sightseeing today."

From the middle of the group someone muttered "Asshole" as the group was herded slowly out of the gate and into the cottage.

Someone seemed to be talking to the boys from the other side of the cottage. They were saying something I could not hear plainly, and Carlos had lifted a rock in his hand and was threatening someone we could not see. Steve walked to the tree and began to climb. As he reached the roof and stepped onto it, Carlos turned and threatened him. Steve threw up his hands like a hero taken at gunpoint in a Western.

"Don't shoot, partner, I'm unarmed. You wouldn't shoot an unarmed man, would you?"

It made me nervous when Carlos seemed to stop and ponder the question for a minute but then something on the other side of the cottage distracted him and he turned to face the disturbance. Steve walked over to a point on the peak of the roof five feet away from Carlos and sat down, smiling slightly, to watch the boys. He glanced down the other side of the roof. He seemed startled at what he saw. Steve turned to me and pointed urgently at me, jabbing his finger to indicate that I should go around to the other side of the cottage, so I went.

As I rounded the first corner I saw the Executive Director standing a safe distance down the sidewalk. He was wiping the perspiration from his mouth with a handkerchief. His suit look rumpled, damp, and it sagged off of his shoulders. His tie was loosened, and the top button on his shirt was unfastened. Standing beside him was the school nurse. She held a syringe behind her back in a piece of cotton. Her mouth was a thin line of determination.

"Oh shit!" I thought. I walked around the second corner, past the two of them. The sidewalk seemed to be full of people. The maintenance worker, in his coveralls, stood with one end of an extension ladder. He

seemed to be awaiting a command. The other end of the ladder was held by a small man in a suit. The psychology intern. The business manager stood twenty feet further down the sidewalk holding one hand over her mouth and supporting that arm with her other arm under the elbow. Standing on the edge of the grass, the social worker observed the proceedings carefully. Standing directly in the middle of the sidewalk nearest the cottage was the psychologist, Dr. Harrison.

"Now, Carlos, put down the rock. We're not going to let you hurt anyone." Dr. Harrison's armpits were dark gray and the perspiration had soaked the entire side of his shirt. He held his arms out, pleading for understanding. "Don't you see that if you stay up there, throwing rocks, you could fall off or hurt someone with a rock?"

Carlos stopped suddenly. His face turned somber as he seemed to consider the implications of his behavior. He put his rock down on the roof.

"Gosh, Doc Harrison, I never thought of it like that before...." Carlos looked down at the crowd, a disturbed and serious look on his face. "I sure don't wanna hurt nobody....I think I'll come down now. Just one thing before I do...."

Carlos rubbed his curly hair boyishly, beseeching the crowd of adults down below his scaffold for understanding. Dr. Harrison cautiously said: "Well, what do you need?"

"Need? What do I need? Well, I need for you to go to your office...."

The Director stepped forward. "Oh no you don't, Carlos. Dr. Harrison, he doesn't mean a word of it."

Carlos looked at the Director with a hurt expression. "Hey man, don't anybody trust a guy around here?"

Ken came out of the cottage onto the porch. Behind him, all of the residents of the cottage followed. "Excuse, me sir. I think I can help," Ken said to the Director. He walked out to stand beside the Director, who was now beside the psychologist.

The three of them consulted quietly. After a moment, the Director gestured for the nurse, who joined them. They placed their heads close together to talk. Every once in a while Ken would pull back and look at the roof, the ladder, or the kids on the roof. Then his head bobbed back into the circle. The boys on the roof observed this conference uneasily, shifting from one leg to another. They whispered to one another.

The group broke up and the individual team members moved systematically, quickly. Ken walked over to me and said, "Follow us." The

maintenance worker and the psychology intern moved the ladder into place upon the Director's command. Ken and I climbed the ladder to the roof, followed immediately by the maintenance worker, the intern, the nurse, the social worker, and the Director.

The roof was steeper than I thought it would be. I could not see the boys, who had fled to the other side of the peak as Ken and I climbed. The roof was also larger than I thought. Our entire entourage fit comfortably on the side. Ken said, "Okay, fan out. I think they are over on the right. I can see a head just over the edge there." We carefully scrambled up the side until we could see over. Steve was sitting alone on the other side of the roof.

"Steve! What are you doing here?" Ken asked, startled. Before Steve could answer, Ken asked: "Which way did they go?"

Steve pointed down at the tree. "They went thataway."

Ken and the Director looked at one another. Then they looked all around the periphery of the roof.

"Maybe they went on runaway status," Ken speculated, looking for two shapes running down one of the streets.

I became aware that while it was terribly hot on the ground, there was a nice cool breeze up on the roof. Above us, the blue sky was dotted with fast-moving, fluffy white clouds. As we looked around, we discovered that we could see a long way in every direction. On the far side of another cottage I could see a group of residents playing baseball. In the other direction I could see the traffic on the nearest main thoroughfare. And, just on the edge of the horizon in another direction, we all saw a sailboat slitting through the water of the blue town lake, posed against the brightly colored awnings of the town park. The entire vista looked gloriously peaceful. Standing on the peak of the roof made me feel like a giant.

I noticed that the other staff members were puffing from the climb, too. Several of them had sat down on the roof. The psychologist was pointing out an airplane, drifting through the air toward our roof, to the nurse. Ken leaned over to me.

"We'll keep looking up here. Why don't you go down and see if you can see them from the ground? If they try to come up here we'll catch them," Ken told me confidentially. I shrugged. Actually, I would rather have stayed on the cool roof, but I climbed down.

As I approached the ladder, I had to wait as two of the cottage residents climbed the ladder to the roof. Several of them had already ascend-

ed to the roof. In fact, there were only two of them still on the ground, and they were about to climb the ladder. Even the business manager was drifting closer to the ladder. Her gaze drew my attention to the crowd gathered on the roof. Most of them were smiling as the breeze blew through their hair. The psychologist had taken his tie off and was flirting with the nurse. The psychology intern was standing on the peak with his arms outstretched, exulting in the freedom of the blue sky.

I went inside the cottage. Carlos and Danny were in the living room alone, watching Bugs Bunny on television. They began to laugh when they saw me come in the door. They laughed harder when I put my hand on my hip and gave them a stern look.

"Eh, what's up, Doc?" Carlos asked. They both laughed so hard that they hugged each other. They kicked their feet on the rug.

"What's so funny? You're both in a lot of trouble," I told them.

Carlos slowed down his laughter to say, "Come with us and we'll show you."

He led and we all went out on the lawn. The business manager was sitting on the roof now also. Everyone seemed to be smiling. Ken was lying on the roof smiling, as his hair was ruffled by the cool breeze. Dr. Harrison and Dr. Evans both were talking to some of the residents about the sailboat on the lake. One of the younger boys was trying to tickle the psychology intern, who was tickling him in return.

Carlos and Danny broke into gales of laughter at the sight of the staff members and residents on the rooftop. Danny, between hoots, said: "Now what are you guys doin' on the roof? Don't you know that's against the rules?"

When Danny spoke, several of the staff members on the roof who could see us on the ground, stopped talking and looked down at us. Dr. Evans' expression changed as he seemed to realize where he was. He looked around at the people assembled on the roof who were all relaxed, some of whom were smiling. He seemed to notice the staff members talking and playing with the residents.

Dr. Evans grinned sheepishly. Then he said to Carlos, "Hey Carlos, catch!" Dr. Evans picked up a pebble and sailed it gently at Carlos, who caught it in his cupped hands.