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Fathers and Child Welfare: Stories of Men's Everyday Lives and Service Experiences

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Fathers and Child Welfare:

Stories of Men's Everyday Lives and Service Experiences

By

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Foreword

This volume of stories from fathers involved with child welfare services acts as both a stand-alone document and a companion document to the research report on father's experiences of child welfare services. This volume is intended for multiple audiences including child welfare service providers, community organizations working with men, students and instructors interested in men's issues, and fathers. This volume of stories may be useful for teaching purposes, service provision decisions, and general interest.

All names have been changed to protect the identities of fathers who participated in this research as well as their family members.

Story Abstracts

The following compilation of abstracts provides an overview of each fathers' story, highlighting key aspects of their life stories in relation to their involvement with child welfare services. This compilation provides readers with a quick summary of each story to guide them to stories that peek their interest.

Story One: Paul

Paul's (46) first contact with the CAS was through his own adoption as a child. He speaks of his childhood and losing his mother in his early teens. Now married with five children, Paul speaks of his family life and how he and his wife manage three teenagers who have all been involved with the CAS and police for engaging in delinquent activities. He speaks of his concern for his children, as some of them have disabilities, as well as their need for supports and services to also meet his wife's health care needs. Paul has worked at the same textile company for 28 years to provide the bare necessities for his family; his daughter Stephanie is currently in CAS care.

Story Two: Caleb

Caleb is 33 living with Christine his common-law wife and their daughter Lindsay (4) and Christine's son Davy (7). Caleb speaks of his childhood experiences being raised by his father in the '70's and what it was like to reunite with his mother when he was a young adult. Caleb speaks of what it is like raising a step-son who has behavioral difficulties as well as challenges with his relationships with his children and partner. Children's Aid became involved when Caleb hit Davy and their babysitter reported the incident to the CAS.

Story Three: Zack

Zack (50) speaks of his childhood and teenage years, how he began working at the age of 14 and alcohol became his 'best friend'. As an adult, Zack married twice although he is now separated from his second wife Julia. He is currently caring for 3 of his 5 children, Philip (7), April (8), and Melissa (13). Zack's eldest daughter Sasha (15) lives with her mother Julia and brother Seth (11). CAS became involved when his first son Seth was born with health difficulties and Julia's well-being and parenting came into question. Zack speaks of his alcoholism, his experiences with CAS and of being a single father.

Story Four: Eric

Eric (early 40's) is married and has two children, a son (early teens) and a daughter (approaching teen years). Eric works long hours at his job as a machinist in order to provide for his family. In his off hours Eric enjoys taking his kids to their various sports and clubs, as well as spending time with his extended family. He talks about not understanding why the CAS took his children away and kept them in care for a year and how painful this experience was for him. Both children are now back at home and Eric notes that nothing has really changed in terms of their parenting in comparison to before the CAS became involved.

Story Five: Carlos

Carlos (25) is a single father of an eighteen month old daughter and is currently living in his parents' home under house arrest. Carlos speaks of how his leaving home at the age of 19 led to driving fancy cars and spending money that spiraled into thousands of dollars in debt and a delinquent lifestyle. Carlos recounts his young adulthood and the incidents that led him to return home to live with his parents and how without their help he may have lost custody of his daughter Deidra. Children's Aid became involved when Carlos's mother phoned concerned when Deidra's mother Chantal wanted to remove Deidra from her care when she was under the influence of illegal substances. Carlos shares how the meaning of fatherhood has helped him reconsider his lifestyle, thus turning it around for the better.

Story Six: Rob

Rob (43) is married with two children, Kevin (10) and Jacob (11). Rob recounts working 70 hours a week and how his and his wife's increased drinking and violent arguments led to his arrest after pouring Ketchup on his wife Sherry's head. Family and Children's Services (CAS) became involved with the family for eight months following Rob's arrest. Rob describes his experiences with CAS workers, his experience being arrested and of the counseling both he and his wife sought to help their marriage. Rob also shares his frustrations with being involved with CAS, how he has learned from his experience, and how he now makes family time a priority.

Story Seven: David

David (44) currently lives with his second wife Paige. He shares his experiences as a step-father to 15 year old Amber, who is currently receiving treatment at a children's mental health residential program. David became involved with Children's Aid when his step-daughter opted to go to foster care after being charged with various crimes. David also speaks of his experiences living with his first wife Chelsey and how being separated from their two children Conor (22) and Sophie (18) for the last ten years impacts on his life and understanding of fatherhood.

Story Eight: Collin

Collin (51) has been separated from his ex-wife Isabel for 10 years. Currently their two sons, Oliver (17) and Oscar (15), are in foster care, while their daughter Olivia (20) lives independently. Collin relates why the CAS removed his sons from his wife's custody and what it is like for him as a father separated from his children. He recounts his family's immigration to Canada as a child and how his sister Patricia's death at a young age impacted on his life. Collin talks of meeting his wife when they were both receiving treatment for health problems and describes their married life as fraught with conflict and economic struggles. Currently Collin lives with his parents and works night shifts as a security guard, he expresses his dream of having all of his children living under one roof with him as he currently cannot economically afford to provide for his children on his salary.

Story Nine: Peter

Peter is a 40 year old man of Jamaican origin who has been separated from his wife, Tanya, and five children (four natural children, three girls and one boy, aged 5-12 years, and one male step-child aged 17 years) for about two years. He lives alone in a small apartment in a run-down rooming house. Peter is unemployed, lives on social assistance, and is undergoing speech and physical rehabilitation for the debilitating effects of a stroke that he suffered a year ago. He spoke of the pain of the separation from his children that was occasioned first by the marital separation and then later exacerbated by his seven-month stay in the hospital and his children's placement in CAS foster care that happened while he was in the hospital. Since his children have been returned to his wife's custody and he has been released from hospital, he is happy to have the children visit him on weekends. He laments the fact that his apartment is not large enough to allow the children to move in with him or to even stay overnight for weekend visits. Peter dreams of recovery from the effects of the stroke, gaining employment, and having a residence suitable and large enough to allow his children to stay with him. He is concerned about being able to stay in Canada because he is not a landed immigrant.

Story Ten: Tarak

Tarak (56) was born in South America and immigrated to Canada as a young adult. Tarak speaks of his childhood and recounts his journey to Canada. He is currently married to Samara and together they live with their son Tye (4). He shares his experience as a parent in a culture that has different values than his own upbringing. Tarak's cultural differences in parenting his step-son Kendal (18), and family arguments, lead to his involvement with Family and Children's Services that separated him from his family for two years. He voices his opinions on Canadian social justice systems and his impressions on Canadian policy regarding parenting, education, as well as the cultural differences he has experienced living in Canada.

Story Eleven: Dean

Dean (34) is the father of his 3 year daughter Victoria, who currently lives with her mother Vicky. Growing up, Dean lived in a large family with an alcoholic father. He speaks of his childhood and how he met the love of his life, Vicky, at the age of 30. Children's Services became involved when Dean and Vicky took their daughter to the hospital for breathing problems and a doctor reported to CAS that they smelt like marijuana. A surprise visit from CAS resulted in Victoria's apprehension when the worker uncovered Dean had somehow given Vicky a black eye. Dean shares his experiences going through the court system as well as his impressions of the child welfare system and how his life has changed since his he and Vicky separated.

Story Twelve: William

William is 50 and married to Marie with two children Richard (age) and Tiffany (age) who have learning disabilities. Reflecting back on his childhood, William shares his experiences growing up in a large family of nine and how his happy childhood memories of engaging in family activities play an important role in how he likes to engage with his own family. William recounts how he and his family have struggled after discovering incest between his son and daughter, and the challenges having his son placed outside the home. William speaks of the emotional and practical challenges of having his two children living apart and of the Children Aid's Society involvement in helping his family manage their circumstances and work toward bringing his family back together under one roof.

Story Thirteen: Felix

Felix (39) is married to Jasmine and they have two daughters, Tashlin (12) and Ruby (10). Felix speaks of his childhood and how he feels his step-father influenced his actions to molest his siblings at the age of 13. Maureen, Felix's sister reported Felix to the authorities during his late teen years where he was then removed from the family home for three years. Today Felix claims he has been under the thumb of Children's Services since he was reported as a sexual predator and how this impacts on his own family as he struggles with the challenges of raising a child with disabilities.

Story Fourteen: George

George (41) is Metis and grew up in northern Ontario. He speaks of his early adulthood when he lived a 'gangster life' and how having a child turned him away from drugs and a violent lifestyle. George recounts how his ex-wife Abigail's drug addiction and prostitution lead to their family's involvement with Children's Aid. He speaks of the hardships he has faced in his past and attributes the current success in his life to his faith, determination and business skills. Currently, George lives with his three daughters Faith (8), Grace (5), and Gabriella (4), and his girlfriend Madison with her two daughters Mia (15) and Chloe (21).

Story Fifteen: Nigel

Nigel (44) immigrated to Canada at the age of 16; currently he lives with his son Christopher (14) while his daughter Julia (7) resides with his ex-wife Marie. Nigel describes his former marriage as a 'happy marriage' until Maria had some behavioural issues he was unable to deal with. Nigel explains how his ex-wife's family supported him financially through his divorce and fight for custody by helping pay lawyer fees. He speaks of his children's experience placed in foster care and his involvement with Children's Aid.

Story Sixteen: Dylan

Dylan (late 30's) is single and has twin children, a son and a daughter, from a previous relationship. Dylan's children were removed by the CAS at the age of five and are now crown wards. At the time of the interviews Dylan did not know whether or not his children had been adopted. Dylan expresses a great deal of emotion about his involvement with the CAS, indicating that he is both angry and sad about what happened. Dylan admits that having his children in care is probably best for them given their special needs and health problems; he just wishes that certain aspects of his involvement with the CAS had gone differently. Dylan has a history of moving around a lot and holding a range of part-time jobs to supplement his income from the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Dylan's own childhood was turbulent, his mother began suffering from pre-senile dementia at a young age and had to enter a care facility and his father was an abusive alcoholic. Dylan is currently planning another move and one of his short-term goals is to find "the right woman" and have more children.

Story Seventeen: Raymond

Raymond (44) worked hard to provide for his three children, Max, Eugene and Sarah; however, his ex-wife Ursula wanted the 'bells and whistles' he couldn't afford on one income. After divorcing, Raymond talks about the difficulties he and his ex-wife have faced in raising their teenagers as separated parents. Raymond now finds himself looking out for his children's welfare and involved with Family and Children's Services after discovering Ursula has been abusive to the children and has neglected their son Eugene, who has special needs. Soon to become a grandfather, Raymond talks about his excitement of having a grandchild and his own dreams of finding a new partner.

Story Eighteen: Burt

Burt (39) is separated from his wife Miranda and is currently caring for his three year old son Thomas; his eldest son Arthur (5) lives in another province with his ex-girlfriend Constance. Burt recounts the challenges he faced when he reported Constance to Children's Services for abusing their son Arthur and was in turn was wrongfully accused by Constance of molesting Arthur. Burt recounts his experience with Children's Services and his struggles to gain custody of his youngest son Thomas when his ex-wife Miranda took off with their son during a period of mental instability. Burt shares what his life is like as a single father.

Paul

Paul was adopted as a young child through the Children's Aid Society. His non-biological brother was also adopted

Um, basically I can vividly remember being a, being in a house, with, with other children. And I've always, this white hair, this white haired woman looking after me, and I relayed that even to my mother, after being adopted, and she said it's amazing because she said what you're relating to is, is the woman, I presume who looked after you. ... I've always known I'm adopted. There was, there was nothing ever hidden, my mother never believed in hiding it ... I have the picture at home of myself, um, taken at, just shortly afterwards, a colour picture of me, just shortly after being adopted. And that's where I'm pegging myself as very, very young. I remember I think a year or two years later, we went to [another city] and picked up my brother.

. . . I'm the youngest of five. Five kids . . . a couple of months later I got this letter saying . . . I was like born on December the 11th, I'm, I'm, medically I was fine, I was a healthy baby boy and, and stuff like that, it gives a little teeny bit, not too much on the father, it gives just a little bit of the mother . . . she liked to frequent the hotels . . . I think she was pretty young. It was 1957. And I think, I don't know, but I'm quite sure probably those five children, maybe just didn't all come from that same father. . . . but growing up, it's, it was fine, like my they were very open about it. . .

His parents were older when they adopted the two boys. Paul talks positively about his parents but sees them as having been strict disciplinarians. His mother became very ill and Paul describes taking care of her and assuming extra responsibilities around the home. She died when he was fourteen:

. . . my mother was very authoritative, like she was loving, but she was very strict too . . . she believed in the belt. But not all the time . . . treats were like going to the, maybe going to store for, like you know, buy a bag of chips or a chocolate bar or a pop, or, um, baby bonus day she'd take us both down to [a restaurant] and go out and buy us a sundae, that kinda stuff like that . . .

my father was going to take us down to, take us down to see our mom [in the hospital] . . . my mother said, "Oh come on boys, give your mom a hug and kiss" she was in bed, like, you know at the time . . . and we got up and gave our mother a hug, and she grabbed us right by the heads and smacked our heads together, and she said, "If you ever, ever steal, and you wreck my name, I'll kill

you. *You were not brought up to steal or anything else, it's not a game*” [laughs]
...

she couldn't give herself needles, she had to get the insulin, so I can remember my father's having problems just doing that, so I, I went to the hospital and learned how on a orange and I gave my mother injections before I went to school in the morning. ...

... I was more closer to my mother I think . . I had more close time in his [father's] last two years of life, than basic probably from when I was a teenager into my adult years. 'Til he went into the old age home. And I'd go over there on Sundays and I'll meet dad, go over on a Wednesday evening for an hour or so . . .

It was like a cloud, in that as a kid, like, looking at her in the casket, I can remember her looking much better, health-wise, they, they because they do the makeup and everything else. Like, then when she was actually in real life, like 'cause she was a, she was two hundred and fifty pounds. And when we, when we buried her she was eighty nine. So she had gone, straight down.

Paul always struggled in school and was placed in “an opportunity class” in grade one or two and stayed in “special education” until he quit school at sixteen. He is proud that he returned to complete his highschool education as an adult:

... when I started to have children, growing up, I didn't want them to see them at, at an age of sixteen, then say, well you did it, you dropped out, so we can do that kinda thing too. So I, that's one goal I really wanted to get back into, to, get my, at least get my high school education. And I enrolled, was just, just up the street here actually . . . I enrolled with them for five years . . . doing homework after the kids into bed 'til midnight . . . at the age of thirty five . . . my son and I think my daughter . . . they were pretty young at the time, and I went and got graduated. So I got my high school education. And I thought that was great. It was an accomplishment 'cause I could turn around and prove to them that, that, that you know, I could do it ...

Paul and his family have lived in the same housing cooperative for seventeen years. He likes where he lives but also talks about the challenges drugs and delinquency in the neighbourhood pose for his children. He has worked for the same employer in the textile industry for twenty-eight years. His wife is on a long-term disability pension. Coping with limited finances with five children is an ongoing challenge. At the time of

the first interview, Paul could not afford to have his car repaired and was commuting by bus:

. . . I started in shipping, shipping and receiving, I was in that for awhile. And then there was a job opening in the finishing room. And I was in the finishing room for about ten years. Then there was a job opening for coming out in the dye house. And it was there for quite a bit more money. And I went into the dye house. And I was in there for two years and then there was another job opening for parts department . . . and I worked for that for ten years. And the last place I am now, is, is like a slasher assistant. Which is, it's in the preparation department . . . I've been in that department 'til, to this day. (So, you like your job?) Oh no. [laughter] Yeah, yeah. Yeah, you need a job. Potatoes and stuff on the table and get groceries . . . I've been there a long time . . . I get five weeks for my vacation time. And basically it's not too bad if you've been there for quite a few years [. . .]

. . . thank God for my drug plan . . . my kids are on this medications, over a hundred and fifty dollars a shot . . . One of my wife's pills are over four hundred and something dollars. Um, yeah, close to a over a thousand dollars a month . . . (Is money tight?) Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, it's tight. Yeah, and um, it'll be more tight too because, they're, they're after us for um, child support now . . . (So is that stressful, like are finances stressful?) Oh yeah. Yeah, that can be more stress, I think that worries me out, worries me more . . . I got food on the table, and stuff like that, you know, it could be a lot worse, you know. A lot of people are a lot worse than us.

Paul and his wife have lived through many challenges with their three oldest children. All had difficulty in “regular” academic programs. They also manifested various emotional difficulties and acted out in school and in the community. His thirteen year old daughter is in Children’s Aid Society care yet continues to run away and become involved in worrisome situations. Paul and his wife worry about the consequences for his two youngest boys. When asked about the consequences for him and his wife of what seemed like unrelenting stress and how they managed Paul responded:

Least my wife, you know, if we don't know where she is, my wife's up all hours of the night, wondering where the hell that girl is. If, if she's in custody, we know, we have a good nights sleep, because she's in jail. And that's, that's horrible.

(So how . . . are you and your wife doing through all of this?) Um my wife went for doing mental counselling . . . she feels like a lot of it, she feels that, she's a lousy parent. Because we have kids acting out, like, we don't beat them. Um, I can say we don't beat them, we love them with our hearts. But they act out.

(. . . how's your wife holding up through all of this?) It, it's hard . . . , she's narcoleptic, she has narcolepsy . . . she's on a, a C-pap machine, kinda thing, that blows air through her mouth so she'll be able to breathe properly . . . it's like a mask kinda thing, like she goes once a year, I think, gets evaluated at the sleep clinic. She's on CPP, yeah, yeah, she was on ODSP, but she got CPP, she applied for it and she got that so, she's on that.

(You've been through a lot . . . So what's, what's been the toll on you?) Um, I'm just hoping it will end. I haven't seen no light at the end of the tunnel . . . (So has it been a living hell for you? You haven't, like how do you cope?) Well it's, I, like I say, I have my wife, we can talk to each other, kinda thing, like that. And I don't go to, I haven't been to counselling, I thought about it one time . . . But, basically, you know, a couple of mates at work . . . I talk to, like I know them enough time, you know, we'll talk about it . . . but mostly it's with my wife, to be honest with you, it's with my wife, and we both talk about it. It's hard on her too . . . I think it's worse on her than it's worse on me actually. (Because she's the one at home?) . . . She's the one at home, um, she questions her parenting. She, I sometimes thought that, like what the hell have we done, what have we done wrong? . . . But we still have two younger children that we have to worry about . . . my two youngest boys we have on a waiting list . . . they have a counsellor coming here . . . I basically want them to talk to somebody, just 'cause we really don't know how it really effects the, with a sister gone out of house . . .

Um, I wish it were, I just wish it would stop . . . if I had to sit down and, and write a book about my experience [with Children's Aid], I'd call it the double edged sword, for sure.

Caleb

Caleb describes being separated from his biological mother when he was three years old. He has no memory of this time but has been told that it was because his mother was physically abusive and struggled with a variety of personal challenges:

My parents separated when I was three, uh divorced with I was 7. Um they separated cause my Mom was abusive . . . she was really starting to understand what- that she was being abusive and it was kind've a, pushing me away too. Cause she didn't want to be continually doing it. (So when you say abusive . . . what do you mean?) Uh mostly physical from what I understand. ... we lost

contact for a number of years . . . she had a major breakdown . . . still suffers from high anxiety, depression . . . and [agoraphobia] more than anything right now. ... there's a lot of stuff I didn't realize that I found out for a few years when I got back in touch with her . . . her first letter to me . . . she spilled her guts . . . Um, she was, she was abused a lot as a child. Um I'm not sure if it was sexually or not. ... Um but I, I guess there was foster homes too ...

Caleb talks about his mother having five children from five different fathers. He had no contact with his siblings until recently and laments his lack of family growing up:

. . . I've never really had much of a family. My uncle lived with us for quite a number of years, um, and my dad and I spent a lot of time with my grandmother. But other than that . . . I did a lot of family stuff with my, uh, my best friend growing up. He uh, he had a good stable family relationship and uh they were just always out doing things . . . it was very much a surrogate family . . .

He describes being raised by his dad in a “male” environment and talks positively about his past and ongoing relationship with his father:

. . . so I grew up with my dad . . . once in a while he tells me about how it was tough because like if stuff comes up on the news, how it was tough being a single father in the 70s. Cause it's just . . . he couldn't get, he had to fight to get things like uh, child benefit and stuff like that. ... (So it was kind've a male household that you grew up in?) . . . Yeah . . . he made sure we went out and did stuff. ... that time was important to him because we'd like doing renovations on the house and there's the teenage years where kids never see their parents and vice versa. ... Was a-a-a promise that he'd always made that he was, he was gonna take care of me and gonna do everything that he could for me. So he, you know, he put me through school. ... And he still does, we uh still have a very good relationship.

Caleb met his current partner Christine when they both worked alternative shifts at a gas station. Caleb talks about the busy schedule required by the alternative work shifts for his wife in a factory and his delivery work:

. . . we work alternate shifts so during the week we've actually we've only actually got roughly, uh, three hours that we spend any time together . . . Um I start at 7 in the morning . . . I get up uh about 20 after 5 . . . I get my shower. I get uh, eat breakfast, get a few things together, get dressed. Then I go up, I get Lindsay- plopped her on the couch. Make my lunch and, uh, then I get her dressed. Get her teeth brushed and get her off to daycare and then I'm off to work . . . Christine gets home at 6:30 [a.m.]. I leave about uh 6:35 . . . If she's tired she'll grab a nap until 8 and then she'll get up, she'll get Davy up, she'll feed him

breakfast, make sure he's ready and off to school and then she climbs into bed for 9 and sleeps until, uh, until we get home . . . I'm home about 10 to 4 'cause I pick Lindsay . . . and then he gets dropped off by the school bus.

Caleb describes holding a variety of jobs since he finished high school and an ongoing struggle to find steady work:

... being a summer worker, I never took the time off . . . I wouldn't get paid if I did, and we just never had enough money that I could . . . winter was always just a scramble just to find any work . . . I got into the cab business too for a few years and until she went on nights, and then I had to look at other work, and that's how I got into the machine shop. . . . when I, in grade twelve was when I got into co-op, and then I worked for the [county conservation park], I worked for them for five summers . . . Um, I got into work at a brewery for a year. That was my first job I'd ever had for a year 'cause up until then I'd been in school, so it was always just summer work . . . so I got into the landscaping . . . (Now would that have been seasonal?) Yeah. I'd have, I got some partial work in the winter doing snow cleanup, but that was a matter of, if there's no snow, there's no work. So I just, I just did the UI thing . . . I've been in this job since last September. So. It's, it's getting a little bit itchy right now. My body's telling me I should be working outside. 'Cause I've done it so long, I mean, it's three years landscaping, almost three years with the city, the five years I did with the {County Conservation Park}. I've spent almost all my summers outside And then when I met Christine, I got into the cab business. Or I worked for, I said her step-mom owns a cab I think I mentioned the machine shop, that I still do part time on the weekends right now. [. . .] (Have you, do you like your current job?) Yeah, I, I enjoy it very much . . . if I didn't get the overtime, and if Christine didn't, didn't get her at overtime, we'd probably just be eating Kraft Dinner. [laughs] . . .

Caleb talks a good deal about the pressures of having enough money to pay all of their bills. He says their financial stress is due to the amount of money they earn and, in particular, to the amount of debt his wife accumulates, which he finds aggravating and describes as a source of conflict between them:

. . . I'd never made much money anyway, so it was, um, but Christine, she was just, I don't know why, 'cause she's always been heavily in debt. And she just never seemed to learn from it . . . she's got the better part of the debts. And she makes the better part of the money . . . I pay my debts and then whatever I have leftover, I put towards the rest of the debts. [. . .] . . . it was like the first week or so after Christmas, we had like no money to buy groceries. We just had nothing . . . it was January, around the beginning of February. [Christine] she had a, a real breakdown where she called me up one day, she was crying, she was, and I guess

it had just finally hit her . . . she was just really realizing how badly we were in debt and why. [. . .]

Caleb describes tension and conflict with Christine which he links with differences over money and parenting methods among other things. He talks about the challenges of bonding with his five year old step son Davey, who he sees as having behaviour difficulties in school and at home. He also illustrates some of the physical and emotional health problems Christine is facing:

(So you've been . . . together like about, what four years?) Yeah. Yeah just over four years now. (Okay. And how's things been?) Um good and bad. Um they've gotten rockier um after she had [daughter] Lindsay; [Christine] she suffered a lot from depression and that made the household a bit rough. And she [Christine] was uh, not so much depression in a sense either as the mood swings that she got. You know she'd be really good and then the next day you, you, you just seem to do everything wrong. And she'd just be freaking out on ya and, and more me, uh mine and Davy's relationship always been a little rougher . . . He's 7 now . . . it's always been a little rough between us. I'm not entirely sure why. . . . I'm not sure [I] was necessarily destined to be a father . . . I just haven't gotten with him [Davy] as well as I would like to of. . . Davy's always been a, a bit of a troublesome kid too. He doesn't like to listen, um, he's always causing a bit of havoc that way [. . .] his academics aren't great. They, they're not terrible either. . . but he acts out in class, he's for some reason he, he hits or kicks or whatever kids once in a while for whatever reason. I think a lot of it's just a reaction . . . he's still only, just only in Grade 1 right now . . . he got tossed off the bus last Friday. Apparently for punching a kid so the bus driver took him off the bus and dropped him off in the office . . . that's not the first time. . . the one thing that really aggravates me about Davy, well . . . you're always repeating yourself. I mean there's stuff we have told him literally for years and he still just goes ahead and does it. . . .

. . . it's hard to get her [Christine] to open up sometimes . . . to open up and to talk to her without her getting defensive . . . So she can get very defensive if you say anything that she feels she's being overly criticized or anything like that. So it can be hard to sit down and just talk . . . (Uh huh. So do you feel like your relationship is on shaky ground or somewhere in between?) Somewhere in between. [...] . . . I finally said to her . . . “We can't resolve our relationship if every time you get angry you're gonna tell me to get out because you don't want me to leave. Cause every time I make it look like I'm about to walk out the door, you tell me not to go.” . . .

Caleb does not see himself as a social person. He talks about coping and enjoying himself by doing maintenance and repairs around the house, chatting with a long time friend he met through a chat line on the computer, writing fantasy stories, and making artifacts from chain mail:

During the summer, my fun is getting out and doing things like cut the grass, trim the shrubs and stuff like that . . . I'm trying to teach myself a bit more, more and more about trying to fix up cars and stuff like that. Not just for the economics of it, but just, I don't know, anything I can't do, I find somewhat interesting on that level . . . So, I'm trying to, trying to teach myself stuff like that. . . I piddle around on the computer. Mostly it's just talking, I have a friend in the States that I met after my ex left . . . pretty much been talking with her since the first night I was on the chat line. And we talk pretty much every night . . . it's just something I do for about an hour at night. . . . I've never had a lot of social connections, I mean, when you're growing up, most all anybody wants to do is go out to bars, they wanna party, they wanna drink. That was just never my thing . . . one thing I like to do is write. . . (So what do you write?) Several different things. Most of the stuff I like is fantasy. I do have one sort of futuristic cop story; that in total is probably about a thousand pages or so now . . . between like six books. (Really?) Yeah. [...] . . . I'd do the whole chain mail thing. That used to be a hobby I used to be in to . . . a lot, not into it as much right now. . . Chain mail. The, the armor . . . You've seen in the, a few medieval movies, when they have the armor . . . you make the, you make the rings and you put them together . . . it gets very heavy. And there's just little patterns, I make little key chains like this, and there's various patterns . . . I made my friend actually a, a wine bottle holder out of one of those. I lined it with velvet and made it large enough to hold a wine bottle . . .

Zack

Zack talks about his struggles with two past marriages, both with women much younger than himself, both with mental health problems and having abusive childhoods:

May as well start when I got married the second time . . . 1988. I was married February 12th, 1988. And my wife . . . was ten years younger than me, I was thirty-three, she was twenty-three, and she was pregnant when we got married . . . That would have been Sasha and I should have known, right at that point that there was, there, there were problems ahead. I found out later that she had severe depression problems . . . And she was also apparently from an abusive family. Her father, and again this is what she was, what was told to me by her. But her father sexually abused her from the time she was about twelve years old on. She had one brother who beat the crap out of her all the time . . . he's been in and out of jail more times than, you know, I've been, I've gotten out of bed I think

. . . her mother was extremely cold and wanted nothing to do with her ... And there was, there was involvement with Children's Aid going way, way, way back with her family . . . right now we're generation number three [involved with CAS] . . . In 1993 we'd had our second child and I think she experienced some post-partum depression, and she ended up at [mental health treatment facility] . . . on electro-shock therapy for two weeks . . .

. . . I met my first wife [Sylvia], uh she was only 14 at the time . . . I was 23, but I didn't know how old she was. ... I wasn't proud of the fact that she was only 14. But then she turned 15, then she turned 16 and . . . I have this rescuing syndrome. She, you know, she said she was sexually abused and physically abused by her father and her brothers and uncles. And so she asked me if she could move in with me cause I had my own apartment by this time. And I thought, yeah, that's pretty nice. I was alone. And lonely. Now I'm just alone, I'm not lonely anymore. Uh and like we a we had an on again, off again marriage. You know she'd be in my life on minute and, uh, you know, she'd leave for two or three months at a time. She'd moved to [the United States] with her sister, uh, and brother-in-law. And, uh, you know she'd come back. She always came back, even after, even after we got divorced. Her life was so messed up when she was down there. Like she was into cocaine and stuff.

Zack came from a childhood home that had many of the same characteristics of his recent marriage:

. . . I grew up, uh, skinny as I am now- only a lot skinnier actually. And, uh, no self-confidence, no confidence in myself at all. I had a dad and a mom . . . they were together for many, many, many, many years until she died at 48 I guess. ... dad did not make a lotta money, same as me. Uh, my dad had 5 children, same as me. ... My, uh, my dad drank. And, uh, and I really believe that he passed off some genes to me. Uh, unfavourable genes . . . my idea, . . . was to, you know, die by the time I'm 30 of alcoholism. And, uh, I have a feeling that I used to, I used to listen to his parties. ... He was a weekend drinker for most of my life, and then when I started drinking it kind've encouraged him to go for more than one- more-more than the weekend. Cause I was hooked on the stuff even before I started drinking . . . Dad and mom didn't get along really that well. I mean, because of his drinking . . . he'd scream and yell, you know, if you didn't do something . . . that's where . . . the fear came in . . . was that he'd scream and yell at ya. Uh, so, it was, it was unpleasant growing up. I mean I wanted to be out on my own . . . my mother was not a good housekeeper. amazing how ya, ya marry the same thing as, as, uh, you leave behind . . . (So your house was kind've . . .) It was a mess. It was a total disaster from Sunday to Sunday and when I grew old enough I, uh, I started to clean it. I was probably 12 or 13 when I first started. And I would clean the whole entire house; well at least the downstairs so if people came in . . . nobody ever picked up after themselves, nobody really cares except me and my dad. My dad, he did a lot of the housekeeping. He did a lot of the cooking.

Zack has struggled with a serious alcohol addiction for all of his adult life. His five children were apprehended by the Children's Aid Society, after his second wife had left them with him to move out with her boyfriend, because of the unkempt state of his house and his being drunk. His children were returned to him only after he had completed a residential addictions program and remained alcohol free afterwards. Now he gets friendship and strong support from the Christian addictions support group at his church. His faith and his church are very important to Zack.

. . . I'm an off ag-, on again, off again alcoholic, but I mean, like I'm an alcoholic, doesn't matter if I, I mean I haven't had a drink now for, it'll be two years April 10th. ... So I have a, a recovery group that meets once a week, at [church]. I hang out with a bunch of sober people. That's my AA. ... Christian based recovery group and it's, it's just, it's first rate, I, I just love it. (If I could just ask, so, how, how far back does this, this sort of addictions problem go?) Oh. Starts about fourteen I guess [...] . . . the guy that I worked for was an alcoholic and it was farm work. So I had the best of both worlds, I had a job that I could go to every day, and every day about twelve o'clock we'd go up the house and have two or three ryes . . . I was a sloppy, miserable, pathetic, crying, horribly un-charming drunk. I hated myself . . . I was a blackout drinker right from the beginning. [...] . . . just around Christmas time I got so sick . . . like for three days I threw up, I was that sick. I drank that much. You know, I probably had alcohol poisoning, ok, . . . towards the end, all I could afford was the big bottles of beer, you know the ten percent beer? And when they ran out, it was like, I mean I shook like a leaf for like three or four days . . . the kids stayed away from me, not because they were afraid of me, but because they were scared of what was happening [...] they apprehended my kids from me because of my drinking. And that was on April 10th, two years ago. They apprehended all five of the kids, or four of the kids. Because at that point my wife had left February 2nd [...] They didn't give me five minutes, they just took the kids [...] (So how long were they there?) Eight months. I got them back December 18th, 2002. And I've had them ever since. [...] I went into detox . . . same afternoon as [CAS] took the kids . . . I was in there for I don't know, six or seven days. And they got me into a [second] treatment centre . . . I spent twenty-one days there [...] I love the Church. I love the people. You know . . . I love the Lord so . . . (Do you have most of your, uh, most of your friends are through the recovery program at Church?) Yeah. Yeah, in fact they're all through the recovery program at Church . . .

Zack lives on welfare supplemented by piece work done in his home in subsidized housing. Money is tight. He has had a variety of low paying jobs over the years such

travelling salesman, farm labourer, and lawn cutting. He is currently the single dad for three of his children with his eldest son and daughter now living with their mother. There is ongoing conflict with his ex-wife and her current partner. He feels guilty over what he put his kids through and wants to be there for them now.

. . . I didn't have a lot of money to be honest . . . I moved back in here the day she left . . . she said, "You know, you just have to go down and change the lease over to your name." So I did that, I did all the, I did all the paperwork, got everything all settled, went to court, had the kids' custody transferred from her to me . . . CAS, well they were still involved because they were still keeping an eye on her. [...] I detest what I did to the kids, you know . . . it was really bad, I, I felt horrible the whole time I was there, I, you know, I wanted to you know, grab the kids and just run out. Take them back home. [...] And, yeah. All four kids came home December 18th, so I had them back in time for Christmas . . . I had them back in time for Christmas, and it was a, you know, for me it was a happy reunion. Except for, I didn't have Seth with me. (What was it like, the kids coming back in, for you, and them?) Oh Jesus. It drove me nuts. To be honest with you, I mean I had, months and months and months of quiet solitude, doing what I wanted when I wanted. And all of a sudden I've got these four demanding kids. And it was like, whoa. You know, reality is setting in again. So it was stressful for a long time . . . for them to go into care, must have been traumatic. [...] But the kids, you know right now, the kids are well adjusted. They have to be. Nobody, well for one thing, they don't fear that I'm going to leave them [...] I didn't go to high school a lot. I came home as often as I could. I didn't like it. I think I went to like to grade 11 and then I, uh, I ended up quitting and going to work for- for a company. Started working when I was 14 on a farm. And, uh, I think I told you that I had the perfect boss. He was an alcoholic [...] I don't have a car and it's really hard to take buses, I'm sick of it. Uh, I practically live on a bus. [...] I'm not, I'm not rich, I never will be. (Now are you on social assistance or?) Uh partial assistance, yeah . . . since I came out of treatment . . . after I got outta treatment it was like 430 dollars and my rent was 237 and I had heat and hydro- major heat and hydro on top a that. So I ended up, uh, so then Children's Aid came to my rescue and said "Look this guy has got kids every weekend, you know. Um, can you do something about this. He needs more money." . . . before the end of the business day they had a check for they'd had almost a thousand dollars put in my account. I hadn't seen that much money in for like a long time. So I'm very grateful to uh, to CAS. [...] they've set me up with a social agency to help me with the, uh, you know food and stuff when I needed the help. [...] (So wh-what's it like being a single dad?) Well I have no social life. Um you know what? I, I like it. I really do. I like it. Um I liked it better when I had all five of them cause then I didn't have to worry about the two that I didn't have with me. Uh, but I like being a single dad. I, I like going out and shopping for my kids and-and, you know, trying to buy them the right stuff and, uh, uh, it's, it's hectic. It's busy . . . if I'm not, uh, working on this- I'm cleaning.

And if I'm not cleaning, I'm preparing lunches. And if I'm not cooking, I'm cleaning up after cooking. . . the kids really do mean everything to me. ...

Eric

Eric grew up in a relatively large family and says his homelife was “good.” He speaks positively of having so many siblings.

(Your parents have a big place?) No, it's no bigger than this one. Well, bigger, a little bit bigger than this one, but- It was still only three bedrooms. Like- The girls in one room, the boys in the other room, and then Mom and Dad. (Like, like how many boys, you had like how many brothers-) Five boys ... Yeah, two bunk beds, and, and a single. And then a small, a single bed. So. (So what was, what was home life like?) Um, good actually. Did sports. Park, went to the park every day, and the school was right beside the house, so it's, school, kindergarten to grade eight, was it eight, yeah, eight was beside the house.

(I think you'd mentioned in, in the last tape that, that you were kinda, a little shy and, and not too sort of talkative, or whatever, when you were younger. Was that hard when you were a kid?)

No, 'cause I had family. More or less, it's, 'cause we were eight, so we were always doing something, and ... and, friends of Mom's and Dad's, they, they were five, so, we always went to the beach, or, you know, the two vehicles loaded up, to the beach. Now, now like you need about, for a family of eight and five, you need about a bus. Or, or more because, you gotta need seatbelts, and everything else now. Before you just loaded up in the station and away we went. You know. You know, two families, you know, but, but, we still communicate with those people too. So, you know and that's Mom and Dad's friends, from way back.

Eric attended both English and French schools as a child and went to a vocational school for the duration of his secondary education. He struggled with schoolwork but recalls that his teachers were very helpful.

But, I been, at the English school and I went to French school. (Where did you go to the French school?) [City in Southern Central Canada] That was in grade four actually, yeah, grade four, four 'til eight. (So how, what was the, the reason, like for the switch from English to a French school?) Well, over, [Northern Central Canada]'s French. And, and parents are French, so we went to French school □ So, they wanted us to learn French, so we did. And, I had, I don't speak it, but I understand it. It's, you know, about eighty, eighty-five percent of it I guess. Unless you're from Quebec, then, it, you're talking, talking way too fast

for me. [laughs] You know, but, but otherwise, yeah, school was good, it, teachers helped. You know, but I mean, everywhere, went to high school with, [Vocational focussed high school], it's, doesn't, it's not there no more. Well actually the school's there, but the name is different, changed ... Yeah, but that was a good high school it was, it, like a trade, trade school, and I don't know if they have them anymore here, but, but not too many. (So what, what trade was, was that that you were learning there?) Um, machinist. Machine, either machinist or electrical, but I, I was more advanced in the machinist part, so I took that. And, be good to have more schools that way, it's way, you know there's, 'cause there's, there's some people out there that can't find work because they don't have a, a high school trade of some sort. (So you, you went there for the whole, for the (Rights) whole of your high school?) Nine, yeah, nine to twelve. (How was, how was school for you like?) It, well it was, um, it was hard, but it just, but the teachers were there to help, not to, like today, teachers, to me I don't think they help, as long as they get their paycheque, they're, they're satisfied to me. But the teachers helped. The, the French school was, it was nuns that were up there in that one. So, and you know they help a lot there. (What was that like to switch from like, one language to the other?) It wasn't that hard. 'Cause like I said, the teachers helped. Yeah, I troubles understanding the French work, but they were there to help, you know. And, and with going to the high school, it's a, was a learning school anyways, so the teachers helped there too, so, like a regular high school, I, my brothers and sisters went to a regular high school and they found it harder, because it's, the teachers didn't do as much helping. You know, so.

Eric explains how his children have had difficulties at school and how he perceives their progress.

(You're kids are having a bit of trouble in school?) Yeah. Yeah they always have, so it just, so they're ... But we've been going, they've been going to tutoring, to Sylvan. Yeah, tutoring type thing, so ... We had to pay for that. They're supposed to go back April, April, May. 'Cause their session was over, so we had to, had to wait and get some more money, 'cause they're not cheap, those guys either... They're, they're shy at school, so they don't put up their hands if they're having problems or trouble and, so ... that's the way I was too, so it's, if I, if I didn't understand it, I still don't, I didn't ask for help, they're, you know. ... He's [son], yeah he's in a regular class, and he's got aid, for, to, to help do his homework, and communication and stuff, but, you know ... he, he's just, slow, like it, like I was and, and they think that's a problem, but it, to me, I don't, I don't think it was really, you know, it, every, every kid has their own learning level, and, and the way the school works today, they, everybody's at the same level, but it doesn't work that way, it's, um, you know. So. [...] I think they're you know, progressing, but sometimes the school doesn't think so. They think they should be faster, or, but their, their learning levels are not like the, what teachers want, so-

Eric is fortunate to have stable employment, although he explains that it is not always glamorous. He has been able to cut down his weekly hours more recently.

You know, but, yeah, I only put forty, forty-two hours a week now. You know, but before, forty-two hours a week, but before it was forty-six, because, if I worked a full Friday, would be, you know, and extra, the whole afternoon, type thing ... we're slow. That, this is why I can come home on Friday afternoons. (So how long have you been there?) Twenty years ... Um, yeah. I started right, basically right after high school. Working, so it's, I think it, I was planning to take a, a year off before I started working, or, you know, but, never did, it just, I got, the job was there and ... I like, I like my work, it's, there's days, you know, well it doesn't matter, a job is a job, it's, there are the bad days, there are good days, there's frustrating days, and you know

Both Eric and his wife are working full-time in order to support the family and recover from the financial impact of their custody battle. This can be stressful as they try to manage logistics such as childcare.

(You, you both, you would both need to work though, to, to make ends meet?) For right now, like if, we figure within the next year, we should be clean of everything, 'cause the lawyers were ridiculous price, for trying to get the kids back and, and, and you don't get the money back from that. We got the kids back, but the, the money's gone ... Still paying that off, it's ... it's, you know, with her just getting back to work, it was all on my income, so it's, that's still paying that off. And, so it's, you know, but the, like I said, by next year, with everything, she'll be all, if she keeps working and, and I pick up work, we gotta get busier.

(How do you handle the summers, with, with both of you working?) Um, we have, the neighbour down the street, she doesn't work for the summer, so she goes there. And he, he's taken a course, a couple courses, babysitting courses, type thing, so, he's, he's got a, a certificate stating, you know, he, eligible to babysit, so, so he stays at home alone, or he goes over to my mom's. And if my cousins are down, and, so, but it's been ok, it's, you know. And babysitters aren't cheap now. They're, they're pretty expensive. To find, to find somebody to watch them for the, the week...

Eric explains how, despite busy schedules, the family is able to spend time together and how he is able to do what he enjoys.

... But, but yeah, that's what we do, we, we, we're, we go bowling as a family ... I bowl, and the kids bowl ... Yeah, I, I bowl for one league, and the kids are in their youth leagues. Yeah, but my leagues, it's, it's a family team, it's six bowlers and that's all brother and sisters and parents ... Yeah, well, I bowl twice a week, but, depends who, on the team there, it's only week ... The other one is um, it's a men's league. And I actually bowl with my dad on that one. So, on that team.

Carlos

Carlos is the oldest in his family. After his father immigrated to Canada from the Caribbean his parents were married and they lived with Carlos's maternal grandparents. Carlos lived there until he was three years old. He describes a "pretty normal" childhood and talks about his experience of moving as child.

... And went to school and everything. You know, pretty normal. And when I was about five or so we moved to [a suburb of the city]. And by that time we already had, I had a little brother. He was born . . . And we lived [there] 'til I was about eight or so and then we moved [to a smaller city] and I was getting, I was just going into grade four. So we moved up in September of '88, and, and, so it was a new school and new friends and, and everything. So . . . I was always trying to fit in . . . where I didn't need to, 'cause everyone thought I was so cool 'cause I came from the big city and I didn't know that. {laughs} So . . . just maybe not feeling like part of the group or whatever, right? . . . we got bussed from our, where we lived to the fights and stuff, and, you know, kids stuff, played hockey - with my friends on the street. [...]. My home life was, I had my chores when I came home. My first couple of summers because we, we moved to a new home and we had to the driveway, and the, the landscaping around the house, we built a shed, like all these things. So a lot of my summer I was, you know, doing things for my dad while he was at work. So most of my friends would maybe have more free time than I did at that time.

After graduating from high school, Carlos felt some pressure to go to college.

Um, right from high school I went to college . . . I took a marketing course. I didn't really know what I wanted to do but my parents were kinda pushing me to go to college. No one in my family ever went to college . . . but I didn't really wanna go, I wanted to take a year off, but my dad was, was telling me, you know, it's a waste of time taking a year off, should just go, just figured it's normal school, but it's not when you get there . . . It went well, I, I mean within my first year I was nineteen at the time.

Carlos describes an incident with his parents that resulted in his moving out of their house and in with his girlfriend in his first year of college.

And, and within my first year, one day me and my, my mom were just kinda arguing. And it was all about a hat. It was all about wearing my hat out, and, 'cause it was cold in the morning, mom's telling me to wear a hat. And I was like, "Mom, I don't need a hat, 'cause I'm just leaving from here to the car, and from the car I go to college, and I got a VIP parking, so I don't have to walk too far and so don't worry about it." And I don't know, it just escalated, and then my father came down hearing all the yelling. And it just, it just got out of hand kinda thing and then the whole, my dad started giving me trouble . . . it got physical, like, then my dad, like he, he hit me a couple times and I told him I hated him. And that was about it, then I walked out. So at nineteen, not even finishing college, I walked out with five dollars in my back pocket. . . . I'm like raised [European] you know, when you were bad, you got hit. You know what I mean? So it was, it was, it was kinda normal, but it was just weird . . . I look back at it and maybe I could have, I could have calmed things down. Or I could have just put my stupid hat on my head and walked out, and my mom would have been quiet . . .

Carlos took another job and explains that work became a priority as he was making a good salary.

. . . I didn't finish college. I didn't even finish that first year. I made it to exams, but then I failed most of my exams. I, I started not keeping track of things. You know what I mean, like I, I was working on the weekends, and then I'd work the three or four hours after school. And then I'd get home and I would really study and I didn't really understand everything. It was just my, my brain seemed blocked . . . I started working full time nights at the factory . . . and then I was working [at the chip factory] on weekends . . . Then I started working on the machines. Like actually cutting wood, it was a furniture factory . . . I was making, you know, ten something, almost eleven dollars an hour there, working forty hours a week. And then I was working another twenty-four on the weekends, so now I'm making, you know, six hundred dollars a week. And that's good money . . . So who needs college when you're nineteen or twenty if you're making six hundred dollars a week, right?

Before he was with his girlfriend Chantal, Carlos says that neither of them was into drinking or drugs. He tells us how this quickly changed and the impact it had on his life.

. . . I had another roommate come in and he smoked the odd marijuana once in awhile. And so one day Chantal and I were looking at him, going, you know, how

does that make you feel, like is it like when you're drunk? I'm kinda curious. And so we tried it. That probably wasn't the, the spark that did it, you know, but I mean, it, it started from there . . . I started missing days at work . . . I wasn't paying my bills, so eventually . . . the repo man came to my, my factory where I was working and was loading up my car. And I just caught them in time to take things out of my car. And that was probably the worst thing in the world. Seeing them take my car away. And my, my, my sports car, you know what I mean.

Carlos began selling drugs, but this did not improve his financial situation.

He continued to sell when he and Chantel found out they were pregnant.

Then it seemed so easy. You know, I started first I started picking up for the girls at work, the owner and the girls, and they'd be like . . . I want a half, I want a half, I want a half, so everyone's giving me forty dollars, and I did the math in my head, well now I can get a bigger amount for a cheaper . . . Um, I started falling, started falling behind again . . . I think my judgement was starting to, to go. You know what I mean? I just, I, at that point, I declared bankruptcy. I was forty thousand dollars in the hole . . . when they took my car, they sold it for eleven thousand dollars at the auction and so there was nineteen thousand dollars left, of debt on the car. And then the, I had a bank loan, two credit cards and phone bills . . .

. . . I was still trying to sell so to make ends meet, so that I can make enough money, so that when Deidre was born, we'd be ok, we'd have this financial, you know, stability . . . I was happy that she was pregnant.

Carlos describes his experience of house arrest, which was one of the conditions of his bail after assault charges had been laid against him. He sees this time as having had some positive impact on him and speaks of what it was like for him to be back in his parents' home.

My bail terms was house arrest, no firearms, illegal, all that stuff, no alcohol, drugs, without prescription. Not allowed to even walk into an establishment, like I wasn't allowed to go into a restaurant. I wasn't allowed for my parents to have liquor on the table. I wasn't allowed anywhere at all, either I was only allowed to go to work, if my father was at work, my father and my mother were my assurances . . . So I was really under my parent's thumb. Which, you know, it's stressful when you're twenty-five years old and you're used to living on your own for five years. And now all of a sudden you're, you gotta be there with your parents twenty-four hours a day. Not be able to drink or, or do anything, not even allowed to go out or nothing, it's stressful, right?

. . . being under house arrest for so long and following through with it, it helped, because I'm not around those kind of people. The whole house arrest and everything, I seen, even though it was, it was bad, like I didn't want to be under house arrest, at, like inside, I was happy, because I, I had an excuse not to go out and I had an excuse to stay away from everything . . . I was kind glad that everything fell into the way it did. And it did, it helped, you know.

(Do you get along with your parents?) . . . they have issues maybe around what time I should go to bed . . . my parents are like, "You know, ten o'clock is time to go to bed." Where I'm playing video games at eleven o'clock and, and I could hear my dad walking down, and I'm like, now I'm gonna get in shit, you know what I mean? . . . I have respect for my parents and I understand what they've done for me. 'Cause if they'd turned their back on me, then I'd be lost . . . I could be in jail, or I could be somewhere, you know . . . I'd always survive, but I wouldn't have rights to my daughter . . .

During this time, Carlos went back to school.

. . . one of my bail terms was having to keep and maintain lawful employment. So I work seasonal, so in the wintertime I decided to go to school. So that I can keep myself busy, and I took marketing, English, and computers. (It's high school or college?) High school. Now I already have my high school. So I decided well, you know what, instead of my, my brain going to mush over the winter, I'll, I'll do some of this. And I got over eighties in all my, all my courses. So I told all this to my, my prob- probation officer. {laughs} . . . he said I'm doing well . . . I just want all this to get over with. And I, and I don't like to waste time either. You know, instead of sitting at home under house arrest, I might as well go and, and get some school . .

Carlos reflected on what he has lived in the past and is content with his current situation.

. . . At one point in my life, I lost everything. I didn't have a home, I didn't have a licence, I didn't have a job, I didn't have, I was bankrupt. I, like I lost all that, and I wasn't even twenty-three . . . that education, I couldn't get at home and I couldn't get that at school. And, and what I'm doing now in my job, like I like doing what I do, I like the landscaping . . .

He looks forward to the future and names gaining stability for his daughter as a priority.

Rob

Rob describes his childhood as “pretty good” and remembers being treated well by his parents.

... So there's, you know, nothing, my parents were happily married, hardly ever any fights in our house. Hardly any arguments, no violence, just calm and, and the people, you know, mother or father, would lose their temper once in a while, but you know, nothing out of the ordinary, so. And I was, I was a pretty good kid. I, I got into, you know, a little bit of trouble when was younger. Most of the things I got into, most of my friends did too, so it wasn't any different.

Rob struggled in school and left in his mid-teens to pursue full-time work, which was a good experience for him.

. . . I quit school when I was sixteen. And I just didn't, I didn't really do well in school so . . . and that time in the economy you could get a job, no problems, paying really well. So I, you know, I quit school, I quit school and within about six months I was making almost even to what my dad was making as an engineer . . . He got his engineering licence so he would be, but he was like a draftsman, engineer, designer, mechanical designer . . . he was making like fourteen thousand a year, I was making twelve thousand a year, back in nineteen seventy- about '77 . . . I was making pretty good money so everything in my life always came easy, I never really, you know, had any hardships. Or, you know, everything seemed to always go my way . . .

Rob met his wife Sherry when he was nineteen. He remembers:

... And I had a motorcycle and a, a car at nineteen, and I was doing pretty good . . . she figured I must have some money or something. Who knows right? But we started dating and she was sixteen at the time. And you know, right from that day we . . . had a lot of good times, like we, you know, we really hit it off . . . from nineteen 'til twenty-four. Before we got married, we lived together for about three years . . . I was a little bit, a little bit . . . jealous . . . [so] like me and my wife, you know, we spent most of our time together, we never really had many friends outside of our relationship.

Rob and Sherry married and around 1990 decided that they wanted children. Rob explains the financial impact that having children had on them.

But then certain things, you know, financial things, it became very difficult financially which was stressful. I went onto a separate shift, I went onto an evening shift. And me and my wife had spent our whole lives, you know, a good part of our lives together. So all of a sudden we have the, the cost of childcare . . . we went through the babysitting routine and we just couldn't bear like, dropping this, our children off at six-thirty, seven in the morning, picking him up . . . you don't know what's happened to your child during the day . . . we didn't like what we were seeing with childcare . . . So I went on the night shift for a short time and then my, my wife got pregnant again, after about sixteen months . . . she took disability leave for awhile before and then went on to maternity leave. And during that time I went back on the day shift, which was great . . . again, more financial burden, you know, our problems because she was off work, less wages, you know, first time in our lives we've ever been faced with you know, a lack of extra money . . . diapers alone it's like two hundred bucks a month for two children at that point . . . At the time we went from, from '85 to '92 without owning a car . . . So in '92 we bought a car, 'cause we had children, we had to take them, go through this rat race, of taking him to the babysitter, going to work, and then when we went on to, then with the second child, we tried the babysitter routine again for a couple months and it was just insane. Trying to drag two children out the door . . .

As his sons got older and moved into school Rob was able to work more and pay off some of the debt they had accumulated. However, with the added income came the temptation to spend money on alcohol, which led to many challenges, the least of which was more debt.

. . . and in that time frame I quit . . . because of financial reasons around '96, '97, just my job was going nowhere and my wife and I both worked in the company, and the company just, it wasn't doing well at the time . . . I needed more of a challenge in my life. I actually got another job . . . started making some really good money, which that helped a lot. But then that removed me from the house more. And I still, I, to get the other job, they needed somebody that was competent on their evening shift which I was . . . I still had one child at home for a couple more months . . . there was a time frame in there, where I was working seventy hours, sixty hours a week . . . then my other son was in, both in school full time, then I could, I was . . . putting in huge hours . . . I've never seen that much money before . . . it was like instantly, debts were just going, it was great [. . .] ...But then one of the things I couldn't afford before was drinking, you know, alcohol . . . But at this new job, I met new people . . . [we'd] go out after work . . . go over to somebody's place, have a couple beers . . . and then I, you know started you know, buying a six pack . . . Next thing you know, you're drinking three beers a day, and four beers a day, and my wife started drinking more because we were so much apart now, I was working seventy hours a week . . . the drinking got worse and, being on opposite shifts, we didn't try and keep either in check . . . Within a year

of working at the new job, I bought two brand new cars, basically paid off enormous amounts of debt I'd occurred over about a four year period . . . twenty five thousand dollars in credit card debt . . . my wife was on maternity leave, I used credit cards to subsidize and then I never could get caught back up you know, and it just seemed to spiral . . .

When Family and Children's Services got involved with Rob and his family, he had to be out of his home for a time, which led him to move in with his mother. Rob does not speak positively about this time. He tells about what this time was like and how he coped with the situation.

Because like I went through, you name it, and, so all, everything seemed to, kinda fell into place. And the only, you know, I, living with my mother was terrible. You know, I'm forty years old, my mom's seventy, so that was a nightmare. But I joined a gym, so, I joined the Y, and what I did is every night, I'd come home, spend the time with the kids, get kicked out, then I usually, went and got something to eat, either ate at home at my mom's, or ate at, well I, actually most of the time I was, started to eat at, at my home with the kids, sometimes I'd feed the kids, sometimes I'd just grab something to eat. Then I'd go off to the gym, spend an hour and half a the gym, kinda try and keep busy and trying to get back to my mom's house at about the time when she'd be almost ready to go to bed, you know. So I didn't have to have contact with her, because, I don't know if you could imagine, I, I don't get along, I get along good with my mother, but if it's only like thirty minutes at a time. And living with her wasn't, well it was more than thirty minutes at a time, so.

Rob is back home with his family. He is no longer working evening shifts and feels this has had a positive impact on his family life. Work is still stressful but Rob says he understands better now how to cope with it.

. . . everything in a way worked out so much for the better. Than if I would have continued on the evening shift, doing the, the crazy hours, and it just, it's kinda strange how it just worked out, because by me coming home after work and doing the the things with the kids, if they, you know, the homework, and, and not having a babysitter there for you know, three hours every day, that worked out good, I got on to day shifts, and being there for my kids every day after school really, you know, that, that was something I, I hadn't ever done. So, you know it was a good feeling, it was really good to be with the, the family in a normal sort of way . . .

. . . 'Cause I got a very stressful job. So. You know, you, in living with stress, you have to have a way of coping with it, and alcohol isn't a good way to cope with

stress. And working more isn't a good way to cope with stress. So they made, made me recognize that the problems that I had, that you know, there's other ways to deal with stress . . .

As part of this coping, Rob speaks about wanting to be more active with the kids and doing some of the things he really enjoys with them; things he got out of doing for a while.

Yeah so anyways, now with the kids it's now this weekend was the first weekend that we actually, I decided ok, like I used to always go fishing. Like I mean, before I had children. From mid March right through, I'd usually end skiing, start right into fishing, fish right through until about the end of, probably about the end of May, beginning of June. And then summer, bicycling, always active eh? And that's, you know, keeps you, it keeps you, you know, out of trouble, you're, you know, constantly doing something besides drinking or, so during all the, those years with the children, I removed myself from the things that I did, because I didn't have time. And fell into a, you know, a cycle, bad things, and then now, we, you know, tend to, I'm trying to get back into the things that I enjoy, and try and expose the children to it. And see how they, you know, they, and they're at the age now where it's great, because they're, you know, they're either gonna like it, or they're not. And this week we took them canoeing, down a stretch of the river, it's about a ten mile stretch

David

David remembers growing up in a more “traditional” household as evidenced by his parents' roles.

. . . My dad was a principal of a high school. At that time a teacher, sorry . . . head of a technical department and my mom was a stay at home mom who never worked. Uh, that was the agreement that they had apparently when they got married that Mom wouldn't work even though she was a qualified teacher. She would never work until the kids were history . . .

David tells us that he struggled as a student and eventually left high school to enter the workforce. David's parents were always supportive and recognized that school was difficult for their son.

Um, grade 1, that's when we moved . . . and started in public school and I was a terrible student all my life. I don't have, uh, a huge education. But I've always had good jobs. Bullshit baffles brains I guess.

. . . I left school actually . . . went I was 15 years old in grade 9. My dad pulled me out of school for the day and we went for a coffee . . . and he said, "This isn't for you. School isn't gonna be for you, hasn't been for you since day one and . . . I don't think you'll ever do anything in school. Not be anything but do- go anywhere in school. And if you'd like to it's up to you, but if you'd like to, uh, I've already given the permission to the school to yank you out and go get yourself a job and see what the real world's all about." . . . It was great, supported me a hundred percent . . . all through my whole life including up until I was married for the first time. My dad always said to me . . . "If you ever decide to go back to school, whether it be college, university, I will flip the bill for you."

Difficulties that David and his wife have had with Amber, David's stepdaughter, have been a significant source of stress in David's adult life. He reflects on his life before the "Amber syndrome."

. . . Everything that happened before I was married for the first time was good times. I don't have bad times when I was a kid, I really didn't like . . . it was a fantastic life . . . I just don't have any there's not a bad memory except if you want to talk about a broken arm or a an operation on my knee because I screwed it played hockey. (Now what about in your adult life? . . . what have been some of the good times since then?) Oh lots of good times. I've always, uh, I've always done fairly well financially in my, my positions that I've had throughout life so travel has never been a problem and nice cars and nice homes and, you know, we live in a fabulous home now with two brand new vehicles. And we both make great money and it's, it's only, it's unfortunate when you start talking about, you know, the, the Amber syndrome . . . that you almost think 'oh my god the poor guy.' . . . it's been hell over the last three years but there's still been some really good times . . .

David and his wife were somewhat alienated for a time because of their daughter's behaviour, in particular the allegations she has made against her mother and stepfather to Family and Children's Services.

. . . We worked too hard, we worked too many hours, we make too good of money, to just have all of a sudden this, at the time, twelve and a half or thirteen year old kid, making . . . a accusation. Right? That was totally false, and now all of a sudden, the whole world's involved, the police, well the police weren't involved at the very first, the time that the police were involved was when we got them

involved. But, you just felt like, oh my God. Now it's, even in your own home, you're walking on eggshells and I just felt like it was such a demeaning, degrading feeling. Of, and I don't know if that's an insecurity, or what it is . . . (And was there also thoughts of, other people are gonna know that Children's Aid is involved. With the neighbours, friends, family?) Only because of my daughter's big mouth, and everybody did know, by the way. It didn't take Amber very long to tell her girlfriends, which were our neighbours, and then obviously the girlfriends, and one, one is a cop . . . (So there was, there was some social fallout though.) Yeah, sure there was. To a degree

Presently, David sites his neighbours as a strong source of support.

We do tons of socializing . . . it's all within the neighbourhood . . . You've never seen a neighbour-hood like it . . . it's incredible. They're all, all about the same age . . . everybody makes pretty good money, so there's never, wouldn't matter to me if somebody came without a case of beer, do you know what I mean, with, some people would get offended on that. If somebody, if we went home tonight, said lets, we got a party Saturday night, and that's it, the party's on. No ifs ands or buts about it . . . they all know of, of what we've been through in the last three years. Amber ran away for a week, nobody knew where she was, she wasn't keeping in contact, and that was really weird that time, with anybody, and I had, one, two, three, including myself, four cars out looking for her one night. So. Good neighbourhood.

Conversely, David and Paige do not find support in their family. He

tells us about some of the dynamics and his own reluctance to engage with family.

Yeah, I can't stand [Paige's] dad and . . . her mom's just a wonderful lady. Um my wife uh, likes my mom. My dad's in a home now so, by the way, he's got Alzheimer's so . . . he doesn't know who I am so . . . Hmm ten years now. Yeah it's been a long time . . . Paige and my mom get along well . . . and [Paige's] brothers . . . and sister, I can take her . . . I'll be sociable . . . doesn't make any difference to me. Not much for the family part of life. Like we all have our problems within our own families and I don't need to listen to other people's crap . . .

More recently, the health of David's wife Paige has been an additional source of stress and her condition has changed their lives.

. . . And then we found out this year that [Paige] has MS, so that hasn't been, that hasn't been easy either, right? And she takes shots every Friday night now and then weekend's . . . She's had two MRI's . . . so we'll see how many lesions have been busted in her brain. That's the only way I know how to put it. It's, there's,

multiple sclerosis is basically scarring of the brain [...] So we found that out about six months ago I guess, that was a little bit scary. But it was better than what the worst, because I thought the worst. Oh for sure, like cancer, or, I, I thought she had a tumour . . . because her vision was going . . . but it only lasted for about six weeks. So, yeah I thought it was a brain tumour. So when they said it was MS, and I mean I, obviously I cried for, for a week, but that was better than what it could have been. MS is liveable.

Collin

Collin remembers things being simple when he was growing up. He moved to Canada from Great Britain when he was five years old. His father had found work here, and his mother, his sister, and him followed. He shared some of his memories of this time:

. . . I can remember . . . we had outdoor plumbing . . . a toilet . . . we had no central heating, just a fireplace . . . the place . . . [was] built in the 19th century . . . humble beginnings you could say . . . I had a lot of, you know, a-a-aunts and uncles. Uh my dad came from a large . . . I think he was the, the youngest of 7 . . . my mom was the uh, youngest of 3. So I had lots of aunts and uncles and cousins and stuff . . . well I had an older sister [Patricia]. Um she was 3 years older than me . . . I can remember, uh, just before we actually we, we came to Canada [. . .] my dad was already here [in Canada] and . . . maybe 6 months it was just yeah me and my mother and my sister. [. . .] . . . we came over on a . . . ship anyways . . . it was fantastic for a f-five year old eh? . . . I didn't realize that I would never be, you know . . . well I wouldn't see any-many of my cousins or . . . my relatives for probably for a long, well . . . the only time I went back was when I was 18. But you . . . don't think though, you know, you just . . . live in the, the moment right when you're that age . . . we lived in . . . an apartment . . . my first, uh, schooling was, was here. I never had any schooling in [Great Britain] . . . I had a lotta good memories actually . . .

Collin and his family moved back and forth between provinces when he was growing up. His older sister's death and how that affected his parents was a factor in this.

...now towards the end of grade 3, I guess . . . uh, we moved to [another province] . . . I can remember I was really, really, uh, unhappy about that . . . I was 8 . . . I had friends and everything, you know . . . as it would turn out my older sister [Patricia] . . . we lived in [that province] like from what '61 to '64 and December of '63 my, my older sister uh, passed away from uh Meningitis. [. . .]. . . But I

remember thinking . . . I just didn't understand why my dad had to move all the way to [another province] um because he . . . probably coulda got a job in [the province we immigrated to] . . . [It was like] practically [moving] to a foreign country quite frankly . . . uh so we c-we ended up, uh I guess the whole exper-losing my sister and everything, you know. They, uh, uh, they . . . my parents couldn't, they, they just couldn't, uh, live there anymore . . . so my dad, we moved back here . . .

This was a stressful time in Collin's life as a child. He remembers how all of the change he was living with affected him.

. . . when it happened [Patricia died] though I-I-I guess I had a- a- I just thought, well okay- uh- you-you go to heaven- whatever that is. And-and-uh I guess I have to wait, you know . . . oh I forgot to mention . . . I had a brother born in August of . . . '65 . . . so basically in a short time span of from say May of '63 'til August of '65 I had two siblings born and one sibling die.(Huge change.) Yeah I know . . . [I] had a tremendous change and this is a . . . like, I was 11/12/13. . . . I can't remember actually, you know, like just being withdrawn quite a bit . . . my dad for-forced me into Scouts and I just wasn't happy at all there. I thought all the kids were all too rowdy and everything . . . I just could not get into it, you know? [. . .] Cause I . . . definitely changed . . . uh I definitely became uh, uh more withdrawn . . . [. . .] . . . we [moved and] lived in a townhouse at first . . . then . . . subsidized housing took it over. So we moved into a-a- we rented a house. And, uh, uh, I ended up flunking grade 11 although I didn't find . . . out I had flunked 'til after we had already moved [again] eh? So I didn't have to share that information with anybody you know.

As a high school graduate, Collin did some traveling before pursuing post-secondary education.

I decided I'd uh I better get some more education so I, uh, I ended up at [college] September of '73 . . . majoring in marketing, but the first year, was, you know, was actually quite easy. But the second year I came back . . . and I dunno, I don't know I just have a problems and I end up quitting . . . I start[ed] working at [a sports company] and [the factory] . . . right up until 1980 I guess. Uh I uh, I guess, uh I mean it was just a job, you know, it's nothing special eh? . . . (What were you doing there?) Uh th-the warehouse . . . doing order and s-stuff like that, and loading trucks . . .

Collin talks about being teased a lot when he was a young adult:

. . . I was teased a lot . . . afraid to complain . . . I hardly ever talk about this with anybody, you know . . . I got into a couple of uh, altercations . . . uh, at one point, uh I threw a . . . hot soup or stew or whatever. I threw it at this guy . . . I didn't tell my parents about this. I didn't, I just kept it to myself. . . uh, at the time I still had my . . . acne eh? . . . it was always a real problem for me so that doesn't really . . . help out matters at all . . . I remember thinking 'geez, how could, how could these guys be so cruel, you know?

At the age of 26, Collin suffered through a difficult struggle with depression.

I guess it was about '78 . . . like my life was uh, kind've like, uh, going nowhere you know? . . . I ended up uh, having a . . . nervous breakdown. I-I ended up in [seeking a mental health program] . . . with uh, depression, you know. [. . .] I was in [the mental health program] and . . . finally I-I-I would, I would not . . . want to leave the house that much, you know? . . . (Were you still working?) Yeah . . . I did end up, uh, getting tra- valium, which helped for a bit . . . (Was that like from a family doctor or-?) Yeah . . . but I ended up, uh, uh, yeah I got to the point where I just decided I . . . couldn't go to work anymore . . . ended up seeing somebody at the mental health centre . . . I guess I was hardly . . . eating . . . my parent's they had uh took me there eh? [. . .] I ended up . . . [in a] mental health [hospital] . . . my dad drove me there, you know, and oh geez, I remember thinking 'oh god- this is it. I'm in a-I'm a nutbar. I'm in a, I'm in a mental hospital', you know? (Yeah, yeah) And I'm looking at all these people and I said 'well they look normal to me,' you know, most of them . . . on a weekend . . . what my dad normally would drive me back, but I said "No, I'll drive myself back." Ah you know, even though well that's kinda stupid because, you know, mental patient doesn't have his car at the, uh, hospital. But my plan was to, was to kill myself, you know? . . . I ended up just driving into, uh, the front entrance of this . . . business . . . next thing oh I'm at the hospital and there's all these cuts . . .

With treatment, including Electro-convulsive therapy and antidepressants, Collin mental health improved. He met his wife Isabel at the hospital. He talks about financial difficulties and being in and out of work when they were first married. His health was a barrier to finding employment.

. . . her landlord drove [a] cab . . . [Isabel] suggested, why don't you do that, you know? . . . it was actually about two months before we got married . . . I couldn't get a medical clearance because of the, you know, epileptic seizures resulting from the drug reaction eh? . . . so I was pretty upset about that . . . we got married in August, went to Algonquin Park for the honeymoon . . . I was pretty excited because you know . . . the first year, um I had a, yeah again I had a few jobs . . . most of the time we were on welfare . . . yeah it was kinda rough actually . . . I remember one time, jeez, it was like, we had absolutely no money at one point I

was considering actually stealing food . . . her dad . . . got some KFC and it was like . . . one of the best meals I ever had you know, you know it was simple, you know, it's good to actually to go through that, you know?

. . . finally I got the medical thing cleared up . . . so I got my cab license . . . and actually I found I was making really decent money . . . well into the eighties, yeah the boom . . . we had a recession . . . the boom must have started around '83, or something like that . . . I was making good money . . . so things started to, you know, improve . . .

After Collin and Isabel had their second son they separated. Collin had to make alternative living arrangements and shortly after faced unemployment again.

. . . I ended up living . . . in a, some cheap hotel . . . I was kind of at a low point, you know, . . . but I was still driving cab . . . she wanted me back you know, as long as I behaved myself, you know, and, and, I think I was there for another, oh, say year and a half before again, there was problems . . . And then of course things got really bad, you know, there was no business, like you know, like business was really bad driving cab, . . . I'll never forget too, yeah they, they brought in the GST [that year] . . . and you know what? That killed the cab the business. That totally wiped it out. Like I'll never forget, the first day I guess, January 1st of 1991. And no business . . . I couldn't pay people to take the, you know . . . it was just unbelievable . . . Anyways I, I ended up moving back home . . . pretty much forced, . . . it was really hard to the kids you know . . . [and] I had to look for a job . . .

Presently, Collin is living with his parents. He tells us a bit about what

this is like for him:

Well, yeah, you know, my dad . . . he smokes eh? . . . I have allergies eh? . . . in fact I use a puffer, you know, and so my dad still smokes, I can't stand it you know? . . . he's a retired, he's eighty two . . . he just has certain annoying habits . . . quite frankly, there's times when I can't stand him . . . maybe it's because I feel like I have, you know, that I shouldn't even be there . . .

Collin would like to have custody of his children and says that his financial limitations are a real barrier to achieving this.

. . . I was telling my son last night . . . he's asking about, you know, living with me . . . I just felt so uncomfortable . . . I'd have to quit . . . I'd just sell my car . . . if I was living with my, with at least my one son, you know, I think it'd be, I think that's a good trade off. . . I don't know if Legal Aid is gonna, I've been on Legal

Aid before, but it was like, really just, yeah, I had to pay them back . . . I can't afford, I just can't afford to, you know, a lawyer.

Collin cites finding work and being able to support himself as one of his priorities right now.

. . . I may have to look for another job, . . . I've had it easy in some aspects, I mean, I've been, well I don't know, basically leeching off my, off my father . . . but it's just the, the circumstances . . . I feel stupid, you know, living at home, but you know, I don't know, do what you have to I guess . . .

Peter

Due to a speech impediment, this account is limited due to a shorter length of interview and the interview not being audio taped and transcribed.

Peter is a 40 year old man from another part of the world who has been separated from his wife, Tanya, and five children (four natural children, three girls and one boy, aged 5-12 years, and one male step-child aged 17 years) for about two years. He lives alone in a small apartment in a run-down rooming house. Peter is unemployed, lives on social assistance, and is undergoing speech and physical rehabilitation for the debilitating effects of a stroke that he suffered a year ago.

He laments the fact that his apartment is not large enough to allow the children to move in with him or to even stay overnight for weekend visits. Peter dreams of recovery from the effects of the stroke, gaining employment, and having a residence suitable and large enough to allow his children to stay with him. He is concerned about being able to stay in Canada because he is not a landed immigrant.

Peter immigrated to Canada at in his late twenties. He worked as a musician in a large city and met his wife, Tanya, there within a year of his immigration. His wife had

emigrated as a child and had a five-year old son, Bob, from a previous relationship. They had their first two children, a girl first (Mary) and then a boy (Jimmy), while living common-law and then got married eight years ago. They had two more daughters (Alicia and Amy) and eventually bought a house with a music studio in the basement. About four years ago, shortly after the birth of Amy, Peter lost his job and eventually also lost his house. This, together with his concerns about escalating violence in his neighbourhood, led to Peter and his family moving to this area about three years ago.

The family's transition to living after the move was difficult. They knew no one there and had little money. It was a difficult adjustment for the children, both at school and in the community. Peter and Tanya together got a job managing a local paper route; however, marital relationship difficulties soon developed. Within a year of the move, Peter says that Tanya told him she "didn't want him anymore" and she "kicked him out of the house". Peter moved but continued to see the children regularly.

He saw his children on weekends but did not have a place big enough or suitable for them to stay overnight. About one year ago this culminated in Peter experiencing a severe stroke. When questioned about the circumstances of the stroke, Peter indicated that it was too emotionally upsetting for him to talk about this.

Peter was hospitalized for seven months as a result of the stroke. He lost the use of one arm and leg, and his speech was severely impaired. His children were very concerned for him after the stroke and visited him almost every day in the hospital. He had one local musician friend who also visited him regularly and who remains as a very loyal friend and Peter's main source of support. His cousin and aunt visited him

occasionally in the hospital, but he felt abandoned by them and his other friends from the city where he used to live. Peter's parents, who never lived in Canada, had both died a few years earlier.

Peter wished very much to have a bigger place to live so that his children can stay with him (either on weekends or full-time). He emphasized that he loves and misses his children very much. At present, however, he is not able to work, has to survive on social assistance, and has little money. He can walk with considerable difficulty now but has not regained the use of one arm, which prevents him from playing music. Peter is continuing to undergo physical and speech therapy and his hope is that he will recover enough to go back to work, save money, and get a bigger/better place to live so the kids can stay with him.

Tarak

Tarak talked about growing up in another country:

(. . . I wondered what you remembered most about your parents?) Well . . . they were good parents . . . when I was nine years old my mother died. Like I was living with my parents, all the times with my parents, before my mother died. Like she, she was a very good parent, like she helped me with all my school work, homework, everything. Like when I was in elementary school, I was top of the class all the time. The year she died, I went right back, 'cause like I missed lot of school, and, and like I went back, far back by then. The, the following year, I start to come back up, get back up on top again. So. But even with my parents, my dad, he was a carpenter, and for, makes a, he does his own contract, like he is a contractor, he's not, he doesn't work for any government or anybody, he has to do his own work, at home. He build houses.

. . . I was happy and everything was fine . . . Like anything I need I, within their reach, they can afford, they, they provided for me. Like I was the only child too, right? For my mother and father. And when my mother died, my father got married back, I lived about two, three years with him, lets see. She died in 1967 [or] '70, yeah, three years I live with them, and then I went with my grandparents . . . my grandparents had two uncles were living there too. So big house. Plus one, like there was another house right beside, my uncle had a house there, so like

they were close, right close by. And their house all had kids too. Oh like when my dad got married back, he had, when I left, he had one child with my step-mother. And then I, when I left, he had six more after that . . . [Step-siblings] They all live in the States . . . my dad died . . . He passed away, a couple years ago, '97 . . . (Had you seen him much, since you moved here?) My dad? . . . like my step-brothers and sister, they went to the States, I came to Canada. And because they were like in, they, they had sponsorship from their parents, my step-mother, her parents were there . . . when I came here, I applied on my own. Like . . . I applied, found out from the independent immigration . . . so I came here . . . I don't see any problem with me and my childhood.

Go, go to school in the morning, come in the afternoon, or sometime I used to give my grandmother, he used to give my grandmother, when they were, they weren't living very far. So when she go to the . . . markets, over there, fresh vegetables, so she'd buy fresh goods, collect it from her, come home, I start cooking by the time he gets home from work . . . he teach me how to cook. (When you were nine?) Yeah . . . In the morning, like, I, I would get up, cook, he gone to work, I have to go to school. It was, it was a bit rough . . . like so stressful and like I, I was just nine. [...] But once, once he[his father] got married back, well then my step-mom starts cooking or whatever.

. . . when I was a kid my mother died . . . my father got [re]married back around then and I lived with my stepmother for um, about a year. I was the only kid from my mother and father, and I went to live with my grandparents [. . .] til they died and then I lived [with] my uncle. (How old were your when your grandparents died?) I don't know, I was a boy . . . life was good like I just . . . it's tough cause like back home you didn't have the kind of luxury that's around here right? It's different. (How was it different?) Well we have one like, well not the type of homes, you have kids up here they got sit down in, got the T.V. you know . . . we played outside . . . schooling was good . . . when I started school I used to be terrible in school. There was nobody, like I was the eldest grandchildren in the family, there was nobody there to guide me, tell me what to do. And like my public school, I have to pay for myself . . . well that's not difficult because like I was interested in my school [. . .] I like to learn. Especially I think I'm a kind've a more practical person [. . .] (. . . you mentioned that you lived with your grandparents. Did you see your dad at all . . .) Like my dad supports me like uh when I . . . got a scholarship prize. Cause I got that high school dream . . . I got a scholarship. It's free . . . And I got books that I have to read my own books. That the, that's the intutionals reading we have to do at our own pace. And for that he bought books for me . . . chemistry, biology that, that's just high school . . . You go on Sundays. (. . . So you went to college?) I did, uh, engineering degree at my school . . .

[. . .] (. . . what was it like living with your grandparents?) Yeah it's nice . . . Uh my uncles, my aunts they were all out with me together . . . one my uncle have a house, it's the best besides my grandpa and then there's another house behind

then you have one more house. So . . . the family is very close . . . and I'm mad cause it's-it's all- it is a closely knit family. (So you were raised by like your aunts, uncles and all your just like- sorta thing?) Yeah . . . the only thing I would say like that's, I doesn't talk, it doesn't kind've, uh, tough for me when I was in school. Cause like . . . it's not like here. Like back home we have [different] lifestyles and uh we have our own lifestyles. Like sheep and goat and cattle, um, chickens, you know, it's very alone. But in the after you'll take care of it. It's was all that transpired in my house. It's- (What did you do?) We plant gardens. So like it's-it's not- out here you have time to waste . . . in the morning, any morning before I go to school I have to take the cattle out- some rush up to the greens, sheeps, goats everything. Come down in the afternoon and you have to look for them where they are. They come home, sometime they come home. Most of the time they come out some, other than that you have to go look for them. So by the time you're finished it's time, it's after dinner time already . . . it troubles me that I had a lot to do because like I was the eldest. I was in high school so the rest . . . I have to show them all . . . that is the hard part. (Who were the rest that you had . . .) My cousins . . . by the time I finish my studies after 12 in at night . . . And I sleep, wake up in the early morning . . . And you don't get, you don't feel it that much when you get accustomed . . .

(Get the sense that you're looking back . . . you have a smile on your face, like, do you have positive associations with living on the farm . . .) It's not a farm like . . . It's not like an urban area . . . it's country side is like, like the clear area but there are some, like there are people not far, it's an open field, pastures and cattle . . . my uncles and aunts, they, they didn't live that far from school . . . they can read, write do whatever, they . . . meant to start levelling school so they didn't go far.

Tarak met his wife and his stepson in his country of origin and moved to Canada.

He has biological children back home:

(. . . when you came to Canada . . . were you with your wife . . .?) No we were weren't married yet. (. . . When did you meet?) Well I knew her for sometime but then- back home. I knew her for sometime- like she was married before but then- before I came with a couple- I think about six months before I leave- we got to know each other a little more. But then . . . I came here [to Canada] and then after that I sponsor her . . . (So you were friends or?) Well . . . she and her husband get problem. Like we were not intimate, we were just friends then and then she and her husband had problem and just started accusing me that- that I am involved . . . well I wasn't. But then . . . she husband start beat her up [. . .] We have a relation after that . . . (After she left her husband?) Yeah. But that wasn't long after that . . . I have to leave for Canada because I have my visa . . . so as I get here, a couple months after I- I sponsor her with the kid . . . she had to wait for her divorce to go through before . . . I sponsor her; we get married over here.

Tarak experienced ongoing conflict with his stepson and his wife over how to parent. He talked briefly about how this conflict escalated when he was drinking on the weekends and how this eventually led to police involvement and criminal charges for him:

When I say [something about Kendal(stepson), it is like] 'pop' like she, she changes altogether. So I don't know, I just leave him alone. But then I have some problem after because when, whenever I say something, you know, this kinda thing it's like we can't do stuff. I used to take my little drink after work. But then, like during the week, or say if I said something it wouldn't bother but I when I take a couple drink then it was a bigger fight. Because I- I had my drinks then we have an excuse and I drink and I- I fight . . . if I'm going to quarrel with something during the week when I'm not, when I don't have any drink it's okay . . . if I have a few drinks then they will start, go on from that. You save everything and you get into an argument, they'll call the cops, I get involved. . . I-I tried to get out. I pled guilty to everything . . . cause I didn't want to, want to waste time in there . . . the longer I stay there- it's my job on the rope- what's gonna happen?

Tarak resented what he considered outside interference in his family and how it forced him to leave home and led to his losing his job. His wife and young son go temporarily to a shelter and Tarak is obliged to find another place to live. He complained about having to pay the costs for two places:

(. . . How do you feel that she was influenced?) The friends are, the friends are telling her what to do. And she's, she's doing it. (What were they telling her to do?) Well- when well- if I- we get a little drunk . . . Like if- if you're, uh, we are a family. We have a problem we have to solve it ourselves. She doesn't understand why you come home. So they'll come and tell you what to and tell me what to do. That's- that's where the problem, you know, gets to create more problems. Right? I tried to talk to her . . . I know she's listening to them. When I get there [to court] I just pled guilty and I didn't fight . . . challenging the case doesn't work so I just pled guilty . . . It happened two, number of years. It build up right . . . so it build on my record . . . that I abuse . . . when the cops come they tell the cops that I beat them.

Well what you gonna tell the cops?' You know they have to give proof. But there's no proof that I beat her or anything . . . but her friend is telling her what to say. So I, uh, when I get to court I just pled guilty to this uh, because I don't want to time that I'd lose there. Right? The job and whatever, she doesn't, you know, she

doesn't care. She doesn't have any money is what. But when I lose my job then there's no, that's all. She doesn't think because the other one is a hooker. ...

[. . .] I'm convicted . . . when that happened I started looking for some attention and I got in trouble. Some drinks then I drive I get stopped so that's all . . . they never got me driving. Right? . . . [Samara and I] we had a quarrel so I just leave the house and I went outside . . . sat in the car, it is cold . . . only to be warmer. I was outside I didn't do anybody anything. Right? We had a quarrel inside, I just went outside to cool off . . . The cops well went up and saw me in the car there, driving just more or less, and I had drinks. And the copper know that so it's right over there right? ... and then they charge me again. ...

[. . .] at that point [my step-son Kendal] . . . he knows that if mom quarreled me then he's free to do whatever he wants . . . [. . .] myself and wife know if he won't stop stealing ahh, . . . and my wife because wife always whatever he does is okay. He bring dope in my . . . house. I come, I talk to him. My wife's okay. (Your wife's okay with it?) I didn't tell . . . the cops, I didn't tell the cops that. He's gonna get emotional right? When we had a quarrel [. . .] because he says I can't go in his room; he can't be smoking dope in my house. Right? I didn't tell him that . . . I get the blame for it . . . I got the jail for it. (For the fight?) Yeah for the fight. And that was, that was on causes of him. Really you . . . can't smoke dope in the house . . . I quarreled . . . but I didn't want to involve him because he's a- he doesn't realize that someday. Right, cause I, if I put him there he's gonna be charged- he's gonna have a record. I- I didn't tell the cop that he had been one of the cause of the fight . . . but still they call the cops on me, well because I had drinks right? They call the cops and I got in I gotten in jail. And I got in trouble, I got drunk, I had the paper I know . . . they put me on probation . . . so that's how it goes ...

CAS one day they come in. Zip in right here with the cops said they're taking them away . . . my wife said ' . . . they're taking the kids.' Then my wife say 'He say he's not going anywhere without the kids.' So she uh, she go with them. . . (She went with them?) My little one was almost a year, a year old I think . . . (So it was like three years ago?) . . . Yeah ... they put them in a house for . . . (Like a shelter?) A shelter ... because I said I'm not moving from here because they want me to move out of the house ...

And CAS tell them th-they that they want out- they gonna come home. I have to find somewhere to stay. So I said okay- let them come. I'll find somewhere. Cause I don't want my kids to be in that environment where- that they comes out and back. Who am I- I find a place and I move. Now that's the hard part. Now I have to support them here and I have to pay rent in another place.

His situation became much more difficult when he injured himself at work and he had not been able to work for the past two years. He talked of his struggles getting

disability supports. His wife's health allowed her to work only part time and finances were tight:

(What happened- how did you get injured?) I fell down at work, um, injured my spine . . . two years ago. (Oh- it happened while you were in the apartment?) Yeah (What do you do at work?) I'm machinist. (So that was a pretty bad injury.) Yeah- I had surgery but no there's no guarantee that I'm gonna get back on my feet. So- So all the time I spend in school just goes over with or whatever. I can't do the type of work and can't do that so it's all gone. I don't know why- (So you've been- receiving disability or?) [Provincial] disability ... refuse my claim. I have to fight and everyone's gonna be open. (Do you have a lawyer or?) . . . I ha-have a legal aid . . . So like I couldn't walk, I ask them back to c-come home. They say wouldn't allow me. So I- I'm injured I can't- I cannot barely walk. Right? And I have pain in my hand.

(So you've been at home with them for the last two years? . . . Is your wife working or?) Well she have lot of pain too- but she working parttime. Two- two days a week . . . She work at a- a store . . . 25 hours . . . It's like not much nowadays. Not-not much income coming in cause WS [worker's insurance] said we refuse my claim and what they are giving me from disability is no- nothing . . . That little baby bonus I getting they- they did- did it up. Take from what I'm getting. My wife is allowed to make \$250 a month. That's all, anything above that- they take 75% ... it's kind've a hard now ...

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Tarak talked of the challenges finding stable employment that paid adequately. Since his injury, he had been taking courses to improve his chances of finding suitable employment but his injuries were making this a tough process:

(So you got your first job here pretty quickly or?) Yeah, yeah- one week . . . I came here in 1988, April . . . my wife she came 90. (So did you stay working at the same place for quite a while or?) He wasn't paying well. I worked there for six months- then I went to [work for another] . . . company . . . It paid more money so

I took it . . . [it] was uh, security Canada. So there I- I started there- they were paying more money. And I worked there 'til they close. ... (They didn't recognize your . . . education?) Yeah. . . . So why- why do I need an education when I have a college . . . I have education so . . . when I applied for my, um, college application. Well they recognize it in [his home country] like I said . . . well I got here they won't . . .

. . . I didn't know what was going on like I don't know but I just comes up, you know was six- six after I couldn't walk. (You couldn't walk?) My legs like ... it is not steady so I said probably it, I standing all day at work you get tired-, you get starved. Well then when I go see my doctor he said I injured my spine and neck. Then- well then there's where I-I st- stopped work because I'll actually- they-he laid me off because I couldn't do my job properly . . . he just ... laid me off ...

well the manager pick me up there he-he-he was a witness- said didn't want to file a report. They didn't so when I went to my doctor then I fill in a report to him for the claim. And WS said we refuse that claim. Now I have to fight it. (They refused it because you because it was filed after?) ... Yeah because- there were lots of time ... they were claiming ... I had this injury before. They're claiming that- it- I wasn't injured in that accident because like there was no ... report ...

School too- so I was- I always had courses. It's like even now I can't work anymore no work so I started on a- now I'm doing, I'm doing a correspondence course. (Where are you taking your course?) . . . Computer repairs. I don't know if I- I will be able to do it because like I can't use my hands. I still- even then you need to turn the screwdrivers or whatever it's- I don't know . . . my injury affect my legs . . . it's numb on my legs and right down. (So it's been pretty difficult physically since your injury?) Yeah like- shower- my wife she helps because I can't do it on my own. Like being- I can't rub my back or whatever. My legs- I can't stand for long- just walk.

Tarak finishes by talking about his life growing up and his frustrations not being able to pass his values along to his children:

Complete stranger, like back home, it's like that, that's how you teach it, anybody else, so long as they're elder than you, you call them uncle or aunt. Like here, they call you by your name, like back home, you call somebody . . . by their name, it's like you have no respect for them but here ... it's totally different ... I'm not have nothing against Canadian lifestyle, but I want my kids to grow up the way, I, I think is right. (Can you tell me . . . what do you mean by that?) Do the right thing. Have respect for our elders. Have respect for others. [...] 'Cause I came from was a poor, I struggle hard for my education. I used to save my pocket money to buy books. [...] My pocket money, like sometime my grandma says, got some extra work to do, say ok, I'm gonna give you a dime or a dollar, whatever. I save that. I used to go, when I would go to high school, she gave me money to

take the bus. I take that money and save it and I walk . . . two miles. (. . . to save the money, yeah. For your books.) Sure and then I use that to buy stuff I need. [...] You come home, you have to do your homework, and then revise everything . . . you have done for that day, right? Revise everything. And learn whatever you, you think you, you, you can't remember, learn it. Read it over a couple times, learn it. And then at the end of the week, do everything that you did for the week. That's the way it, it's, all the, it's more gonna stay in your memory . . . (Does he, does he follow through with that?) . . . I force him sometimes, he's gonna start cry, what can I do? It's not, it's not easy to, trying to raise a kid here [...] They teach the kids at school, your parents yell at you? Call the cops. Your parents spank you, call the cops.

Dean

And yeah my dad used to just yell and scream. I used to hide in a little, a round, forty-five gallon drum in the closet, put clothes over my head. And we'd jump out the windows, and run when dad come home drunk. And that gave me a lot of anger. And built up over the years.

I grew up with an alcoholic father. I've got a couple of brothers who are in and out of jail all the time . . . one's really bad. Like he's spent eighty-five percent of his adult life behind bars. Yeah. And yeah my dad used to just yell and scream. I used to hide in a little, a round, forty-five gallon drum in the closet, put clothes over my head. And we'd jump out the windows, and run when dad come home drunk. And that gave me a lot of anger. And built up over the years. And then I finally met Vicky, who is my ex, and thought things were gonna go great . . . I didn't meet her 'til I was thirty and I stayed away from women, long term relationships my whole life. Probably because of my upbringing. You know, my dad used to call me a little cocksucker and different things like

. . . so then I generally just didn't bring women around the house, stayed away from them. And then Vicky was my first long term relationship, it was great. And then drugs got involved. You know, I never worked, we lived off her income. Things just got worse and worse, as money, money got tighter and jealousy became into the play, and are you cheating? Both accusing each other, [Vicky] more than me. But, but it just got worse and then I ended up getting in a huge fight on Mother's Day, of all days.

Yeah, Vicky woke me up at three in the morning and we'd been fighting earlier that day. And then she woke me back up at three in the morning, and I had to have my clothes packed in a couple of suitcases, and she didn't realize this earlier. And she came to bed at three in the morning, I'd been sleeping for about four hours. Exploded, just beating me up, hitting me, pulling my hair. And, 'cause the

suitcases were there with the clothes, I didn't unpack them. And I had to unpack them and then that fight just got completely out of hand. And I ended up giving her a black eye . . . Anger management helped me a lot. So then, yeah things went well, you know, for three days after that [the day of the black eye].

[So what lead up to the incident?] Well it's not her fault, it's still my fault. But I just, I exploded . . . I took a big flower pot and smashed it, it was a little orange one. And I was upset 'cause I'd bought a lot of things in the house too, and I said I was gonna smash some stuff. I was gonna smash it all. And when I smashed it on the ground, she picked up a piece and was gonna stab me with it. And first she threw four or five pieces at me, hit me in my back of my arm, and I was all cut up and bleeding. And then she was gonna punch, well stab me with it, she's left handed, she came at me, and I just, I punched her, gave her a black eye and, that was it, I started crying, she started crying, and we both said sorry. And then later when I went to jail, I found out that she said I'd punched [her] thirty, forty times, pulled her by her hair, threatened to kill her, her ex-husband, her mother, her father [and] I would hurt all the kids . . . she put me in jail, charged me with assault with a weapon.

I got a call on my cell, for me to come in and speak with a police officer. So I went home, had a shower, I drove out with my, my father voluntarily, and walked into the police station. Said "I'm Dean" and they arrested me for assault with a weapon . . .

(Because the flowerpot?) Vicky said I tried to smash the flowerpot over her head . . . and when I missed her head, it smashed on the floor . . . she had no socks or shoes on, and it cut her big toe . . . like a paper cut almost. And she got the cut from running through the pile and picking up pieces and throwing at me as I was running to the other room, I spun my back, so it wouldn't hit me in the face . . . and everybody says to me, 'why don't you, um, press charges, why didn't you get pictures of your cuts on your arm and the bruises on your arm, and the cuts and the blood coming down your back?' I said "Well, where does my three children go now?" They go to foster care. They go into adoption. So I just suck it up and take it, right?

(So what was that like?) Very, it was difficult, but I put myself in that predicament, like I even said when we were arguing once before, you know, I'm gonna end up giving you a black eye and I'm gonna go to jail . . . and it happened, you know. I don't know if it was to get away from it, because it was hurting the children, they seen us fighting all the time, arguing all the time. They were like never abused, always fed well, you know we took them to Wonderland, and fairs and parks . . . but they saw the arguing constantly, you know, which was no good. . . .

Vicky is born January 12th, my daughter was born January 12th, it was on her birthday. Her [daughter's] name was supposed to be Kayla and then once she came out on Vicky's birthday, she looked up at me and said, can I? I was like, sure. So then I was like, oh now I got two [Victoria's] . . . and I find that a little difficult. (Because it reminds you of her?) Yeah . . . I wanted to get back together, but [Vicky] didn't. She said I was too violent, too out of hand, and looking back I can see, you know that anger management course, whatever it was, four month course, was really good. Showed me the things I was doing wrong and how I thought it was her fault, but you know, I set her up or I led her into it. And, or I was just plain denial. You know. So that course the Family Services made me go, I recommend that course.

But I stopped I (drinking)t because I just don't wanna turn out like the way my dad was. He's better now. He only drinks a little bit on the weekends, you know, he works all the time, he doesn't get too rude ... he's changed his life around quite a bit. He still gets a little angry once in awhile, but I find alcoholics do ...

I'm a very hyper person when I'm drinking. Now I'm lucky if I drink a six pack a week, I mean a month. A month. I just don't drink and I think that's because of my father's situation, watching him beat my mother and, you know, he tried shooting her with a gun when we were young once, and we got to look at the hole going through the wall, through the bedroom door, and then it went into the other wall, and then it was stuck in that wall. And then you know, for years I wanted to, I wiggled it, that bullet out of that wall, well you know what, that bullet could have killed my mom . . . the things you think of as a child, you know. (How old were you when that happened?)

It's hard to say, it's, there was a lot of different, before five maybe. Six, I was, I was young . . . I slept through the gunshot . . . when I woke up I could hear all my brothers and sisters "Dad tried to shoot mom" . . . he'd come home drunk, she'd open up the window, throw the shoes out, throw us out the window and we'd just run, you know. 'Cause it was his house, he's gonna burn it down, you know.

(How many siblings do you have?) There's different marriages. My father had an affair. So I've got eight sisters, only one is my full blooded sister. And I've got three brothers, which are all half. Same father, different mother. (... did you grow up with all of these in your home?)Um, most of them . . . Jake [Brother 1], the [other] brothers not too much. Jake, he's in and out of jail all the time. ... My brother Ricky [Brother 2], when he was young, he had to be raised on goat's milk. Which was very expensive back then. So he was raised with my grandmother, my dad's mother . . . and then Doug [Brother 3] is, we got the same father, and that was from my dad's first, I'm not sure if they were married or not. But ... he grew up with her. And we don't really talk, I don't like him, he don't like me. So we just stay away from each other.

. . . Doug [and] I didn't grow up with Jake, I did off and on. (Ok) Cause I have memories of sitting in our living room. At the ages of six and seven and eight, we'd all have to put the kitchen chairs in a semi-circle, and there was a, some kind of a guidance counsellor lady, whatever, a psychiatrist. And she would sit down and [we'd] . . . discuss how to make Jake [Brother 1] better, and how I was gonna stop him from beating people up at school, and doing crime and drugs ... he started shooting needles I think, the age of thirteen, fourteen

I don't do any drugs anymore. (Was that easy to stop, stopping drugs?) Um no it was, it was easy, but it wasn't. I just kept remembering my little daughter ... Like honestly I don't think I would have quit if this (child welfare involvement) didn't happen. I would have smoked weed the rest of my life. I was cutting down again because of Family Services . . . came in and came into the home and then I cut way back. (That must have really effected you then . . .) It shocked me . . . it's amazing what a little girl does to your life.

To find a lawyer, I phoned, they want two thousand dollars up front. And I have zero dollars. I drive a van, well I don't drive it, I pay monthly payments, and finance it, four hundred and thirty dollars a month, every month . . . I got a, a loan . . . through the bank, through the company. I pay four hundred and thirty dollars a month, and it just sits in the driveway, 'cause I can't even save money to afford insurance on it. And it's been sitting for eight months . . . I drive my mom's car. They pay the insurance . . . I drive her car to get back and forth to work, and to all my meetings. Now my mom wants her car, 'cause it's summer . . . {laughs} . . . now that the nice weather's here, so now I've gotta come up with money to pay my insurance so I can get my van on the road . . . first I had a criminal lawyer, and that cost me over seventeen hundred dollars . . . my dad put a thousand dollars down, and now I'm doing monthly payments to pay the last seven hundred off.

Lot of stress. The stress is just unbelievable. Just, over everything, stress is just constant. Constant, you just, one battle after another. But I just learn to take it one step at a time, and I'm slowly getting, you know, slowly.

(Where are you working right now?) . . . [at a] meat packers . . . they slaughter pigs. I just work in the packing department. I wrap loins . . . (And you've been, how long have you been doing that for?) Five months . . . the people are good. Pay isn't the greatest . . . benefits are not too bad

... When I lived with Vicky she said I didn't live there. Because I had no income and she was on welfare, then they'd want me to go do, or on the social assistance, whatever, they'd want me to do all their programs. The welfare programs. (Ontario Works?) Yeah, whatever, you gotta find a resume course, it's four to six weeks. How to do a job interview, four to six weeks. How to, you know, and they

had all these different courses they send you to. And I didn't like them, I got kicked out of three of them. Oh, ten years ago. And they made me go see a psychiatrist. Back in the, that's a whole other story. (Why did you get kicked out?) Violence . . . speaking up.

I just exploded . . . they said, no more courses, I didn't even have to look for a job, I just had to wait for, to see a shrink. 'Cause they said I was mentally unstable. Too abusive, too violent. To go to any more programs. And that took months and months, eight months, ten months, maybe a year. (To get to the psychiatrist?) Yeah. So every month I just signed my name. And hand my card in. And that was it, I get a cheque every month. I went and saw the psychiatrist, down at the welfare office . . . They said, there's nothing wrong with [me] . . . then I would have to go through all these courses again to get welfare . . . so then I just, I would get off welfare, and I wouldn't collect it and then I would just bum off people. I would steal, out of stores . . . do whatever to get my money. And, then once in awhile I would collect welfare, like after five months or three months. But you can only collect it for two to three months, then they make you go and do these programs. So I'd be getting two to three cheques, and then I wouldn't get another cheque, I would just drop out . . . that's way before I met Vicky

. . . I totally changed my life around, I just, I'm gonna work the rest of my life. Get my little girl, keep clean. This is a big eye opener. It really, yeah it really wakes you up. I haven't filed income tax in like five years. So now I gotta do that. Like there's just, there's all these little things I gotta do in my life, that I've been letting slide. And like, get by, 'cause I just didn't care. And now they're all right there in my face. So now, this is, the only thing is this is just straightening up my life. And it's doing it quick. They would have buried me, or, or I'm gonna thrive from it. I'm gonna succeed . . . I haven't had a steady job like this in my whole life . . . I dropped out of high school when I was seventeen. Got a job for like a few months, quit. And just became a bum

It was just like a street kid . . . then when I was twenty, I had enough of it and I went back to high school . . . I went for two years 'til I was twenty-two, got my grade twelve. And like a week after graduating I got hired at a company, I was making like twelve bucks an hour. And that was back in 1992. Here it is, now, 2004, and I'm only making twelve bucks an hour. I'm back where I started. But at least it's honest . . . and I had a job there until the company went out of business. And then when they went out of business, I started collecting unemployment, and then my brother got out of the penitentiary . . . and [he] brought the strippers around, and then we all got a, a three bedroom townhouse and started partying with all the strippers and a lot of drugs then too, lot of alcohol and partying, and, and then he robbed the bank, and got eight years. And there he went again.

(What happened to you?) Then I moved out of that house. Moved that, out the townhouse. Moved into a full house. With the one stripper. And then we had two to three strippers moving in and out, constantly, need a room for a week, whatever. And they just kept paying money. I'd borrow cars and I'd drive the strippers all over . . . if it was a two hour drive there, two hour drive back, they'd give me like eighty, ninety bucks . . . they'd buy my lunch, couple of beers. You know, hook me up with some drugs. And I got, made good money off that, just driving stripper around . . . then that all just of course, went up in flames and everybody moved . . . (How did it go up in flames?) We all started arguing. We all started fighting.

I started drinking again with Vicky, that's how I met her, I started drinking, getting drunk and partying, but it was never really my thing. I don't like the hangover. I always get hangovers. And that's why I like the weed. And the drugs, you just wake up, it's a new day, there's no headaches, there's no nothing. No side effects really. Except, short temper, angerment, outbursts, moody swings . . . when you don't have it . . . ,but I look back now, and it's like oh my god, I was out of hand. People that I see now. And that come up to me and talk to me, they're like, oh my god, you're a different person, we were afraid to talk to you. You were ready to snap, you were gonna explode. We thought you were gonna fight everybody . . . Now they see a totally different, more calm, more cool, you know, I think more rational.

. . . when I got out of jail and I was at home, had to move in with my parents. You know, and then me and my dad gets a little, little touched, little tense once in awhile still, because of past lifes and, I owe him probably five thousand dollars, six thousand dollars, from all this case, helping me pay, my van payment, I couldn't keep paying it, 'cause I wasn't making money. I wasn't doing wheeling and dealing, whatever it took to get the money, 'cause I couldn't do the crime. I had to stay away from the drugs. I just disowned all my friends. I sit at home, watch TV every night. Rent movies. I hang out with my niece once in awhile . . . that's my sister Sister I's . . . daughter. I hang out with her. 'Cause she's going through Family Services with her ex. Right now. So she's been through a lot and can help me. . . I got eight sisters and three brothers . . . I get along with almost all of them . . . I'm gonna stop becoming that black sheep and go up and visit and, I'm just gonna focus my whole life to work, to pay the bills, and to be with my daughter . . . Um, I just turned my, I just turned my life upside-down, completely, yeah. From doing nothing, carefree . . . to do everything by the book

. . . Like when I was growing up . . . I went to church, from the age of two to like sixteen years old . . . I enjoyed it, I thought about going back to church recently but I, I just don't. It always crosses my mind.

... well if I'm gonna get accused of stealing, and I'm gonna get grounded, well I'm gonna do it. So then, my brother [Jake], like he'd take me and he'd show me how to steal, so then I just started stealing on my own . . . (What kinds of things did you steal?) Um, tee shirts, hunting knives, clothings . . . stuff like that. Trade for drugs. Go to the weed guys . . . we'd be fifteen, they'd be like twenty-three . . .

(. . . money must have been tight with that many children.) Yeah, there was a lot of children, they bought a, she said she went through, there was seven or eight of us in the house when we were small. She used like twenty loaves of bread a week. You know, potatoes we just bought by the fifty, that big huge bag, that, you know, like a hundred pound bag.

My dad always worked, that's one good, you know, he always fed us . . . He was a truck driver . . . and he had his own roofing company. So he'd balance, you know, he'd have the company for a year years. And then he would go trucking for a few years . . . [. . .] (So was your dad away a lot . . .?) Trucking? . . . Yeah, that was nice when he was gone. . . when I went to high school, I could skip, my mom was a cook back then, so nobody was home. So just skipped class constantly. Forged the notes . . . I had that down to a T. I sound like my dad on the phone . . . so I knew all the ins and outs to get away with stuff.

(Are you close with your mom?) Yeah. Yeah, she's going through counseling right now, finally. From the abuse my dad put her through . . . the poor old lady. I don't take her to my family court cases or nothing. Because she gets very emotional [. . .] . . . her and my dad both bailed me out, I live with them right now. So, yeah he's made up a lot, he gave me a thousand dollars for my bail . . . I mean, for my down payment on my criminal lawyer . . . I was making no money and I was all stressed out and I had four hundred and thirty dollar a month payments on my van and he paid a whole bunch of them, I owe him like probably close to seven thousand dollars right now, that I've accumulated in the last year. So, I think he's did so much, is 'cause he's felt guilty, of the way he's brought me up and raise me, and the abuse he gave towards the whole family. Right, so I think he's feeling a little guilty, and that's why. (What makes you think that? Did he ever talk about it, or?) Oh no, I don't talk to my dad at all.

(So, you've mentioned about your work, I was thinking about this when I was listening to the tape. Is, well how, what's it been like . . .) It's hard. It's hard. It's weird. It's very hard . . . At times I don't like it, and I find it, well it's confusing, it's, 'cause I'm not used to, I'm used to sleeping all day, and doing nothing. Now I'm waking up at three-thirty in the morning, to be at work for five . . . You just don't wanna work. But then I think, and I go, well the other day when I skipped work a month ago, what did I do when I sat at home? I watched TV and did nothing all day, I've got no friends no more. So I literally watched TV all day. That was very boring. I had more fun at work . . .

[. . .]

Um, my whole life, did a lot of roofing and stuff. And with the temp, I was out shovelling gravel under a bridge, and putting it in buckets and, hiking it up from underground up on to the, the road, and you're hot and, and very hot and work all day, and, eight dollars an hours, ten hours a day, just to make money. Now I'm in a cooler, and I'm just wrapping meat and throwing it in the box. [laughter] This is like the gravy job. You know, so I think, I, that's why I think I keep going back to work, just 'cause I enjoy it, I don't mind it.

. . . If I got no job, I can't pay child support, can't pay support, I'm breaching my probation. I breach my probation, I could go back to jail. I go back to jail I lose Victoria (his daughter) ... Everything focuses around Victoria it's just amazing what one little girl will do to you.

I didn't want to meet anybody, I didn't want to get married, I didn't want kids. I just didn't want to fall into that trap of marriage and all that. I just didn't, I saw the way my parents were, that's not love. That's abuse. I was scared of women when I was young. 'Cause my dad, I didn't go near them. My dad called me a faggot. Do the little cocksucker. You know. Then if I did bring a girl around, he would kind of hit on them once in awhile, or say weird things, you know, why do you wanna hang out with my son, don't you know he sucks dick? Like, you know, so then you wouldn't bring them around, so then, I just was scared of them, I just didn't know what to do.

My plans are to move out, get a two bedroom apartment. One room for me, one room for Victoria on the weekends. Buy her a bed and a dresser and, buy her all the clothes and make her room pretty in pink. 'Cause everything's pink she wants . . . I'd like to be able to pick her up after school and take her out for dinner . . . two, three times a week if I can. I don't wanna be the every other weekend dad . . . everything's positive.

Vicky took everything I owned. I lost everything I owned . . . (So you lost everything you had?) I ended up with my couch. A little beer fridge. And like a couple of small power tools that were just garbage . . . Vicky took all my clothes and ripped them up . . . I wasn't allowed to go to the house. I was told she had like, almost up to your knees in garbage on every floor. She took all the things out of the cupboards and smashed them, like dishes she didn't want. She just smashed everything on the floor. Left it a mess

Yeah, I just, I'll be sitting at home and I'll just get the shakes, and my whole hand will just start shaking. And my chin will start to shake and all of a sudden I get emotions and I start thinking about Vicky and the kids and what happened, and

then I just, start channel surfing . . . I still have nightmares. I had nightmares last night.

And when I got with Vicky and had a child, and fell in love, all them bad dreams went away. And it took me about a year, I was like, hey, I haven't had a bad dream in a year. They're all gone . . . 'cause of the love. It's not all the fear and the anger and the hate and, the crap I grew up with in my life, jumping out windows and running and hiding, hiding in barrels, and hiding in the closet, and put clothes over your head, 'cause you could hear dad's cowboy boots coming. You know . . . [. . .] (What do you feel like when you wake up after something like that?) . . . I'm very, a lot of energy, very, I don't know, like hyper shaking . . . when I wake up, like I'm full sweats. I'm completely drenched.

Because I have to confront her [Vicky]. I don't, confront her, but I just have to see her in the same [court] room . . . and I can't give my feelings, I can't give my thoughts . . . My nerves have been shot all week . . . [. . .] (. . . it's seeing her, and then you said, not being able to say anything . . .) Not even to just be able to just apologize. (Yeah) Just to say I'm not here to bug you, I'm not here to give you a hard time. You know, I'm here to try to work co-operatively for Victoria. I wanna, you know, I want things to work for our daughter. You know. And just to say sorry. And that would just help me I think. And I can't do that, I can't even say anything.

(Can you tell me a little bit more about what you were like as a kid? . . .) . . . I was very average to happy kid. Very bubbly. They called me the garbage can, when I was a kid I ate everything . . . Now I don't eat hardly at all. I eat normal compared to when I was young. I was just, I was very happy, bubbly, always told jokes. I don't know . . . and I was babied, 'cause I was the second youngest. (What was it like being a teenager? . . .) . . . That was just all drugs and booze. From the age of fourteen to probably twenty. Was a lot of drugs, acid, coke, weed, mushrooms. Beer, whiskey, lager, you know, just everything. Partied like six days a week all the time, and then when I hit twenty, I was like, whoa, this ain't working. And I went back to high school, for two years, got my grade twelve. And then got a job for two years, then got laid off, and then that's where my brother got outta the pen. And introduced me to all the strippers. (Right) And then that's when my whole life, every time, Jake keeps bringing me down.

(Something I, I just thought, like how would you describe yourself now?) Now? . . . Stressed all the time. (Yeah) Um, very quiet most of the time. Withdrawn. I've just turned my whole life upside-down. I just work and go home, I, I don't go nowhere. (How would you describe yourself as a person? . . .) I'm very kind. Always willing to give a, a helping hand. It's weird, I can have the most anger in me, and just, the hatred. And then yet, on the other hand, I can watch the Little House on the Prairie, and cry. It's, I love that show. [laughs] Watched it for

years. And . . . (You're an emotional person aren't you?) Yes, and I go from one extreme, (Yeah) to the other . . . it's a very wide range of emotions I go through. But overall I'm, I'm very generous, I try to help. I try to make people laugh and smile most of the time.

William

William is 50 and married to Marie (age) with two children Richard (age) and Tiffany (age) who have learning disabilities. Reflecting back on his childhood, William shares his experiences growing up in a large family of nine and how his happy childhood memories of engaging in family activities play an important role in how he likes to engage in family activities with his own family. William recounts how he and his family have struggled after discovering the incest between his son and daughter and having his son placed outside the home. William speaks of the emotional and practical challenges of having his two children living apart and of the Children Aid's Society involvement in helping his family manage their circumstances and work toward bringing his family back together under one roof.

[...] My father was a math teacher. He was always a teacher. When I was born he was in the war for a couple years stationed in Africa, he worked on the planes. My mom stayed home in England and she worked in some sort of place where they fed the people ... We all came over from England in 1958. Three brothers and three sisters ... we came over on the Empress of Britain . . . My mother showed me the passenger list yesterday ...

Actually, we all grew up in [the town] and my mom and dad had two more children in Canada. So that would be nine kids after 1964 [. . .] I'm the middle boy, there's three sisters older than I am and a brother, then I come in fifth down the line. It was kinda good for clothes and everything else. And you know, it was good, my mother could go out and do the groceries and whatever while the older ones took care of the little ones . . . I was the middle boy and I was in contact with all of them basically [siblings]. 'Cause of the situation I got to have time with the older ones 'cause they looked after me when my mom and dad weren't home. It was good because I tried to stay in contact with them when they left. And you know they were like parents eh? Just like looking after me and stuff like that. And

you know there was always somebody there to talk to . . . there was that closeness that we had, as we grew up we didn't have much money and whatever we had you know it was quality time because we used to go at least once a week, the whole family say to some park and we'd have time, they made a point of it every Sunday to go out somewhere . . . We used to go fishing and stuff like that. . . it's a good family outing.

Dad was very good with authority. You know when he spoke everybody sorta jumped and had to do what he said you know. My mom ran a bakery beside the house, through an extension. We had good education. My father would help us out and my mother fed us, so it was good all around.

[. . .] We were Roman Catholic. I went to [Catholic schools]. I guess I was a shy one. I failed grade nine. I had a hard time. It was the time when my brother died. My brother was twenty-one. His death affected the family in quite a few ways because everyone expected him to show us the way, he was going to university; he was killed by a drunk driver. He and his fiancé were coming home from [a city] and a drunk driver hit him . . . We all had a hard time you know, we really counted on him, the family was counting on him graduating and whatever because he could help us out financially; he was going to be a biologist. So we thought he would be the number one and he'd help us out.

When I failed grade nine my father took me camping, we set the tent up in July and then he told me the news - that I failed my year. Well, I guess I kinda knew it was gonna happen, it was very close, I needed some good marks and I just couldn't buckle down and do the work. So he took me camping and then another day later the rest of the family came. And that year they got me involved with going to the Y, taking Judo and stuff like that to build up my self esteem . . . I left [school] in '73, I was one credit short of, for a grade twelve and I have it now.

I went to work in [my home town] for a friend of my dads. And I worked there for the summer. Then I worked in a tool and die place for a year. And then I thought, no, I'll spread my wings and I went to [a big city] for a year or two. Then I came back [home], 'cause I missed home, and thought I'd get a transfer with the company, but it didn't happen . . . I worked for [Farming Equipment Wholesaler] cleaning trucks and maintenance, it was a good job, but I came back to [home town] 'cause I missed home and thought I'd get a transfer with the company in [another city], but it never happened. So I went back to school, to machine shop. And I got a job in [a town] at a [Tractor, Equipment Company]. I worked there for awhile until the place closed. Then I got a job in [my home town] and I worked there for twenty four years.

[. . .] When I was in my twenties, my brother went to University and my other brother, well, he was going to [another province] and it's just the time in life when sort of everyone was moving away. My best friend was killed, it was his little brother's brother - so I became his Big Brother for about seven years. I had three

matches with three little brothers. And that's the most favourite thing we had going eh, it was good, to go fishing and stuff like that.

. . . the factory where I worked in [my home town] for twenty-four years, it closed about three or four years ago. I'd still be there if it was still running. It was good. It had it's times. But it moved to the states and some of us needed to change jobs. We we're best of friends, you'll see somebody you haven't worked with for twenty-four years now, it's like a reunion every time. It's, it's nice. I see them whenever; we shared a lot of hours working together and it's just like being part of a family . . . When [the factory] closed I was gonna become a teacher's aide 'cause my father's a math teacher and two brother's were teachers, so, I thought that'd be alright. So I did go to volunteer at some of the schools for classroom monitoring, going out at lunchtime to look after kids. So I went to school, finished my grade twelve - I found that very hard cause I've been away for so long. Then I took psychology and computer's in the classroom and some other stuff. I had fun, I enjoyed it. And then I got a call, the hospital, so that was it . . . I got a part-time job at a hospital because I don't know, just my luck, and I do housekeeping; it's a change from the factory because I don't have to yell no more. I can move around the hospital and do things differently, do work on other floors. Whenever patients stayed for awhile you really got to know them . . . I see myself . . . just as a person that goes to work and does his job and you know. I am a person that doesn't talk very much. And I just go there and do the job and come home basically. At my job at the hospital I talk to people and make their day and they make my day too 'cause we're all in that place together and have to work together.

[. . .] I met Marie [my wife] in '79. We were both in St. John Ambulance at the time, of course we don't belong to it anymore, she looked after the duties for the corps, stuff like that. You know we sorta looked at each and we kinda tried to arrange to be there together, it was a good thing. My mom told me you know, you're, you have to go to a place, that you like going to, where there's good people and you'll, you'll meet somebody. And she was right, we married in 1981 . . . We have two kids, Richard and Tiffany, they were both born early. Richard was like two months early, and Tiffany was like six weeks early or something. [. . .] I came home from work one day and Marie told me the news.

And it was kinda exciting 'cause my oldest sister and my brother in law came to the hospital that same night and Marie's mom and her sister came. So it was special, you know. 'Cause it was the first one for their family and it was the first one for Marie's Family. So, it was double whammy both family names, kinda nice. Because my sisters had to change their names when they got married and my brother he couldn't have kids so they adopted, so it was kinda wow. The first son to carry on our family name . . . And we decided to have another one and she was six weeks early and thank God we had good people looking after Richard while things happened. And this was the time where Marie got to meet her biological brother 'cause she was adopted so it was kinda a real eye opening time. So our family got bigger. Yeah, it was exciting, busier; it was fun . . . We were

both working full time, Marie went part time after Richard was born or after Tiffany was born. And she went back to full time about four years ago. And that's around the time that my place closed too, so it was a good thing. So, you know the benefits were there.

[. . .] Tiffany has dyslexia. She's in grade seven and Richard's in grade ten, both in [family home town]. They're both slow, they've both been identified that they need help. Tiffany is in a special school program and has extra help at school. [. . .] My mother lives close in [family home town] only ten minutes away. My dad died about seven years ago. My mother broke her hip, I'd go to pick her up groceries every week. Do the groceries, have some time with her and carry on from there This happened at a time in our lives where everything was crazy. Marie's sister had lost her job. She was out of work for about six months and my mother just had major surgery. She had her hip done and she was eighty-two back then. She had her knee done, one knee and hip done one year. And our life out here, we were getting hooked up to the sewers. Finally after years and years [laughs] and our house was a total mess because of it. 'Cause you have to organize, you know, move this move that and the house was just total disaster. So, it was total confusion and we should have just stopped and listened to our kids I guess. So . . . we learned our lessons.

. . . We had sort of a problem, our family with Tiffany and Richard, they kinda did a few things [they became sexually involved] and Children's Aid had to be called . . . Tiffany was eleven, and Richard was fourteen, there must be something that went on those times.

My son was arrested. He now lives away from Tiffany because they can't see each other right now until things get better, 'til she sort of agrees with it . . . My son got charged the same day. He had a day in jail, a night in jail. He went to court the next day and if my sister in law wasn't there to take Richard it would have been much harder, he would have gone to a home somewhere else. And the contact wouldn't have been there. Richard went to Marie's sisters to live and Tiffany was here. Marie's sister is kinda a Godsend because he would have been sent somewhere else eh? And who knows what, where he would have gone eh? . . . It was very hard for me, I lost thirty pounds 'cause the stress is just unreal.

. . . I think the judge doesn't realize what we as parents are like. You know, my involvement with Big Brothers . . . Church going and stuff like that. This decision was made without that information. I think it's good, but you know it just seems like everything is dragging on and on and on. When we had the situation we were dealing with it. And the situation that we went through I feel that the courts and then a few other things combined has brought the family apart.

[. . .] You got a son, you have two kids living apart from each other and he lives in [another area of town], she lives here and you have to get people to look after Tiffany while you're visiting the other one. It's back and forth, somebody had to

stay with Tiffany to make sure she did her homework and help her out, but now she's getting to that stage where she can be left on her own for a little bit so we can go see Richard, the two of us and have time with Richard . . . You know we've had to make sure Richard gets fed well; clothes and whatever. We have to go down there to check on his homework and stuff like that. For awhile there when this first happened we were taking Richard, going down in the morning after-before work or something like that whenever we could we took Richard to school. That was good because I'm working part time I can do those things; see him in the morning when he needs that extra boost before he goes to school

. . . Right now I work part time at the hospital doing the housekeeping and Marie works full time. Now we just, try and see our kids whenever we can. I do the housekeeping part time and try to keep our house from falling apart. Marie doesn't realize sometimes the things I do, and vice versa . . . somebody's gotta be there and I'm there. So Marie will go to work and don't worry about things, stuff like that. I try to be independent and do those things and Marie's the same way too. She'll do things. Just for the family.

[. . .] I've regained twenty pounds back. It's just all of a sudden you have to do this you have to do that. And in the house you sit back and you think I can't do that. You know, I gotta look after myself too and keep my strength up too - by going out and bowling and having fun in my life again. I was always a bowler and I've just quit the last couple of years because you know we were driving kids all over the place. Sometimes you have to take time for yourself too. I bowl once a week. And Tiffany bowls on Saturday morning, Richard bowls Sunday nights. Just one of those family things. [...]

[. . .] So, our lives turned upside-down, but we're still living and it makes us kinda stronger I think sometimes. 'Cause you have to be in two places at once and it makes you appreciate what you've got. Because you know, you hear so many stories about kids separating and kids suicide incidents.

[...] So you have to have faith, and I guess maybe that's why we go . . . to get recharged. I go as much as possible. I can only go every other week 'cause the work or whatever and Marie's home the other weekend. So we kinda work it that somebody's home with Tiffany. Going to church, means a lot. [laughs] 'Cause if I don't go to church I don't feel right or something, I just think everybody needs that special hour a week. ... I still find it hard to go to church when I can't take two kids to church.

But you know, it's just hard when two kids are living apart that should really be living together. Like the punishment has been thousands of times over, that's an exaggeration maybe. Because you know we've not only had to have two kids apart, the financial strain has been just incredible.

Felix

Felix (39) is married to Jasmine and they have two daughters, Tashlin (12) and Ruby (10). Felix speaks of his childhood and how he sexually molested his siblings at the age of 13. Maureen, Felix's sister reported Felix to the authorities in his late teen years. Felix was removed from his family home for three years and he feels that he has been under the thumb of the Children's Aid Society because he was reported in his teens as a sexual predator. Felix talks about his family struggles and his current challenges of having a child with disabilities.

. . . I don't remember it, but I was told I fell, fell out of the window. At a fairly young age, it was before my brother [Alex] got hit by a car ... in 1970 I was five years old when [Alex] got hit by a car. And I have some memories of that, but I have some vague impressions of standing by a window and my mother told me I fell out the window and hit a fence before hitting the ground. And I'm not sure if she said it was picket fence or one of those steel bar fences. But she did say that it saved my life. 'Cause, cement pavement was under that, so, I imagine that's the first time that Children's Aid was even involved in the family...

(How many siblings do you have?) I have three others . . . when I was born my father was thirty-three. My mother was twenty-two . . . I don't think I have siblings through my mother, but there is the possibility, I keep thinking that you know, eleven years between my mother and father. So, I could have an older half brother that's, or sister that's in their fifties. And I also think that there's a possibility that I have younger siblings through my father.

Well when I was five years old ... my father had to leave the house. Or he left of his own accord because of his drinking, going to jail, whatever. I'm not exactly sure of all the things, but he had to, it was agreed upon or he was forced to, I'm not sure what it was, but he had, was out. So. And since then I've actually not really seen him except for, well four times before we moved . . . at least four times . . . I saw him when I was thirteen actually. Since my grandmother died, his mother, I've only seen him for the funeral ... we did the viewing and then he took us out to, for donuts and pop or something and I was thirteen, and then I saw him about seven years later. And I actually haven't seen him since. So, so almost twenty years ... He's seventy-two now, I guess, if he's still alive ...

(So you grew up, your mom raised you and your siblings?) Yes. She raised us . . . when my father had to leave, we went into a, a shelter. I think it was like three days, that we were in there, I have this picture of the furnace, I think. And being

there for a short time. And then my brother and I were taken up on to the mountain. To live in a foster home 'til about Christmas time, or a little later, maybe my birthday, I'm not sure . . . I think it was when I was six . . . it was a pretty good experience.

So I think Children's Aid was involved in that one ... Yeah, my two sisters went to a farm. If I was six, my sister Alexis was um, three, and my sister Maureen was one. So it was the year, I think it was the year after my brother got hit...

(Then what happened after that?) Not too much. Until, until I was about thirteen. I guess when my grandmother passed away . . . then I started to, to, I sexually abused my siblings. At that time. But that didn't, nothing happened to that until I was eighteen I think it was. Seventeen, eighteen. And my sister reported, my sister Maureen. So um, five years, I guess, of abuse, sexually abusing my, my, well I did my brother once I think. Um but my two sisters, molesting, or abusing them sexually. I got charged when I was seventeen, eighteen years old. Or nineteen. I don't remember when exactly . . . but Children's Aid was involved with that because I had to move out of the house [and] I went to live with a friend and then I moved into my mother's boyfriend's house because he was living with my mother. So I sort of um, a year's probation . . . Well I was, by the time it was finished I was twenty. So a year of not being able to go home to a house that, at the time I was, I was gonna be buying with my mother. So, but I wasn't able to put any money into that. And, I don't really think that it disturbed me all that much. But I guess there could be feelings or resentments. I'm, I think I'm proud of my sister for doing what she did . . . Well I think it takes a lot guts . . . to do that, to, 'cause in a way you're putting yourself out, you're, you're, you wanna get out of your situation, but you're getting into a different kind of a water that could be just as hot. So. I just think that she did the right thing.

(Was that hard for you when [your father] left? Do you remember?) No I kept telling my mother I wanted to live with him. For even when we moved in '74, 'til about '75, and my mother said ... "You're never gonna live with your father. Um, he was a drunken alcoholic. He's been to jail. So just wipe it out of your head. You're not ever gonna live with your father." So after that I think I gave up ... and after 1978, that's when I think I started to abuse my sisters . . . I was thirteen

Kinda being picked on a little bit at school; I, I don't really remember being picked on all that much. Just a couple times that year and then, and then the fight. I was trying to get somebody back their hat, or trying to get back my hat. I got kneed in the groin and hauled off, plowed him in the chin. That's the extent of that fight. So. I think that day that I went out to, [that was] the day that I found out my grandmother died

. . . Vince [my step-father].... he didn't, he didn't marry my mother until '82, I think it was. But he had been there since '71, '72. I remember going to his gas

station, I would clean the toilets occasionally, I'd get a dime or a quarter for doing that I could get a can of pop and a bag of chips, couple other things. And then by '75 I was pumping gas [at] ten years old

My brothers and sisters went to church. Course, I started, started to go to church . . . we went to church so that [Vince] ... could do his books in quiet . . . Um, he never wanted us calling him dad because, I have no clue why, but I started to in the early seventies when he was starting to live in the house. And he says, "No. You call me Vince."

I think in 1978 that he may have been abusing my sisters himself. Which kinda, I, I really don't know how much I knew, but probably felt for sure that something was going on, and it kinda made it easier for me to be able to do it . . . might be rationalizing in my head or something, trying to, to put the blame somewhere else, but some, some people might think that. But I, no, I did it, that's what happened, you know. But I do have the feeling that I was told, because I've always had that feeling, after we moved out and after Step-father was gone, I've always had that, I had that feeling when he was gone, that he had been doing the, the same, as I was ... So yeah, 1982, '84, yeah I was nineteen when . . . my sister [Maureen] . . . told me that, that Vince had been abusing her and my sister. Vince also threatened us. Threatened us, to keep the girls and to, that's one of the reasons now that, looking back he kept saying that he was gonna institutionalize my brother and send me off to foster care or something. So, and keep them [the sisters], so he had a special place already on there, and it, he had been doing that for about a year I think. Saying things like that. So yeah, there's a lot that I can look back on and see twenty-twenty, a hundred type thing ...

Um since [Vince] . . . moved out in 1982, '83, I've never seen him. Now he's called my sister Maureen occasionally. But he's never called me and I've never went to the phone or tried to find him. I don't, I don't like him. Although I kind of respect him in some ways because . . . he gave me the chance to, gave me the responsibility, you know, had the trust in me or whatever to, to open up a shop and to watch the store ...

My mother says that Vince was insecure. We moved around a lot, it was like a pregnancy . . . It seems like once ever year we'd move . . . My mother and Vince owned the store and the, the garage . . . half the businesses . . . Not only that, but half the, half the businesses in town {laughs} . . . it was a little hamlet . . . The store burned down. That was after we moved though.

(How was school for you when you were younger?) I always thought I had problems, making friends. Because of moving. But I always seemed to have friends. I always thought I had problems, but at every school, I always had some, at least two friends in every school. (What kind of kid were you?) Oh, {Laughs} on the better side of well-behaved I guess. I wouldn't say that my grades, my

grades could have been very good if I had applied myself, at least that's what the teacher's always said to me. Three sticks of dynamite, just to get you motivated

(So what was high school like for you?) It wasn't too bad. I guess. Although I was pretty consistent for English in grade nine. I wish the English grades would have been like the other grades, but, twenty, twenty, twenty, twenty-one. Was the English grades. The other grades were all passing. I think English I failed, I had to go to GC in the summer, for summer school for that. I started skipping off in grade ten. Was it grade ten or was it eleven? Well let's see now. Eleven. Started skipping off with a friend of mine. And, I don't know how many trips, I ended up with only sixteen credits. Half, half of what you get when you, for four years of high school, I only had sixteen. I got expelled from school, but because I was hanging around the area so much to visit with my friends, the vice-principal gave me another chance, he says, ok you do these exams, if you pass them you get the credits. I believe I got my math credit anyway.

I was twenty-seven before I went back to, to adult education. Somewhere around there. And I still haven't graduated. I got the life credits and all that, and I did good in most of the four credits that they said I had to do ... (So you went to work when you were done high school?) ... I found a job working at [metal fabricators], started at ... six dollars an hour ... I was twenty ... I worked there a year and a half until they moved ... I was living at home with my mother and then I had to move out. And I moved into my friend's place, - because of, being, my sister reporting me. So, yeah I worked there for about a year and a half, I broke my foot ... I'd done something stupid, I got drunk or something and, and went running through backyards and that. I think one of the police stamped on my foot. To get me to hold still or something. I don't know. All I know is waking up in the jail cell with a very sore foot.

... '86 my sister had my niece Alexis [my sister] never told me that Children's Aid told me to, I was to stay away. I babysat [my] niece my brother did some babysitting as well, as well. He sexually abused [my] niece ... Children's Aid think I did too, but I never did.

I had had Tashlin [Daughter 1,] or she [Jasmine my wife] had had Tashlin. And I basically [had] ... been with Jasmine for three to six months of her pregnancy, with Tashlin, so I'm basically her daddy. I'm you know, was there when she was born; although I wasn't in the delivery room ... I met [Jasmine] ... [for the] first time ... before my sister reported [me for sexual abuse]. [Jasmine] keeps telling the story about how she first saw me, she asked my brother, "Who's that old guy sitting on the couch?" {Laughs} I was twenty, she was sixteen.

... the things that I don't like most about the Children's Aid is, when Tashlin and, and Ruby [daughter 2], when I had to leave them, [CAS] they forced me out, Jasmine forced me out too ... Um I wasn't allowed back in [the house] for three and a half years ... [At the time] Tashlin was a year and half or more, aAlmost

two years old. Ruby was eight months ... (And what was going on at that point?) Nothing. It was because of my past. Nothing had happened to the kids. Of course, couple of things might, have been reported, but I might have scared her one time, I didn't, picked up, I picked up Tashlin and um I was mad and I got way up here [motioning to raising child up in the air] and I was gonna come down and put her in, but when I was up here, it was like, ok, that's stupid, and went down, put her in the couch.

Cause there was a time in the summer, I was with Ruby, all [by] my myself, she was doing some sort of schooling . . . I was trying to get Ruby to go to sleep and I was giving her a bottle, she didn't want it. Tried feeding her, she didn't want it. Tried rocking her to sleep, didn't want it. Got frustrated. Placed her in the, I placed her in her crib, or playpen and then I went to the wall. I stood at one of the walls and pounded and pounded for a minute. And then I walked across, pounded, pounded. On that wall. Trying to get . . . Trying to get the frustration out, going, 'why can't I do this?'

Children's Aid, um, had me jump through hoops eh, wanted me to go to anger management. So I went to anger management. They wanted me to take a parenting course, I took a parenting course. Parenting course, I did. I didn't see the point. 'Cause they told me all this stuff that I already knew

Children's Aid had me go through a, a sex offender's thing as well. I went to that . . . I got a lot of frustrations out there . . . usually when I went there, I'd just come from visiting with the kids, so I, until the visits got changed, or the day changed that I was going on. It was always rar-rar-rar-rar-rar, I hate 'em, I hate 'em, I hate 'em . . . I hated the agency. Especially when I was coming from, from the visit, going to the sex offender thing ... (What was that like? That group.) It was neat actually. Found out I wasn't alone.

I guess that's kinda what my friends feel like from high school. You know, I had friends in high school and I don't see them ... Well, I still think of them as friends, I don't know what they think of me. But they haven't tried to contact me, one of them I tried to contact a lot, and never got any calls back, so, it was like eight years before I decided, ok, that's it.

... the company that I was working for then. Which was landscaping. I worked for them. That was right after [the metal fabricators] went into landscaping at six fifty. Three years later, I was making eleven fifty. It was cool. (And what did you do there?) Landscaping, laying, laying sod mostly. Putting in sprinklers. Planting trees . . . (Did you like that work?) Yeah. I like being able to go into a neighbourhood, and say that I did that . . . I worked for [landscaping company] for about three and a half years. Then I made a mistake. I, I had been drinking one time. Drank for about six hours, didn't drink for another four and a half hours or more, drove [to city] looking for my dad. I got pulled over. And they said I blew a 1.51 . . . almost double the limit. So the officer said, officer that

arrested me said that I missed hitting the telephone pole by that much . . . I had to spend a hundred and forty dollars or so to get my boss, my boss's pick-up out of the impound . . . I lost my licence for a year there

... She (wife) says sometimes I scare her ... (She went to live with family?) I think that's sort of what her plan . . . And she visited quite a bit. (Had you been arguing? Is that why she left?) Arguing is once a day, or once every two day occurrence. 'Cause money or something to do with money, would always come up. Not so much with Tashlin, but nowadays we sort of fight about the kids and money. So. Not much has changed.

(Does Jasmine's mother help a lot?) Yeah. She does help quite a bit. My mother gave up before, gave up on helping me, trying to clean up my apartment or my bedroom or whatever a long time ago. So and Gurty, I don't know what, she just seems to like cleaning a lot, and, and helping. My mother's also busy, so, not only did she not want to do that, she didn't have the time

I also wanna talk with Children's Aid. I believe we need a three bedroom apartment, or townhouse. You know, I actually want something where I can do the laundry, daily type thing. That way it doesn't get too far away from us and if Ruby messes up the bed, I can change it. She's on the top bunk, and the top bunk is like, when I'm trying to put the sheets on, it's eye level. And then there's a railing up there ... (What are your responsibilities?) My responsibilities are her [Jasmine's] responsibilities. You know, but um, I don't work no more. So um I haven't worked pretty well since Tashlin was born

(What kinds of things do you do with your kids? With your girls.) Well not as, not as much as what I thought I would be. Tashlin really doesn't want to do anything. Which kinda fits in with me in a way. I don't really wanna go outside. Don't care. If I was working, I'd just continue working. I'm lazy. You know, in two ways. I'm just lazy, and lazy that I don't feel like going out and working, or if I'm working, I don't feel like quitting, I just stick to what I'm doing. It seems to work, I leave it. If it doesn't seem to work, so what? It's a disruption if I change it.

(So you guys are quite involved in the Native community?) No, not really. But Gurty [my mother-in-law] was and is, has been. Not so much so anymore. She has to keep her toes in anyway, she's a drum bearer. And Jasmine's kind of a Native princess in a way. 'Cause she's next in line to be the drum carrier.

... last couple of months I've kinda decided that I want, if Children's Aid's gonna be in our life, they, they can help us then. I'm gonna ask so see if they can help us get that. I gotta talk to, to Disability as well. It's, it's really needed. If not for my, not, it's for my comfort, but it's more for my being able to help Ruby. To be able to do more for her, so that I'm not so uptight, and cranky.

George

George (41) grew up in a northern Metis community. He speaks of his early adulthood when he lived a “gangster life” and how having a child turned him away from drugs and a violent lifestyle. George recounts how his ex-wife Abigail’s drug addiction and prostitution lead to their family’s involvement with the CAS. He speaks of the hardships he has faced and attributes his current success in life to his faith, determination and business skills. Currently, George lives with his three daughters Faith (8), Grace (5), and Gabriella (4), and his girlfriend Madison with her two daughters Mia (15) and Chloe (21).

Well I guess before any of my three daughters were born, I was quite involved with, with drugs and I was a bit of a gangster myself. Um, got involved with all types of different types of drugs and weapons and dealing with bikers, and I ended up losing a lot, you know, we, through it, it really it bottom and I lost a house and lost all my property and all I was left with was my girlfriend who was pregnant with my, my daughter and she [my girlfriend] ended up running away, couldn’t stop using drugs. I had tried to track her down, you know in crack houses and whatnot. And ended up getting stabbed, bottle smashed over my head. Hit with bats and I got, went, sent to the hospital a few times and it became very evident to me that I was gonna probably die trying to find her [Abigail]. So I ended up just praying to God, it was Christmas, my family had disowned me, I had betrayed them and deceived them and ended up owing them money, and I, I had established a, you know, a new place, with new furniture, and I was all alone, I had no, you know, wife, no child to, to be, with me, so that’s when I prayed to God, to just protect my child. You know, and I didn’t know what else to do. Offered my life to God and said if you do anything, you know, I’ll give you my life if you save this child, ‘cause the child needs protection. I couldn’t do it and I was healing from these wounds.

We [Abigail and I] were both in [northern Canada]. So I didn’t realize what I had done, you know, referred back to James, I think, chapters one to eight, it talks about submission to God and such, and making an unselfish request, that those requests would be granted. So I, I’d received a call, it was, it was just before Christmas, I think it was December the 19th and Abigail was in early labour. [I] headed right from a bar [to the hospital where] . . . my ex-wife [Abigail was in labour] . . . with my first child [Faith] . . . I guess she [Abigail] hadn’t eaten for a few days, and she was drinking and . . . heavily using a lot of drugs . . . and when they got to the hospital . . . [Abigail’s] eyes were like saucers, she was talking like

she was on another planet and they had run some tests and stuff and they, they found there was, you know, high levels of barbiturates and marijuana and cocaine in her system, along with alcohol.

...the nurse wraps this child up and hands her to me. And, I'm, I'm looking at her, you know, I open up the blanket, I'm looking at her hands, and her toes and her face and she seemed so perfect and so beautiful, and to me that was God answering my prayers. I said, you know, I had to have had my prayers heard and I was, at this time going to Narcotics Anonymous [NA] meetings . . . I had brought my child there . . . and I'd said, "This is why I really believe in God . . . this is an experience that changed my life" ... with NA [I] didn't get a lot of support from them, they weren't really into my righteous attitude about God, God to them could be anything. Pumpkin, a tree, whatever helps keep them clean ... I ended up leaving there and I, I stayed clean and started fighting for custody.

You know, Abigail, my ex-wife was fighting to keep [Faith] because she wanted to get housing, she wanted to have a welfare cheque, a place that she could . . . prostitute for, for cocaine . . . she would leave the child with people that were unfit. But the court, like to try and prove this was hard. Like it was like pulling teeth. And I was so desperately trying to, to watch her closely without being charged with stalking and stuff. And it became very, very hard to me, I figured you know, I'm never gonna be able to prove this.

I ended up going to the hospital and realized what had happened ... I stayed with her day and night, and I was going to court, to get an interim, interim order for custody. And I was denied. And, and when my, my ex-wife found out about that, she had had the police, she phoned them and phoned CAS and said, look, take the child, put her in your care, don't let George see the child, and, and the security guards and the police literally dragged me away from my child ...

... I was living about twenty miles outside of town ... and I didn't have a car I had gone to get my court papers, which were out in the, out in the country where I lived, and by the time I came back to show them ... they had already taken her to FACS's care.

... at this stage where Faith was about nine months old, I had taken her, like and not given her back because of, you know, Abigail was just using so heavily, and she was under the influence, and I had court action going, and she, she brought the police to my house because I didn't return the child, and FACS at that time, if you fear the child will be in jeopardy of danger again, don't return her. And go to court, so I again took their advice and had her now the court went on for like nine months. You know, back and forth, and she was putting off because she didn't have proper legal council, then changed legal counsel, and the whole time she was getting the baby bonus, and she was getting mother's allowance, and, and spending it on whatever, and I had none of that money.

Now I was at the time out of work, I was living on general basic welfare. For like I was getting like four hundred and fifty dollars or something like that a month. And I had to pay rent and feed this child and I, I was, I was living on next to nothing for the longest time

So I really at this point, was just dumbfounded, not knowing what to do . . . I grabbed my daughter and I prayed ... I asked God ... “Just give me some direction where you want me to go.” ... I was very sad and I cried a bit, and Faith was playing with the tears as they fell down my face and, and I [said] . . . “I’m glad you’re so small. You don’t realize how I feel right now, what I’m going through and how hard I fought I to get you and how I wish I had more to give you.” And, and I just said ... “God, tell me where you want me to go.” And we went to bed, it was very humbling time ... I just literally almost cried myself to sleep that night.

[I] woke up the next day and there was a knock at the door and it was the St. Vincent de Paul. They said, “Well you know, we heard you needed a few things ...

So like I, what I made on welfare, went totally to rent, and with, with what I was getting from downstairs [rent] paid the thousand dollars, ‘cause it was all inclusive. And I had this huge three bedroom, or four bedroom house I was in, it was a beautiful house but I was eating from the food bank

I ended up, again through prayer and determination, landing a business with some training solutions ... out of [the United States]. And, and I opened up a couple of little kiosk stores in two malls and got off of welfare, but through the whole time, I didn’t have any mother’s allowance . . . until I think it was about, Faith was about eighteen or nineteen months old, I didn’t get custody of her until then. And, and by that time, I didn’t need it, but there was a time . . . and the system, they couldn’t do anything because I didn’t have legal custody yet of her although the child was with me twenty-four, seven. I lived for probably the better part of a year on four hundred and fifty dollars a month and food bank ... It was really tough.

Shortly around that time, my mother and my father and the rest of my family saw my devotion to my child and how I tried, and like I was going to show Children’s Aid, look I’m not using drugs, I was peeing in a cup every week, I did that for like almost two years, ‘til they finally said, “Man well you’ve gotten a lot of support from your church and the community and your family, and we just want you to keep on going. And, and you know, we see you’ve got your own business, and, and all this stuff. We just wish you the best, we’re closing the book on you.”

...the business was doing well and I ran into a millionaire ... who had a water treatment company up here ... and he, he met me in my, in my town [up north] and he came back to my house for a, a small business meeting, and saw all my products and what I was doing in my little kiosks and said, “Gee, let’s start a business together, let’s get these products shipped up to [here] . . . you move up

[here] and we'll, we'll sell this stuff, it's great products" ... he had lent me some money to buy a van, 'cause I had no vehicle, and rented a place for me, paid my one month up here ...

[Before I moved from up north] my ex-wife had come back to my church, in front of my pastor and, and his wife and a couple of the other people that were involved, she just bawled in front of everybody at the church, I'm sorry, forgive me, I'll never do it, I want my family back, it's just been killing me not having you, and bringing her back into my life, re-opened the books with FACS because she had still a serious drug problem. Wanted to have help with us, was deceiving the whole lot of us the whole time, my, my church, everybody there, myself, and was using behind my back. But I didn't know this and, and took her to be sincere. And when we moved down here to . . . well before we moved we got pregnant again right away with my second child, Grace...

I got a call from a guy who was there. Said, "Man I know how much you love your kids and how you fought, and you know", I sent him a picture and letters of my newborn, he said, "I see your child, she's just a gorgeous kid, but your wife is here in a crack house, leaving the child in a room full of people shooting cocaine, smoking crack cocaine, and she's going into the bedroom with the dealer of the house for a half an hour at a time, to pay for her cocaine with whatever she was doing. And coming back out." And, and I had phoned my pastor and said, "Look, like I, I know she's done this. I don't have the money to get her back right now, can you send her on a bus, I'll wire you money" I wired him money . . . and he, he went and grabbed her...

And, and like I was kind of harsh with her and she didn't want to admit to this, what she had done . . . maybe about a week after she came back, she left through the middle of the night with the baby[second child, Grace]. [Abigail] went to [women's shelter], said I threatened to cut her throat open and they're very, anti-men there . . . but she fabricated this whole total lie about who I was and how I was hurting her and threatening to cut her in . . . I had gotten the police to help me find her, and again, I had obtained an interim, interim order, and had the child returned back to me. We then fought for months for who was gonna get custody of the children...

I forgot to mention this. My, my partner, in my business here had actually ripped me off ... he like emptied the warehouse out, him and the president of the company that was supplying us in the [States] , emptied a warehouse out there and hauled everything out to the West Coast.

I had to go find work again and I got involved in telecommunications, worked for a couple of employers, and then ended up starting my own business. Which, which is, I've been doing now for about four years ...

... but anyways, Abigail and I fought for a few months and, and then we decided, she decided to try and make it work ... I said "Look, you know, I'll give you one last chance, if you're gonna, you know, come clean and admit everything, we'll take you back ... " Well I still loved her, you know, even though she betrayed me and done a lot of bad things, I still loved her and I know my children loved her and I, it was, I thought to keep the natural family together, you know, I just thought that was what God would want to happen. To give her every last bit of energy I had to try and keep the whole family, originally together. And were going to counselling, and we had some romantic dinners and we got pregnant again with our third child, who was born after we were separated ...

[Abigail] ended up getting her own place, through, through housing. And getting on mother's allowance, and we had joint custody of [Joy] . . . but she had the child living with her she agreed to give me full custody of the two older kids [Faith and Grace] ... I agreed to that, providing I had access anytime I wanted and she didn't deny that ...

... [Abigail] started really going downhill, using drugs and, and selling herself and you know, letting the child stay with people and, and the conditions, like I remember going to the house and there was, you know, her and a couple of men they were doing stuff ... and the baby would be upstairs in a room so covered in feces ...

I got on my phone and I called CAS [Children's Aid]... and then I ... said "Look, I'm starting court action again with [Abigail]" ... and eventually I caught her red handed with people in the house, I found her paraphernalia, I caught her with cocaine. Her prints were all over everything. And, and she had, she had agreed, she said "Ok, you can have joint custody of her."

I phoned FACS and said "I'm not gonna give her back" ... at the time she fought for it, and I had to give her back, you know, it was just hard ... the cops have that little bit of cocaine and that little bit of, you know, the crack pipes, and they said, "We can't use it in court." You know, you went into her house and you took it . . . I guess a month later she, it got to the point ... where [Abigail's] ... hydro was cut off, it was coming on every half hour for half an hour, then they'd shut it off for a half an hour, and coming on just enough to keep the food from going bad . . . she was behind in her rent, she got eviction notice, she said, "You won, come take the child." I went and grabbed her and I've, I've had her ever since. Now that's been probably you know fourteen months from today that I've had her.

All I know is, is you know, I had all three of my kids, I was single up until about a year ago ... (Were any of the other ones affected, 'cause your ex was using at the time?) Well [Abigail] ran away . . . through the second pregnancy, and we're testing Grace ... I've been going through testing for her, for a year and a half, her speech is behind a bit, her motor skills are off, I think she's possible ADD or ADHD ... Psychologist looked at her and, you know, suggested maybe Ritalin, and

I said no, I'm not gonna do that until I know for sure that's the only solution left. So we're, we're working with her very closely and she's coming a long ways, we have people sit in with school with her, and help her at school ... she's been in tons of [hospital out-patient] programs there, so it's, it's been helping. The littlest one, Joy ... because she was staying at Community Rez, for the part of the pregnancy, and then on her own, I don't know to an extent what was being used. I know there was some cocaine, but there wasn't really any alcohol, and alcohol's worse as far as I know ... I cried so many days, you know, not knowing if the child was gonna get hurt or die or what, you know. And just wanting to, like the anxiety, I, I just felt just, just anguish, everything, you know, that helplessness.

So Madison [my current girlfriend] and I have been going out for three years. Lived together for a year, a year now. And they [the kids] know her so well ... for my children [Madison's] a great role model. She doesn't have any problems with drugs or alcohol, neither one of us smokes cigarettes ... I get upset and I cuss and she doesn't even do that ... she's done things a little different than me ... 'til I met Madison ... there's been about three years I was alone and single with all my kids, working full time and having them in daycare. And you know, like I, I didn't get a lot of sleep ... so it was real tough I just stuck with it, didn't have a lot of money, didn't have any family there, you know, didn't have any friends, like I left everything [up north] ... and I had to rebuild a life.

I grew up in a town [up north]... I spent quite a number of years, I think, from, I think around the age of about twenty-four 'til about thirty-four... I had a great job and a house and like I ended up getting screwed over by my boss and felt I got short, short changed by unemployment. And that was when I said like "I'm never gonna work again, I'm never gonna pay taxes, kiss my ass, Joe government" and I went into the gangster thing, and I was dealing on a high level, I was dealing with the mafia members in [another province] and you know, bikers, you name it ... (So were you sort of in one of the biker gangs?) Not at all, no, they wanted me to get involved, I never did. I never used needles ... Smoked a lot of grass ... Used a lot of cocaine ...

(So how'd you get into that life?) Well I knew people ... I was working ... selling camper trailers. I was probably the top salesman [up north] ... I was probably retailing a million to a million and a half in just product. Making really good money.

...it was, soon as I sat down at my desk, clock ticked to nine o'clock, and then he said "Look, either you come in at twenty to nine from now on, or you don't bother coming back in." And I says, "Why would I come in at twenty to nine, what can I do at twenty to nine that I can't do at nine? ... you don't pay me by the hour, you pay me straight commission. ... he grabbed my keys off my desk to the store and took my keys. I was floored. I couldn't believe it. Said "Get out." ... I went straight down unemployment. ... So at that point in time I was very upset with the government, with my boss, and I knew a few people and one of my high school

buddies, I just happened to run into him . . . he was into the grass big time, selling grass, dynamite, grenades, guns, cocaine. And I just got bang, heavy into the, selling cocaine and hash and, and marijuana and dealing it in large quantities with everybody...

I believe God is there. And I think he has his hand on my life ... maybe it's genetics . . . my bloodline, like you know, my grandfather comes right from Norway. My grandmother and this is on my mother's side, she was a pure Ojibwa Indian, my father was, his parents was, his father was from France, and his mother was from England.

My mother, she, she just had, just this memory, but as a small child, like I was, you know, the first child, like I was a, a year old, I was peeing in a toilet when I was just over a year old. My dad was so proud of me, like I was the only one of his buddies kids that could talk and walk and he was taking me to parties with him and, and they, they would be all drinking and they would teach me to swear and they would laugh.

... the next morning, you know, I get up, and I'd, first thing I do is, I start swearing, f-ing this and stuff, and he's say "What?" And he'd slap me, he used to beat me for it at home. And my mom and him ... I remember them fighting about this ... It was, well no, yelling and throwing stuff and she'd slap him, but he never hit her. He never hit her. He slapped me though, like whenever I swore ... And my mom and him fought ... and then he got caught in bed with a babysitter ... and I remember that day 'cause she was whipping his stuff out the bedroom window, we lived on a, on a main floor apartment, but there was a basement below, and there was stuff was flying out the window and I was crying ... I was running the clothes back in to the house ... I was about two and a half years old ... I remember so much when I was a kid ...

So I never really had a dad, I remember having, you know, just all my friends had cottages and motor bikes and boats ... and I said, "Mom, can't we have some of that stuff" and you know, no, you know, "I can't afford it, it's just me, you're never gonna be able to get that, so you might as well get it out of your mind" ... she bought us a lot of toys and she was very good that way, but she drank a lot ... when she was twenty, she was alone with three kids.

And I left home, I was 15 years old. And I, I ran, I was involved in crime, I got caught, got sent to reform school. That changed my life . . . I was not gonna be stupid like that anymore.

I started working, fighting fires and then I got a job in a mill ... and it was like going nowhere, even though it was good money ... I was there at 17, I was supposed to be 18, working in the mill, if I could have got hurt, I would have got in a lot of trouble with compensation or whoever. So I figured heck with it, you know, I saved up a bunch of money, bought myself a car and I went back to

school. Put myself through high school ... I got through high school in, in two and a half years ...

So I ended up being this, this brat of a kid. Truant all the time . . . my locker got raided at school before I even went to reform [school], so like in grade nine, I got to grade nine, before I was like four months into school there, I got raided at school twice, they busted me with a hash well and a couple of my buddies. And we ended up getting kicked out of school. Then I quit.

I got heavily involved in karate. . . when I first started competing in the states, the first year I was in it, and five guys, we took back I think it was two hundred and forty-four trophies in one year . . . I started teaching it. Bang, my academics were right up there, I was an honour student ...

... I got sick of working in the mill, almost got killed, like I worked there for five years, every year I almost got killed either by a flying log off of a roller belt in the wood room ... so I ended up leaving I was 24 at this time and I, I quit to go sell vacuum cleaners and I sold tons. Was making huge money and I got offered management stuff, to open up my own offices, and I was managing crews, the guys, and, and I got burnt out from that, went back to the mill, worked there for a little while ... got into campers and trailers and, and then, you know, the downfall kinda happened eh?

... You know, just my mother and I, I remember taking my hockey equipment down, and I got hand me down stuff from my uncles, lot of it didn't fit right, it was either too big, or you know. And I remember the old grocery bags with the rope handles, I don't know if you remember those but, but my mom couldn't afford- well we couldn't afford a lot, so I carried my equipment in those bags when all the other kids had nice duffel bags and nice equipment and their dads would tie up their skates. And I always had a hard time tying my skates up tight. And this was like at four, five, five years old, you know. And I was very frustrated with the game. And I ended up scrapping with kids, because I, I couldn't you know, I guess I was just frustrated by not having a dad.

Well [I] had two little brothers. And you know, my mom worked at eight o'clock in the morning, eight to four-thirty. And she would get me up with her at seven and I would get ready and we would eat together . . . she'd have to walk to work and . . . I would commence making them toast and tea, 'cause that was one of our favourite breakfasts, dipping our toast in our tea.

I grew up . . . my grandparents lived in a town not far from there and I used to wanna go there all the time because they had a snow machine and they had a trap line.

And my grandfather ... like he showed me how to shoot the, the 303 Winchester... but he also, he swore incredibly, a lot. Like just constantly. If something like, when we sunk, he was just, gee, mother f-ing, you know, and he just, it was non

stop and you know, I just stood back 'cause I didn't, I didn't know what to do at the time. But he was quite promiscuous back in the town, when we went home to my grandparent's home and he would, he would flirt around, he also bootlegged booze to make money on the side, he was a CPR foreman. He was a big guy, you know. And he, he, he was quite a womanizer. You know, he, he'd always go out and drink and fool around with women whenever he could. And it got to the point where he got so bold he would even bring, bring them home, into his room, his, my grandparents never shared a room. But he would always, if my grandmother said anything, he would, he would smack her. And, and slap her silly... [These were] my mom's parents, but my mom, she witnessed more horrific stuff, like my grandfather just smashing my grandmother's head into the wall, you know, but why she stayed, why she loved him, I'll never know, like she was a status Indian, and she lost her status ... Well I saw quite a bit of it. And it was a regular thing, you know, [my grandfather] drank a lot and he was very violent with [my grandmother], never hit me 'til I, 'til I got involved, like I tried to stop him, I think the first time was about 9 or 10. And he smacked me back, quite hard and I fell down and you know, I remember, I remember him, him holding me back and ... was whipping my grandmother with a belt. ...I knew something was gonna happen, so I'd sneak Grandma, like Grandma let's go, I'd sneak her in the truck, because I could drive a standard. I'd hop in the jeep and I would drive her to neighbour's, or somebody that I knew she, where I, where she would be safe...

My mother still says you know, nowadays, you know, you, you three boys were the best boys ever. You know, couldn't have asked for better kids, polite, quiet . . . we were just well behaved, manners were good. [...] Is [your mother] still alive?) Oh yeah. Yeah, she comes, she, and visits, she's remarried ... (So how often would you speak to her?) Oh, every week we speak ... (Did you ever make peace with your dad?) No. He actually died. Right when I was, I was in my last year of high school, I think I was 21.

[Are you ever violent in your relationships?]. . . I never took that road. You know that my grandfather and my uncles did ... I was disciplined through martial arts and I took my anger out in other ways. And I, I, I didn't see any real benefit in smacking my girlfriends around. You know. So it didn't happen. So like I, I ultimately broke that chain ... I'm working and I ask God, I say, you know I, "I need your help here, you know. I need your, your spirit to come inside my heart and soften it so that, that I'm not as hard with my kids." (Are they happy, happy kids?) They're pretty happy kids ... loving kids, they're, you know, we try and give them a lot of affection and love and hugs and kisses ...

Nigel

Nigel (44) immigrated to Canada from Europe at the age of 16. Nigel has been divorced since 1998, after he separated from Maria when she had some behavioural

issues he was unable to deal with. Nigel explains how his ex-wife's family supported him financially by helping to pay for a lawyer to gain custody of his children through his involvement with social services and getting divorced. He currently lives with his son Christopher (14); his daughter Julia (7) lives with his ex-wife Maria.

Alright, well I'll give you a brief history about I suppose of myself and the children's mother. We, Maria [and ...] I married in 1989. It was a happy marriage for a little while. Christopher [child 1] was born 1990. Julia [child 2] was born in '97. Maria had some sort of behavioural, I don't know behavioural, maybe that's not the right word now. Some issues. And I guess it was not really readily apparent when I married her that she did have a, a few sort of hang-ups ... issues, that she, that I, I deemed were unresolved. And I think a lot of it had to do with you know, family, her, her mother died when she was fourteen ... and she was from a big family and . . . then just prior to when, when we got married ... she was struck by a car and, and she, her head hit the concrete. She went for a brain scan, at that time they said everything was fine, but to be quite honest, I, I just never found her to be exactly the same after that. It was nothing you could really put your finger on, it's very subtle ... it really didn't become apparent 'til about two or three years into the marriage, and I just sort of felt, and I said, this is not the same woman I married ... even though [Maria's] from a large family, we were living in [western Canada] at the time, so her parents, her family didn't have regular contact with her ... so I felt like I was sort of going through this by myself.

Anyway, I, we separated in '97. And this was probably when my daughter was only three months old ... we divorced in '98. The children were both living with her at the time because you know, I didn't even contest that basically. She was a good mother to the children, I would see them ... we worked out a custody agreement whereby I would have them every other, every other weekend. And for the most part, that went quite well. But she did have sort of mood swings ... and this sort of escalated, and then when was it? 2001, it just came to a head basically, she'd been acting very strange. And I had actually contacted Children's Aid ...

Anyway, so around the time when, when we had the first custody arrangement, around '98 we just been divorced and we were in the process of selling a house, she [Maria] was still living in the house. And I think there was a lot of strange behaviour going on, and even, even her brothers and sisters were starting to notice this, and they contacted me about it. And you have to understand, at this point I didn't have much contact with them, because they had obviously sided with her [their sister] after the break up, and I didn't see them for two or three years. Anyway they contacted me and they said, "Maria has been acting very strange, been saying, doing very strange things and you know, what do you think?"

... just after we got divorced, she got into with a ... bad crowd she had this friend that was probably not the best sort of person she should have ... and they had some bad people and they were in the house that we still hadn't sold yet. And apparently Maria was under the impression that they were breaking into the house and stealing things so she wrote all over the house with a, a black magic marker, F-off, get out of my house, you're liars and all this sort of thing and, and I remember her brothers and sisters came up for like Thanksgiving or something like that, and they were at the house, and they were just horrified. They walk in, you know here's their sister living in the suburbs and she's got all this stuff on her wall ...

And, just little things like this that, it's not anything that's completely wacky or out of control, but sort of out of character ... Like for example, Christmas Eve, phoning me up, saying, "Oh you have to take the kids now." I'm like, "but it's Christmas Eve, I'm just about to go out to go here." "Well you have to come and get them, because I didn't buy them Christmas presents." I said, "It's Christmas Eve Maria. I don't mind coming to get the kids, but maybe you could have told me this last week or something, right? I'll come and get them." So I came and got the kids and just, whole series of little things like that ...

... since the break up she's never really been, you know, cordial, but same time, sometimes she'd just be downright abusive and just to the point where she wouldn't let me see the kids and have no explanation ... it was usually around holidays when we'd have things planned and then we were expecting that call at the last minute, "Oh I've changed my plans, they're not going now." ... that was, just enraged me and everybody else around right?

I pointed this out to Legal Aid and they said "Well, you know, maybe she is a little unstable, but there's really nothing we can do because she's not beating the kids, she's not mistreating the kids."

And then 2001 I got a letter through the door ... it was a court order saying . . . you've been summoned to go to court by your, by your ex-wife, she, she, she doesn't want you to have anything to do with the children ... and she wants to cut all ties ... take custody ... well I didn't have custody ... and I was just horrified and I phoned her ...

...as it turns out she thought that I was out to get her and out to kill her or something ... (And had you made any threats or anything like that?) No I hadn't, no I hadn't actually ... and then the police phoned me one night and says, "Hear that your wife's, that you have been threatening your wife." I went "No, I haven't actually." I went down to the police station and . . . I explained the situation . . . I said, "To be honest, [my ex-wife's] she's not quite, she's not quite right ... it's been documented, you can go and talk to the doctor." ... I was never charged with anything ...

... like I have to go to court in a month. So I don't have a lawyer, anything like that, and I decided I'd speak to her family . . . I hadn't seen them for three years and they go "Oh you know what Nigel? We've noticed some pretty strange things about her too." ... So they decided that she definitely needs help and they were gonna back me up right? So I, I got eight of them, their, she's got nine brothers and sisters, I got eight of them to sign sworn affidavits on my behalf, saying that Maria needs some help.

So to cut a long story short, it took six months basically of going to court ... going to court, going back, waiting, waiting, waiting, and I'm still, I'm not seeing my children, and each time I'm going up there, first I didn't even have a lawyer ... So there were eight of them (Maria's family)) and like you know, they've got, you know, they're fairly, I don't wanna say wealthy, but they're, they're doing alright ... we got a lawyer and we decided we're gonna split it nine ways ... and it culminated in 2001, in October of 2001, and this is probably like six months after I'd been served this thing through the mail.

... this is something else, when I was going for a lawyer right, and I'm looking at angles, like I can't afford a lawyer, how the hell am I gonna do this, right? And then I, somebody had mentioned to me, she said, "Well there's this, this bill, where you can go through Children's, you can go through Children's Aid and there's a bill ... where you can get a Legal Aid lawyer to represent you and your children."

So the next thing you know, I'm by, and this took a couple of months for this whole process. And in that time I hadn't to see my kids for six months. [The] social worker said "... I'm gonna arrange for you to see the kids" ... "it'll be supervised by me," ... So I was just excited, but this was in September, I hadn't seen them for four or five months.

(Why did they need to be supervised?) ... because of the, Maria had said that I offered death threat, death threats and this is why I hadn't seen my kids for so long and the, the judge even said, "You know what? My advice to you is just to get your, you get your facts straight and just don't phone her, don't harass her, just keep going the way you are, and, and get this sorted out. Because you know, one wrong turn from you and you could blow the whole case."

I'm waiting for them, I can see the truck come or the van, and like I said wait a second, where's Christopher? Right, he wasn't in there, it was just only Julia. ...I said "Where's Christopher?" "Well Christopher didn't want to come." And I was just devastated by that, because like my son, he was just like you know, my pride and joy right, and him and I had been like, like this since he was a baby, right? ... And I didn't want to, at the same time, dwell on that, because here I haven't seen my daughter and I don't want to dwell on why I'm not seeing him . . . 'cause I didn't want it to affect that situation. And apparently [Julia my daughter],

she said, "Well he wanted to come yesterday but then ..." Maria would sort of be telling him, 'no you can't do this, you can't do that', and ... the little boy was just confused and he's siding with his mother ...

I got a call at work from Children's Services ... [the] social worker's recommendations came in to us ... [they told me they] went to the school ... and ... [placed] the children ... in the custody of Children's Aid and they're in a foster home. And oh my God ... so I went down to the Children's Aid and I spoke to this guy ... and he explained the situation to me, he said the recommendations came out from [the] social worker, and your children have been placed in two separate foster homes.

[CAS] then they looked at my records, said, well you know, you got a job, you, we have no record of you doing anything bad, the kids seem to like you, you seem like a stand up guy. So I started the process of getting them [my children] to come live with me ... at that time, I only lived in a one bedroom apartment ... I said "The kids are safe, seems to be quite stable where they are in these foster homes. How about January the first, it will give me an extra month to find a place, and I'll get it set up by then, I'll have a nice, you know, three bedroom townhouse" ... January the first I moved in . . . and another reason I said, "Well I don't really wanna disrupt their Christmas or their whole, you know they, they like where they're living now, and they've got their whole school thing with the Christmas, I don't want to disrupt them, pull them out, yank them out of there.

But I knew that would never be the end of it, because Maria is very persistent and she would never give up, right? So we were in court again the next month ... and the judge says, "You know, basically, I don't know why we're here today, things have not changed that much in three or four weeks. ... And I'm thinking, well, well neither do I, but you know, two thousand bucks later ... And basically she [Maria] was wearing us down. And every month we'd be going back to court for something else [...] and you know, every month coming back to court, taking me to court. From the time ... [the children] came to live with me ... we'd spend another ... nine thousand dollars. And you know, I was just baffled, where does this money go ...

... And then this government lawyer ... he said "You know what? I'm gonna suggest now, how about, I know it's rare, but I think it's probably better if Christopher stays with you. And that Julia stays with the mother. You can have joint custody, with primary custody there and there." [...] Well I think it's worked very well, I mean that, that initial eight months I had the pair of them here, and ... I got my hours changed at work to accommodate and ... my company was very good, they even gave me an easier job ... they were very supportive that way and, and I was able to cope, you know ... I can't afford babysitters, Julia was still in, she was in junior kindergarten, Christopher was like eleven ... so I arranged . . . subsidized babysitting ...

(What's it like being a single dad?) Well I don't mind it, I mean, to be honest I don't have a girlfriend right now, I'd like to have, I'd like to have one, but I, you see it's hard for me to pursue that sort of thing because I, you know, I work days ... I work eight-thirty to four-thirty, I'm home by five o'clock every day. And you know, like there's time ... I'm home with Christopher and we, we have, we do a lot of things together. So I'm home cooking and you know, making lunches and doing laundry and stuff like that. And I don't get to go out a lot ... it's a small sacrifice really, because I really enjoy the fact that he's here. I've gotten used to the workload ... I'm an organized person and I keep on top of things ...

I work in, I work in the printing business ... I [worked there] for six years ... I got that job in '98 because I knew I, at that time, when I'd just been divorced, that I would need a day job in order to see my kids ... and that's worked out very well ... I was just basically trying to find any kind of job. I had jobs through like an employment agency, and they'd say ok, this, you're here for three weeks. Now you're over here for two weeks workings nights, and then you're over here. You never really knew where you were, you're just sort of trying to find a job, right? And then finally I got this job ... now everything's gonna settle down, I've got a straight day job, right?

Over the years, to be quite honest, like I grew in [Europe] right? And I came here when I was sixteen. And then I left home about eighteen, I went to college briefly, but didn't finish college. And then basically I, you know, I had a falling out with my parents at the time, we later reconciled, but, so I, I was, I've worked, since then I've kinda travelled around quite a bit. And I've lived in maybe eight or ten different cities in this country. And I've worked in construction, retail, sales, restaurant, bar industry. I was a roadie for a rock and roll band for a couple of months, and just all sorts of things, you know, and because I've lived in [western and central Canada] ... So you know, I moved around a lot ...

... when I met the children's mother we decided that it was, we wanted to go out West. So we ended up moving out West together. And then, we spent six years there and we came back. So I was, I was pretty stable for the time I was with her ... I had a couple of jobs in [western Canada] ... working as a bartender there at [a hotel] ... it was a well paid job, it was union, plus lots of tips and gratuities and everything else. And then so we were doing pretty good. And then in the, in the, in the winter, I actually had a job with doing advertising sales and, and, and I was doing sort of journalism for this small community paper and that sort of thing. ... It didn't pay very well, but ... we were doing ok money wise. But at that time Christopher was just born and then, and that put a strain on the relationship, working because Maria would be working one shift, and then I'd go home be taking care, care of him and then she'd work the night shift ... we didn't see a heck of a lot of each other all that time ... we were getting a bit homesick and ... we came back here ... in '94, you know, we were just kinda thrown into the deep end again and I ended up taking a job that I really didn't want, but you need a job right?

... So we were doing ok, Maria had a job and I was working and ... then after the second child was born, like Maria went through this whole postpartum depression, you know? ... when Julia was born, I go, oh my God, yeah I remember, now I remember this, I've seen this before, this is like six, seven years ago when Christopher. ... she was sort of thinking I was having affairs with other women, women, and, and I wasn't ... I went away ... to see my, my brother for the weekend, and I came back on the Sunday, and it was Father's Day of all days. I get home, and there's like four members of her family there, this is odd, I'm like "Why are you here so early on a Sunday morning?" And she says "Well they're, they're here to escort you out, you gotta leave." I said, "Leave, well where am I going?" "Well, that's it, I can't, I don't want you here anymore." And I was just flabbergasted and then I, I left right? . . . I ended up getting like a rooming house ...

So three months. June, July, two months actually, we were apart. We reconciled and then a month later it's like, it's not working out ... I says "How about I leave at the end of the month?" Ok, we set a date, October the 1st or something. And we had a big enough house, I was like, "You can't just chuck me out again for crying out loud. I just moved back in, you gotta give me time to like, you know, get some money together, find something." So I said "Ok, well the house is big enough, you live up there, I'll live down here" ...

(How was it for the kids, going through all of that?) Well, Julia was too young to know. Like I left when she was three months old, so she's really never, doesn't even remember being there ... it's just like water off a ducks back to her, like these things just don't affect her. And Christopher is kind of easy going, and he, he, he took in stride too ... and maybe it affected him in a different way. In a quiet sort of way, you know? To the point where he's come, comes across as being shy and withdrawn ...

(You ever like, did you ever like lose your cool [in the marriage] ...) I did, yeah, I was yelling, I was yelling and screaming. For sure, I would, and, and but both. We, we reciprocated it, I mean she'd be yelling and screaming at me too. But it never got violent, but there was, there was a lot of bickering too ...

(What was it like, sort of, all of a sudden being out on your own and away from your kids?) Well it was, it was, it was difficult because . . . I'd got a warehouse job here ... I'd actually been there for four months and they were just gonna hire me on there ... And I go, you know what? I don't have a wife, a house and kids anymore, I, and I sure as don't want this, hell, don't want his crummy job anymore either ... Now in the meantime I had a, I had a part time job, working Saturday nights, at this banquet facility ...

So basically I, and that day I lost my house, my wife, kids, job and the city I lived in. Gave it all up at the age of 37 I'm out of here. Starting again right? ... at that

point, it was, I'm thinking I have to go, I haven't been back to [Europe] for ten year, I grew up in [Europe], so I gotta go back to [Great Britain]. It's almost like with this thing, I have to go to my roots in order to progress. ... And I went over to [Europe] and it was very liberating, I got to see my family again ...

So anyway, within two months, I've been back here, I said ok, first thing I do is get a full time job, days. And I did, and I got that job at [the copier place] in April I started at Easter ... and then I'll quit smoking. And sure enough, within a week of getting a job, I was able to quit smoking, cause then, or now I, I got something to latch on to and I can build from here. And I haven't smoked since ... it's been quite good, 'cause I got that job, straight days, got to see my kids.

I have friends here. Actually of couple buddies of mine, we, we're like amateur filmmakers, we made a, like we were working on couple of film projects we, just for, for our own benefit, it's not like, it's just for fun basically, and the kids are in it and stuff like that, sort of thing, so. We, that's, that's one of my hobbies, and I also play soccer on a, on a men's team. Every other Sunday. And it works out, 'cause I get my kids every other week, and I've got soccer every other week ... (So what kinds of films?) We made one, we're working on a second one. It's, it's basically a comedy about, about of all things, soccer ... 'So we ended up making this film about the World Cup. ... But it's a hobby because you know, we get to write it and direct it, and film it and edit it, and choose the music and you know, it, it's, it took us awhile to do it, and we were quite happy with it ... It takes about a year, year and a half 'cause it's hard to get it altogether ...

I had a pretty good childhood. Now my dad was, when I was younger, he was in the armed forces so we, we lived in a few places ... my brother was born there ... I had a pretty normal childhood, had, we lived in what was called in [Great Britain], it's like a council house. You know, people, lot of people don't have money to buy houses ...

Well we, we had, we had, we bought a house, but it was basically a, we had, these terraced houses, you get a row of like a hundred houses in a row right? They were all built in like 1899, to accommodate the factories, you know, like, and it's just, they were all slapped up during the industrial revolution right? ... it was kinda near the sea too, so you could get away from it. ... by the time I was fourteen or fifteen, I was more independent, and then I could get, you know, get on a train and go to ... the biggest cities, and go to see rugby and soccer matches and stuff like this and it wasn't that bad.

We tried to emigrate. And we, I guess there were three or four failed attempts. ... And finally we did, we got through when I was sixteen. And we were living in Wales and, and basically the letter came, and its like [snap], well, we'll go, we, we've been accepted and we have to, and we were gone within two months. And we cleaned up, sold up and off we went.

... My mom had been here (Canada), well I guess it, I don't know if it's pertinent to this situation but I was born out of wedlock, when I was, when my mom had you know, when she was eighteen, she had me out of wedlock right? (With your, was your dad your biological dad?) No, no, he wasn't.

Well it turns out when, you know, the whole maternal thing took over and she couldn't give me up right? So it turns out that well, ok, no, no big deal. So as soon as I was old enough to, to fly, I guess I was about four months old or something like that, she went back to [Europe]. And then you know, it, it turned out it wasn't as bad as she thought it might be. And you know, it wasn't such a stigma, and then you know, like once granny saw me, it was like oh my, how could we even have thought such a thing? And then within a year, she met my dad right? And they, they married, and he adopted me when I was like two. So basically he's been my dad all my life, and I've never had any concept of my real, biological father ... I met him once or twice, but that was only arranged through my granny, and, and it's like, you know, I never really pursued it. And you know, so it's, it's not really a big deal.

And it turned out, my dad had been in the armed forces and he'd travelled the world a bit and he'd always wanted to come to Canada ... And my dad got a job within I think, he said he had four of job offers the first week that he was here. 'Cause he had, you know, various trades from [Great Britain] ... Yeah so, my dad had said he had four job offers in the first week, and with his skills and everything ... and within two months ... we got an apartment and then like, I think within three months, we bought a house.

I finished high school... and got some community college ... and then basically, you know I, I got the travelling bug my self ... I got a job in a factory and I remember when I was nineteen, thinking my God, there's gotta be more to life than this right? ... I headed out on my own ... [I had a] fallout with my parents ... we had a fire in the house, and it wasn't even my fault. Well it kinda was. And that's one, for the one reason today, I don't fry chips in the house, right? ... he starts lecturing me right? ... meanwhile, my brother's standing behind him, and my brother's kinda chuckling, he was only fifteen. And then I start laughing and then my dad smacks me, and he'd never hit me ever, right? But he did that day. And I guess I deserved it. Anyway, and, and that was it, that's it you're gone. You got a week to find somewhere else to live, right? So that was unfortunate. ... And he felt really bad and then he phoned me up that night and goes "Ok, come on, we gotta resolve this." And we did. And I, to this day, I mean my dad's, still, and I, we have these, I don't know, he's, we're not, we're not always on the best of terms. My mom and I are on, you know, great terms, and my brother, my dad's a bit of an issue sometimes.

... to be honest, like the last six years are probably when I'm the most stable, 'cause I've had the same job for six years ... I'd say the last years, I've settled down quite well ... when I threw all those things away, and I'm thinking, well

seven years later, like it's not so bad, you know, I'm back here in the same area. Kids are here, my, I've got my kids, I've got a job, I have friends, you know, I got a reasonably nice little place here.

(... I wanted to kinda check out ... living in a co-op ... what's that like?) I like it ... when I first signed up for this, I didn't know, realize it was a co-op, I just saw the ad in the paper, I was in the three bedroom apartment ... so I phoned this place ... I explained my situation ... I was sort of the perfect profile [for this place], right? ... I'm paying like seven hundred a month, which is you know, it's, it's not chump change, but it's still ... It is reasonable for a place this size ... (So you, you're doing ok financially?) Yeah, it's pretty tight but I'm pretty good with money and I, 'cause I have to be, basically, and I'm always on a budget and I cook . . . and I make lunches every day, and I'm always planning ahead, that sort of thing, 'cause I have to, because I can't, can't just afford to go out and spend a hundred bucks without thinking about it. Because you know, it's, and then, still have responsibilities to my daughter, and you know, she can, she's coming over, and Christopher is getting older, and you know, bikes and, and new shoes and haircuts and sporting events and this and that and the other, you know, it's, it's expensive ... but I've got it under control ...

Dylan

Dylan (late 30's) is single and has twin children, a son and a daughter, from a previous relationship. Dylan's children were removed by the CAS at the age of five and are now crown wards. At the time of the interviews Dylan did not know whether or not his children had been adopted. Dylan says that having his children in care is probably best for them given their special needs and health problems. He has moved a lot and held part-time jobs to supplement his income from the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Dylan's own childhood was turbulent, his mother began suffering from pre-senile dementia at a young age and had to enter a care facility. He describes his father as an abusive alcoholic. Dylan is planning another move and hopes to find "the right woman" and have more children.

I hated the word retarded, like 'cause to me I had no clue what was wrong with my mom when I was young. So as soon as someone said retard, or called, loser or

called other names, I fought. I didn't care who it was, where it was, and then once I hit sixteen, I quit fighting because I knew it wasn't worth it.

[Q: Oh, so she's had that for quite a while then?]

Yes, since I was five...It's more like Alzheimer's...she was only in her thirties when she just got it. Like she's been in the nursing home already for at least twenty-five years already. And she's only in her mid-fifties.

[Q: So did she live with you when you were young?]

Yeah. Hard to remember, remember it though. Like I remember some things, but it's, since it's been so long.

[Q: You've mentioned your dad a few times. Can you tell me about him, what he was like?]

I know deep down he was a good person and did love and care about us, but he cared more about his drinking all the time, and that's why he hit us ...

...he was sixty-four last year. And that's how skinny the past two years, like since his liver was shot, his mind was shot, he went downhill. Like one thing I had a hard time dealing with too is, people said he looked better when he was cleaned up at the wake, than what he did in life. And I'm like, can't you just keep your f-ing mouth shut? You don't say that, how can a person look better when they're dead than when they're alive.

... like I was able to play hockey, go to cubs, go to scouts, army cadets, and everything else. So-...Yeah, I loved that. See that was like a-...I loved going camping, at least I wasn't home. Just being around kids and I was able to be a ham, and stuff like that.

But I was, not so much a kid, but I know as a teenager especially, where I was always a risk taker all the time, like I lived in about fifteen to twenty different cities...But I had no fear.

[Q: So, you've talked in the past, that you've struggled with depression on and off throughout your life. (Yep) Did it start when you were young? Or-]

Yeah. But I don't know how I couldn't be depressed with everything I lived with. Especially like losing my mom like that. Because that, and then seeing my dad drunk all the time, and everything else, like I remember like the good parts too, like going to camps all the time, cubs, scouts, cadets and stuff like that...

'Cause to me, where I always had a hard time with mama's boy. Mama's boys, when they go to extreme, absolutely drive me bananas. I understand a kid crying, but say if you just tap him like that, or just say something really minor, and the next thing you know, they start bawling their eyes out, I have a very hard time to deal with it.

Like not wimp, but I still get called names by teenagers...like I don't know why people pick on me so much. And that's why I get scared for the kids too, like I don't know, I don't want them to go through stuff I went through, because that's really hard on the male ego.

Because of self esteem. It's like I feel like I'm worthless, nobody, loser, like I've been called that numerous times too. So it just feeds into it, it's like, what the hell is wrong with me? Like that's what started me into being anti-social. That's why a lot of times I isolate myself, because I have a hard time trusting people. I know that affect, really affected it with the kids too.

I know that something I gotta do is eventually find a way to go back and at least get my grade twelve, or get my equivalency, but that's not one of my top priorities right now. My top priority right now is getting place of course, and make enough money.

[Q: You lived, you moved around a lot when you were a teenager?]
Not teenager, but early twenties...I lived in like Toronto, Hamilton, Oshawa, out West, worked at a fishing lodge too in St. Arrows...I liked it. I miss the travelling, but now, where like I can, I'm moving back to Toronto hopefully, and to me it overwhelms me a bit, it's like I want to get my old feeling back of no fear.

[Q: When did you move out of your family-]
About fifteen, sixteen. 'Cause I just couldn't take the yelling and the fighting anymore. Especially since my dad used to hit me, my mom and my sister. So I was like, ok, bye-bye.

[Q: And what did you do there?]
Dickie Dee in about, at least five or six different cities...not just Toronto, like in Oshawa, Ottawa, Hamilton. 'Cause like I knew, ok say, like the boss I had here in Kitchener, if I had him in Ottawa, I would have been number one seller in Canada.

But like I know with those days too, where, like that's when I used to drink, but I could never drink much anyway because of my size, plus for me I always drank too fast, always drank the hard stuff. And that's why to me, I call some of the youth today wimps. Because there is no way they would do what I used to do...I, this is why I had my nickname about Crazy Dylan, the crazy boy. I got, I liked that, that nickname. Ok, 'cause like I knew we ended up, my friends and I, we ended up drinking after work, three days, we had no sleep for three days, and we kept working. Not once did we complain.

Well I ran away...Yeah, 'cause that's when I, that's why I lived in so many different cities too, as soon as things got tough, it's like bye-bye. Soon as I don't like a job or something, it'd be bye-bye. Just take off, don't tell anybody where I am. And of course that came back and haunted me when I was older... 'Cause like

I could had, probably half the house, but I ended up getting nothing, hardly, once my dad left. So I got a lot of resentment about that.

Like I had more anger towards myself because of how I treated him (his father) and everything else, 'cause I dealt with everything the wrong way...just by taking off, plus like when he hit me, I ended up stealing from him and stuff like that.

[Q: So you felt guilty about that.]

Yeah. And plus like I didn't, like even when we lived together, I didn't talk to him that much, because since I don't drink and he does, just got frustrating sometimes. But to me, at least I got closure with him, like since I was there when he died ...

The first time, oh and this is why from now on, I would rather travel on my own than with idiots friends, or acquaintances. Yeah, no they can't be called friends, 'cause they're idiots. Like I went with one person out there, like that's where he was from originally, like I met him here. So or no, that was twice this happened, yeah ok, I can't be trapped. 'Cause first time when we were here, we ended up going out to Vancouver. That time we went and met idiots. 'Cause they were into drugs and everything else, so then I didn't see Vancouver like I wanted to and went through Calgary but I didn't see anything, because I went with idiots ...

...like when I was in Winnipeg, going to Winnipeg in '92, and I met a woman there, that's when I wished I went, I, like since I was in Winnipeg, we were still going further east, but, I mean further west, sorry. Like we ended up coming back here.

[Q: With the woman? (Yeah) Oh ok.]

And I blew that one...I ended up, my addiction, like it's a sex addiction, so lot of times I go on the chat lines too much. And that killed it...It was something that always, yeah that always came back and haunted, haunted me.

[Q: So you've been doing that for awhile though. 'Cause that was-] Too many years. I don't wanna say, it's too embarrassing. And it costed way too much money and other stuff that I don't want to get into.

[Q: What was Operation Springboard? Like what did they do?]

Oh it's basically the same thing as John Howard.

[Q: Oh ok. So they help you connect with resources, and housing-]

Yeah, plus like, yeah and for me, where they, they had like a group home, so I stayed there for a bit, and that's where I got the, get that word goof, that's from staying in there.

[Q: Oh ok. How old were you when you were there?]

In my twenties...At first I liked it and then I hated it. Too many rules. Because like if you break the rules, you are gonna get grounded. So of course, I always picked the wrong time to get grounded. Long weekends. [laughter] ...But most of the people were in jail or had some kind of disabilities, or something like that. Like I found out about it when I was in the hos-, in the hostels in Toronto. That you never wanna go to again ...

...like I know I'm a strong person, but you need a different kind of mentality to handle the streets. And I'm definitely not a street person. Like that's why to me I wouldn't, I wouldn't, I'd find a way to survive, but I couldn't live with myself if I had to go back to that.

Um, ok, second of all, first of all, with my ex, I knew I shouldn't have been with her in the first place...So then, once she was pregnant, because it was her for a bit, but then she totally changed, she became more of the B word. We'll just leave it at that ok? (Ok) So then, then, and then she threatened to call the cops on me and everything. So then of course I left, like, if you threaten the cops on me, bye bye. So then I took off to Ottawa for awhile and then I came back. And then I met with her in July because I'd be away, I wanted to get back with her in a way, since she was the mother of my kids and I always wanted to have kids.

So anyway, when, when I, but that's when all of a sudden I get a phone call in August. And it's like, you have a son and a daughter, and your daughter might not make it. So, like I lived in [city] at the time, she lived in [neighbouring city], so of course I end up getting a drive and bringing my bike to [neighbouring city].

Because they were only like two-two and two-nine [pounds]. And Meg [daughter] couldn't breath. How are they and everything. And also we were, we weren't sure if she [Meg] was gonna make it or not. Like we knew she only had a fifty-fifty percent chance...So anyways, so then the kids get shipped down to Hamilton and then a few days later, I found out Meg had to have a major operation ...

*[Q: Ok. Do you live with your kids?]
Nope.*

[Q: Where do your kids live?]

No clue...That's what I'm trying to find out, where they are, I mean I can't find out exactly where they are, but I want to find out the dist, and to talk to them, I.

[Q: Yeah. When you, so were you directly, yourself involved with Family and Children's Services?]

Unfortunately... Well I haven't been involved, like the past year, like we lost the kids, eh? I mean my, my last visit was in August of last year. But before that we were involved with them for about, like with crisis and that part took like about a year and a half...I'm just phoning them now to find out where they are. But I'm not involved...Thank God.

No, but it's just that when I went to the court thing, it's just, I didn't realize that how emotional I still am about that. 'Cause I guess I tried to keep it aside because like I know it has, I guess you can tell, for that has to be with the right people, because I know I can lose it. So I, at least now I can talk about it without crying, so I'm glad of that...It's very emotional and powerful, and I still got a lot of anger. Oh and sadness, but that's one word I very rarely ever use.

'cause I knew I could have helped the adoption and everything, but I just couldn't deal with it at, like last year, plus I got, going, like with everything that I told you. It was just too tough on me, mentally, and plus for me too, where I suffer from depression a lot too, and I was suicidal before, and I don't want to get to that point again. So that's why, and that's one thing now, that F and CS used against me all the time too was that. They used the depression and suicide against me.

... so I ended up having a hundred pills on me, like it was my dad's heart medication too. And so I ended up calling CMHA, and tell them how I felt. And then the person called back right away, but when they called back, of course the phone had to be off the hook of course. So then the person called the cops on me, so I got taken away in front of my daughter, like my son was out of the room or upstairs or something. And of course my daughter was wailing of course, because of course she didn't want me to go.

At that time. Like that's why, for me, I kept going back too. Like even after that incident, Carla was told that I wasn't supposed to be in contact with the kids. Which I understood, but I ended up living back there again.

[Q: After what incident?]

When I got taken away from, by the cops, for the suicide attempt.

[Q: Oh ok, so they were babies when that happened?]

No they were three... Yeah, they were three at the time.

[Q: So you weren't allowed, you weren't supposed to be around the children after that.]

I wasn't supposed to be.

[Q: So Family and Children's Services got involved when that happened?]

Yeah. 'Cause like they kept, they, they kept coming in and out of our lives.

[Q: Ok. Was that the first time?]

I don't think, no.

... like I was the mother, she was the father. Like I was the one who did the cooking, the cleaning, the laundry, the midnight feedings, whenever the kids woke up during the night, I was the one went, 'cause there was like four nights in particular, I only had like eight hours sleep in four days. Like and she would just sit on her ass. And to me, where I couldn't let her go, even when she was working, like I tried a bit, but I didn't try enough, like the house was still a pigsty, that's partly why we lost them.

[Q: Must have been a lot, taking care of two babies.]

Plus Jan [step daughter]. Well when we lost them, they were three, but I mean, since they were born premature, with, my daughter, she still can't talk. Like even when she was sick, she still couldn't talk, couldn't talk. And then plus with my son, where he's really slow and behind a lot of different things, like he can talk, but he's still slow a bit. And then since my mom lives in a nursing home, she has pre-senile dementia, so I couldn't help but compare my kids to her. And that caused a lot of problems there. That's why, to me, I'm jealous of my sister, where

her, right now her son is healthy, and it's like, no fair, she can have healthy, and to me, I can't?

'Cause Carla [his ex partner] blamed everything on me, she couldn't take any responsibility at all. So I had to go through counselling to realize that it wasn't just me, that it was the both of us. Like a lot of people like, well if it was just you, she would have got them back herself, and she would have got Jan back.

[Q: Jan was taken away too?]

Yep. Like, last I heard she was living with her dad.

I ended up slapping my son on the back in front of Jan, so of course Jan calls, told the teacher, be a teacher or a nurse or something like that, so then that's when of course F and CS, F and CS called...This is in, few years ago. Yeah, it was two years ago when we lost them. ...I just remember hitting him...Like there was big red mark on his back too...Might as well talk about- I don't want to remember it. I haven't talked about this in so long. Because like I know the place was a complete disaster, plus there was laundry all over the place, and bags, like it was a disaster. So then they took the kids ...

But I knew I just wanted to stabilize myself mentally and get stronger and go through the grieving process before I find out. 'Cause like I had some parents told me, that that's one thing they regret in a way, was getting pictures and letters.

[Q: You've talked to other people that had their children (Yeah) removed?

(Yeah) Where did you meet them?]

Through the chat line.

Yeah. Oh I always knew that. 'Cause like I knew in a way, it was for the best. I just wanted closure the right way. Like to me, I wasn't asking for much.

[Q: Can you tell me what you mean, that you knew that it was for the best?]

Like I said, my kids are both, they have, have special needs. I know on my own I couldn't deal with it. Like I love my kids too much, and I knew I wasn't capable of handling enough. That's the part that made me feel a bad father in a way, but I know, a lot of people said, no, maybe you're a good father, like you're realized your, and you made the biggest sacrifice that you could make.

'Cause like every father who goes through that, like when you lose your kids, you go through so many different emotions as is, and for me, where this is where I was able to get what I want too, is um, I hardly ever missed a visit with my kids. Even though they were in custody for a year, we were there.

[Q: Yeah, you were living with your dad last year? Is that, or sometime?]

Yeah, until he passed away...And then, so then too, where, and then plus like I wasn't working for the longest time, so I actually started working again too. So I know now where I gotta keep working to, that's why I want to move to Toronto, because like I've been trying to get other jobs here, but no one's hiring here. And that does not help the self esteem. But then yesterday when I went to Toronto, that

was just emotional...So then it's just the moving and like, too much other stuff has just caught up again.

'Cause even now that's, like I'm hoping when they're eighteen [his kids], that they do want to come find me. And like I just hate when people say, well they might not want to find you. And I'm like, don't say that. Like I know more of it, I don't, I don't want to hear it.

*[Q: You said you haven't had a serious relationship since Carla.]
Well not really, like kinda last year I was with someone, but it was bad timing, 'cause I was only with her since I was going through everything that I mentioned, like losing my dad, losing my kids and everything. I really think I should have gotten rid of her sooner. Cause like I said for me, I want to meet someone normal. Someone who's more like me in a way. [...] 'Cause like I always hated Christmas without the kids, and then I loved Christmas. And now I'm to the point of I hate Christmas again. So it's like, ok, I gotta find a woman and have more kids. But make sure it's the right woman. 'Cause I will not go with just anybody anymore.*

*[Q: Where did you spend Christmas?]
I went to my brother's in law's place. I don't want to do that again. Feel too much like an outsider. They made me, tried to make me feel wanted, but being the only single, one of the only single people there doesn't help matters.*

*[Q: Yeah. [laughs] Can you tell me about your job?]
Well that's what's killed, killed this shoulder a bit too, but like what got it worse it when I worked in a grocery store recently. Like lifting up all the milk and everything else, it just killed it completely. Like I know I'm supposed to take it easy for a week, but I have a hard time doing that. But now like, but now where, when it comes to Dickie Dee, I don't think I'm gonna do it too much longer, because I'm losing the joy out of it. 'Cause I can't deal with the kids. I'm having a hard time dealing with the kids and the parents nowadays. Like I'm having a harder time keeping my big mouth shut.*

*[Q: Yeah. Yeah. So what are you hoping to do in Toronto? Like would you do the same kind of work, or, what are hoping to do?]
I'm gonna try like four or five different jobs. Like one of course, is selling ice cream again. I might sell hot dogs. Plus like I said, last week, my true dream one is the Air Canada Centre and Sky Dome. And probably sell flowers.*

*[Q: So financially then, two jobs will be able to pay the rent.]
Yeah, two or three. Oh no, it's not the rent, like remember since I'm on ODSP, my rent is covered through ODSP.*

*[Q: I don't think you told me that you're on ODSP.]
I didn't? (No) Oh ok. [laughter] No, I thought I, oh ok, I thought I did the first day. Oh. (No) [laughter]...Oh ok, 'cause like I'm on there because of my back, and depression. So that's why I don't have to worry about that for rent, just...*

*[Q: How long have you been on ODSP then?]
Eight, nine years.*

Raymond

Raymond (age) married and talks about working hard to provide for his three children, Max, Eugene and Sarah. However, he said that his ex-wife Ursula wanted the ‘bells and whistles’ that he couldn’t afford on one income. After divorcing, Raymond talks about the difficulties he and his ex-wife have faced in raising their teenagers as separated parents. Raymond now finds himself looking out for his children’s welfare after discovering Ursula has been abusive to the children. He says that she has neglected their son Eugene, who has special needs. Soon to become a grandfather, Raymond talks about his excitement of having a grandchild and his dreams of finding a new partner.

Well I grew up in [the suburb of a large city], my parents lived there, they still do in the same house. I’ve got two sisters, I’m the middle child, I’ve got a younger sister and an older sister. I lived there pretty much my whole life until I was seventeen. And I moved out at, when I was seventeen, eighteen I guess and went and worked my way through college [in architecture] ... So I moved out . . . got a job and worked my way through college for the next three years ... Most of the time I tried to work just during the summers.

[I] graduated then I went off to work ... actually I moved back home for about two months until I found a job and then I moved out . . . got a job there, drafting . . . I’ve never, never been in architecture since I got out of school ... So I started that job ... I lived there for about, oh probably a year, in an apartment. Then moved . . . switched jobs to a consulting engineering company. At that time I was living with my then, she was my girlfriend at the time, but she, eventually she’d be my wife. So we moved in together then ... [I was] about twenty-two probably . . . was, she’s the same age actually ... we eventually moved out ... We did not have kids yet, we were gonna get married.

... Ursula got pregnant and we then heard that the place we wanted our wedding had a cancellation . . . we ended up getting married in February ’85 ... and the same year in October, our eldest was born; Max. His actual name is Max-a-million, but we have called him Max ... we had our son ... and we had Sarah ... who is the middle child, and we decided [a big city] wasn’t gonna be the place to

raise kids 'cause there was a murder just down the road, so we decided to move [here] ...

Ursula decided to quit work to stay home, 'cause there wasn't much work up here ... she's an interior designer. So she actually stayed home with the kids which killed the income and eventually we had to move from that house 'cause we couldn't afford it ... we moved out to [another city] ... I ended up getting a job ... [where] they make boilers for power generation, station for power plants . . . the company got really busy and I ended up doing a lot of travelling.

I was usually gone thirty days, home for thirty days ... we had our youngest ... I don't remember the year ... at that time we were pretty much having marital problems then, because I was away so much. She had the three kids, it was difficult. But at that time of my life, it was my job. I had to do it, that was it, I was the only one working. So, so we were having a lot of troubles ... financial problems because she wasn't working and she needed the biggest house in town. ... I was making like, forty-thousand dollars. So we just couldn't afford it and that's why we moved ... but when we moved, it was the same thing, she wanted a huge house. So a lot of it had to do with, with money ... And me being away. And I think for me, it was an escape too, to be away, it didn't upset me, because it got rid of the problems. So, but it was difficult on her, I do agree with that. So we finally we sold that house and we moved back [here] ... we got separated in '97...

... she asked for a divorce in December. It was December 22nd, '97. And she asked me to move out and I said "No, I'm not moving out. You wanna break up, you move out," ... So I ended up, I stayed, I stayed at the house. It was awkward, but ... the kids were there and she stayed there too; I just slept downstairs ... I actually had a house built ... and I moved out the middle of May, I believe it was '98 ... the kids and I moved in ... She actually said that I could take the kids, as long as I didn't ask for child support. Which I agreed to. ... She was just starting to work at that point in time. Ursula was starting her own business up with some guy...

It was difficult for the kids. It was, it was really hard. I think the person that took it the hardest was probably Sarah. She took it pretty hard. Then the next one would have been Eugene, the youngest and, and Max. Max was really close to me ... youngest [Eugene] was very close to his mom. Still is, but it's pretty equal now ... he doesn't have a problem with his mom and dad living in different places, so he's fine, well it's been six years ... that's how the separation papers were written up, that the principle residence would be with me.

... [Ursula] eventually sold that house and she moved . . . when I moved out of the school district that Eugene was in, Max was fine and so was Sarah ... but Eugene, I would have had to pull him out of school or re-route him to a, start him in a new school. And he had already been there a couple years I guess. So we decided that I would just leave him in that school and I phoned the school board and the

teachers and fought with the principal and everything and eventually they let me keep Eugene in the school. So then eventually Ursula did, when Ursula moved, she moved into the school area. So that was fine . . . When she moved there, she was living with a guy ... at that time.

Things were still not too bad. I'm not exactly sure what changed everything, but things just got worse, where we couldn't talk. She would ask me, we were having a lot of trouble with Sarah. Just getting into problems. Like she'd probably been fourteen or fifteen years old and she was just into, into trouble, and Max was getting into trouble ...

Max, when he was about fifteen or sixteen ... he was involved stealing little things off cars ... him and a bunch of friends ... they never caught him, but one of the kids had his knapsack with them, so he was, he was charged, but the charges were, were dropped.

It was like she thought we were still married. She made all the rules and I had to live by them. And that's when I think things started, like ... it got to the point now, I'm divorced, I don't live with you, I don't love you, I've had enough of it, I'm gonna, I can make up my own mind, I'm a big boy. But, and you couldn't say no to her. Like if you said no, she would fly off the handle ... So she would stop talking to me and I would stop talking to her. And like I say, I would ask, she would ask me to honour something, like this girl. And I wouldn't allow her to, Sarah to go to the girl's house. But it was a one way street. She could do what she wanted, but I couldn't do, if I did it, it was, I was dead meat ...

In the meantime, I spent a lot of time, a lot of money, she has never, and to this day, financially yeah, she buys the kids a few things. But for the six years, I've paid all the daycare, probably about, God probably thirty-thousand dollars in daycare over six years. Kids class trips, like two trips to New York City for my son, a trip to Boston, summer camps. I would say the majority of the clothing, dirt bikes for the kids, soccer, hockey.

She would come to my place, we'd talk to Max because Max was, was drinking like when he was sixteen. And again, she would, and he has the lackadaisical teenager attitude, where- "What's the big deal, I don't really give a shit." You know ... she'd end up flying off the handle . . . she'd storm out. She'd always bring her boyfriend with her to talk and he'd always have his two cents worth in.

I got a call from her boyfriend, that they had broke up and I guess she had got pretty violent and the kids were there. So I went over to grab the kids at one point I heard there was a knife thrown ... I'd seen her with a bad temper, but I'd never seen her like hit or do anything ... But the kids had told me that, that at one point she had thrown Sarah's cell phone, at one point in time, and smashed it 'cause she got mad at Sarah ...

There was another time ... Sarah would call a lot, and say, you know, I just had a fight with mom, I want you to come pick me up, I want to come home. And I would always try to say no, I'm not gonna come pick you up, you and your mom have to sit down and you guys have to work it out, I can't run over there every time you have a fight. You've got to work it out. But it didn't work the other way. If the kids had a problem with something I did, I grounded them, or something like that, no sooner had they called, and she'd be at the door ... she would just come to my house and walk right in ...

So there was one time the kids had, had called her and she came over and I told her, "No, you're not taking the kids. I'll work out the problem, if they have a problem with me, I'll deal with it, they're not gonna call you every time they have a problem." And I grabbed her by the arm and asked her to leave and I didn't push her or shove her or anything else, I just grabbed her by her arm and said "Leave." And she got violent. She started kicking me, she started hitting me, and the kids were standing, right on the stairway. So at that point, I walked away, I went to the phone and I actually, I called the cops ... they went and talked to her, she told them that I had actually beaten her up and the cops came back and pretty much almost charged me . . . the police then called Family Services . . . Family Services, all they did was just really just interview both of us, interviewed the kids, went to see the kids and that was pretty much the end of it, nothing happened after that ...

The kids were still visiting her ... I'm not sure of the year, probably 2001, Sarah actually moved more over to her mom's because we were having more trouble with Sarah and we were having trouble with Max so we thought we could, try to concentrate more parent time with, individually to each child ... I kicked Max out a couple times ... he was sixteen and seventeen, for alcohol and different things like that, I just kicked him out ... He went to friends houses. He's never ever been too fond, I mean, since he's been about sixteen, going over to his mom's that much.

It was pretty much until the roof blew off things in February, 14th, 2002 ... it wasn't a nice Valentines ... I was actually on the way up to see a girl I was dating at the time ... and we ended up breaking up that night ... I was sitting at home actually and my neighbour next door, who I used to date ... I ended up going over to her house for, the kids were with their mom ...

And I noticed there was like thirty-three messages; missed calls on my cell phone. Now that's weird. So I tried calling Sarah's cell, 'cause they were all from her cell and it just went right to her answering machine ... and the phone rang and it was Sarah - she was at a friends place, and she said, "Mom just beat me up."

Sarah had two black eyes, she had a cracked lip and she had a, her cheek was all swollen. So I asked her what went on, she said she had a big fight with her mom ... she would have been fifteen ... Supposedly too, her boyfriend pushed Sarah

down into a chair also and there was a bunch of, she dragged her, Sarah tried to crawl out through a basement window and Ursula tried to dragged her back through the window and, I'm not exactly sure of everything that went on there, but I picked her up, I didn't call Ursula and I called the police ...

The next day the cops came back over, they had gone over to her place and talked to her, and they were not gonna charge her ... It was self defence. So I said, "Did you see any bruises on her?" "No, she said they were all in parts that they, she didn't want to show." ... meanwhile, my daughter's got black eyes, she's got a cracked lip, her cheek is swollen, and if it had been me that had done that, I would have been, I would have spent the night in jail ... And that's when Family Services got heavily involved. [...] they decided what they were gonna do was put a court order against her. That the kids would be placed with me, with supervised visitation with her and her boyfriend ... Ursula was to get counselling. I was to get counselling. Parenting counselling ...I didn't disagree. I mean, hey, you can learn a lot from taking a course on kids ...

So I think the first time we went to court was in April of that year. I don't know all the dates we went to court, it's spread out over, it was just settled finally last, this past January. So it was long, long, long. She (Ursula) fought with tooth and nail ...

Going back to when Sarah tried to commit suicide ... I think Sarah was depressed at a lot of things. She was a teenager, going through a lot of teenage girl shit, with boys and she didn't think boys liked her. She, I mean she's a really beautiful girl. Gorgeous girl. But she had it in her mind that boys just didn't like her and she had a hard time making friends and it was mainly because of her attitude. She treated people, she treated people like her mom treated people.

Sarah did have a hard time, for some reason she felt she couldn't talk to me. So I wanted to go to the sessions with her, so that we could actually talk. ... Sarah would tell me how she felt about things ... So it, it was good. It was, it was really good ... Sarah and I very, very close. A lot closer than, than we were.

... I also took Eugene a couple times to the counsellor, to the same counsellor but they couldn't do it anymore unless Ursula signed a form because he was underage and they needed her consent. She wouldn't sign it, so he didn't go back again ...

During the year and a half ... I also went for raising teenagers course ... which I think out of all the schooling I have, those eight courses were the best thing that I ever took in my life. They were, it was amazing. Just the relationship between my, between my kids and myself, after that course, it's just totally different.

Not head banging with them, knowing that, you know, you have to just walk away, don't get into arguments with them, because you're not gonna get anywhere. 'Cause they're always right. Doing stupid silly little things, like leaving notes for

them. I left my, my seventeen year old a note, just telling him how I respected him and everything else. And I figured he would just throw it out. About three months later, I was just going through his room, checking for drugs or beer or whatever else. And I found the note underneath his mattress, he actually kept ... and my daughter kept hers, my other son kept his. [...] I made it a point, on Sundays that Sundays is family dinner, everybody has to go and it's still that way now. That we all have to sit down on Sunday, and we talk and have dinner and not rush. So that's what the counselling did for me, it helped me tremendous, tremendously.

There was a court order put in place. And it was deemed that the kids would go to their mom's Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Eugene's having trouble in school ... he's not a hyperactive child, but he is a, can't keep his attention very long. You gotta be very fast paced with him. So he sometimes will disrupt the classes. So they've actually stuck him off in pretty much a corner for the last four months. Which I don't agree upon ...

Sarah's and Eugene's relationship has just, you just wouldn't believe it, they're inseparable. They are always with one another. They depend upon one another, their routine in the morning ... I used to work [out of town] so I had a, a woman come in in the morning, 'cause I had to leave at five-thirty in the morning. So she would come at five-thirty, just to make sure that the kids got to school on time . . . Eugene would have his alarm clock ... he would get up at ten to seven ... Hops down off the bunk bed ... walks over to his sister's room, which is across the hallway. Wakes her up, says "Ok, it's your shower time." ... the daycare worker's, or the, the babysitter, whatever is there. I mean, all she has to do is sit there. I pay this girl to sit there, 'cause she doesn't have to do anything.

They get along a lot better now. They still all get into trouble. They all still have fights. We all still don't agree on everything. But atmosphere around the house? It's a good atmosphere. Really good atmosphere. The kids help out. Some days, not all days ...

Sarah's made one bad decision, last October. And we find out what it is in July of this year. She's pregnant ... But I don't know whether it was a bad decision because that has even changed her more ... last September she sort of recessed back a bit and one day she just decided to quit school ...

She started school back up the next semester ... She was at best, normally a fifty-five, sixty student. Like, yeah I'll do my homework, yeah maybe. Right now, before her exams, right now, she's got an eighty-nine. Yeah. She's like, totally different. She's, comes home, she does her homework, she studies. That's why I said, it, I don't think it's all that bad. She gave up a lot of her childhood because of her pregnancy, but I don't think it's gonna be a bad thing. And that's the other, I mean, I accepted what happened. I didn't get mad at her for getting pregnant. ... Her boyfriend is still in the picture. He actually just got a job. So, he's gonna

help support. (Is she gonna stay at home?) Yeah, I rearranged my whole household.

And I gotta be a grandpa, oh God. [laughs] ... it is exciting. I'm looking forward to it. I told her to I'd look after him any night but Friday night, Friday night is still my night. [laughter] ... kids are with me now. Family Services still comes around. In fact they're gonna be there tomorrow night to see the kids. So they still visit.

Uh, I like where, where I live right now. It's a, probably a middle income neighbourhood, it's relatively new, I've lived there, the house was new when I bought it. It was just built, it was one of the first ones on the street. So it was brand new, there's lots of kids. The kids like it, they each have their own bedrooms. It's not a huge house, got a nice yard. Four bedrooms, I got the basement finished. I like it.

I get home around quarter after five depending ... I come home Mondays, Eugene's got his golf lessons, so it's come in, make a quick supper and we have to be at the golf course by six. On Tuesdays he's with his mom, so I get to relax a little bit. Wednesday he's with his mom, so I get two days of relaxing . . . Thursday's he's got his drum lessons. So again, it's come home, make a quick supper, get him ready, take him over to drum lessons, sit around there for an hour, then come back. And then Friday he's pretty much, he's with his mom. So. That's a normal week ... then there's all the other little things, I have to pick my daughter up after school sometimes, because she just walks over to her boyfriends and she wants me to pick her up her way home. So there's, it's busy. All the time ... Lately I have been, it's only been about the last two months I've been making sure I myself get out on Friday nights ... but Sunday or Saturday, there's a, oh there's housework, there's laundry, there's groceries, there's, I have a motorcycle, I like to get out on it every once in awhile ...

I have a couple friends that have really been with me for the last six years. And they've really helped when I went through the divorce and then through this, and then now, they've always been, always there, and I can always phone them and they're always there ...

I never got along with my parents, my mom or my dad . . . there was nothing wrong with them, I mean they were, they were strict, but there's nothing, there was nothing really, really bad, I was a teenager, I just didn't like the rules. [laughs] Like kids do now. So, but even now, we're not, we're not close, I go down and see them once, twice a year. And that's it. And they, I call. And I should be closer, 'cause my mom, my mom's great, my mom, with the kids, she'll, she doesn't remember a single, she doesn't forget a single birthday, she doesn't forget school, when they finish, she doesn't forget Christmas, Easter, every holiday, there's a cheque in the mail to my, to the kids.

I want to be closer to my kids. 'Cause I want my kids to come and talk to me. I don't want the relationship I have with my parents, for them to have the same relationship. And that's what I try to build upon, I always try to get them to talk when they're upset.

I got an older sister, I haven't seen her in probably ten years. She had a fight with my mom and she doesn't talk to any of us now. So, I don't know

Umm, my father worked at a car dealership, was a parts manager. Did that I think pretty much his whole life. My mom didn't work, she quit when my oldest was born ... she always regrets it. She always regrets not going back to work. I had a pretty good childhood. I mean I didn't have any problems, my parents were very, very strict. I was rebellious ...

I was a, probably an average student in school 'cause I didn't, didn't really care for school. A lot like my oldest son, but my only, the difference between my oldest son and myself, is that I respected, I did respect my parents. I mean I never got along with them that well, but I always respected them.

Now, now work isn't as important as it used to be. Six, eight, ten years ago, it was, it was the most important, I mean I don't know what, I was off travelling all over the world . . . now it's different. Family comes first. Always, I mean my kids, if they're sick, they need me at home, that's where I am. If they were sick before, then I would find someone to look after them and I'd go off to work. Now, now they come first. Work is, is second.

And I think when I got divorced, when I got divorced it really, it really changed, because it was actually a blessing in disguise, because it forced me to change. Because now I had all three kids. She only seen them once a week and that was it. So I had to be there. So it was a blessing in disguise, actually. I never regret getting divorced because if it wasn't for the divorce, I probably would be still the same workaholic I was eight years ago ...

What do I do, what do I do? I have a street bike. I like riding my motorcycle. We all have motocross bikes . . . the kids have motocross, we go out, we live near trails. And so we go out in the trails ... We ski, my kids board, I ski. Woodworking. I build furniture. So on the side, I just build, like pine furniture, I don't do any hardwood, but I build like pine tables, and boxes ... golf, I got into golf last year. Squash, I play squash. I haven't played much this year, last year I played once or twice a week, we'd go out and play squash. Pool, that I'm not good at. I, I love playing it, but I'm just shitty at it. We usually go out and play pool on Fridays. What else do I like doing? Reading, watching movies.

Never been in jail. Never been arrested. (... any problems, would you say with addictions ...) No. No. Now, my father was an alcoholic - and that's why I'm really careful about how much I drink ... I always watch what I, what I drink. So.

(Did that impact your whole life much?) Um, to a, not very much, he was a, he was a sleeping alcoholic, like he'd get drunk and he'd sleep. He wasn't abusive or anything like that ... So it didn't really affect, like it wasn't a really bad, bad environment ...

Well the best parts in my life is my family life. Worst part is probably my personal life right now, 'cause I don't have one. [laughs] So I haven't been in, I've been in a couple relationships since I've got divorced. Couple serious ones, but they, they only lasted six, seven, eight months. Now the kids are growing up, I'm trying to get out more, but maybe I put too much emphasis on the kids.

Burt

Burt (39) is separated from his wife Miranda and currently is caring for his three year old son Thomas; his eldest son Arthur (5) lives in another province with his ex-girlfriend Constance. Burt recounts the challenges he faced when he attempted to report Constance to Children's Services for abusing their son Arthur and in turn was wrongfully accused by Constance of being a child molester to their son Arthur. Burt speaks of his involvement with CAS when his ex-wife Miranda, who became mentally unstable, took off with their son Thomas. He shares his struggles to gain custody of his son Thomas and what his life is like as a single father.

... I've been married since August 25th, 2001 and unbeknownced to me, I married a girl [Miranda] with bipolar disorder and . . . Miranda and I had Thomas [son 2] together. And ... in [the] fall of 2002, [Miranda] started going into a manic phase of bipolar disorder. I didn't realize what was happening at the time. I'd found out probably about three days before she took off with Thomas. She took off on the run with Thomas and got jumped from women's shelter to women's shelter to women's shelter ... Children's Aid stepped in and apprehended Thomas ...

And then when he showed up with bruises, I, and I spoke to a couple of babysitters, and they verified that things weren't very good at home for Arthur. That's when I made the call to Children's Aid (first involvement) ... I figured it was his mother [Constance]. I figured more his mother than his, his stepfather ... What happened was, the investigator came up here and interviewed Constance and Constance's husband and they alleged that I was abusing him and said that I was sexually assaulting him and said that Arthur was the product of rape.

... When I got back to the worker the next day about it, that's the worker never told me anything about that Arthur was a product of rape. She ... just kinda kept quiet and never told me what happened, she told me to deliver Arthur back to his mother. And she said she was starting an investigation. And she just wouldn't answer any of my questions. ... But all the time, she [the worker] just kept a, like a cold distance towards me and wouldn't talk to me ... I said "Well when I lived with her a few, like when she got pregnant ... " and she said, "Wait a minute, you lived with her?" And I said, "Yeah." ... she says, "I thought Arthur was the product of a rape." So this worker took Constance's word right off the ... start that Arthur was a product of rape, which wasn't true.

I almost fell off my chair when the girl looked at me and thought I was a rapist ... it wasn't much longer after that Constance had started denying me access.

Constance had walked into the police department and told the police that she was raped by me four years ago, and I was under investigation for a couple months by, with the police. ... Soon as Constance figured out that the police weren't, were figuring that she was lying, she was afraid she was gonna get her and her husband Constance's husband and Arthur, bolted up and left everything and went to [another province]

Miranda, she started slipping into a manic phase and I didn't, I'd, well I know a little bit more now, I still don't know a lot. I didn't realize what bipolar disorder or manic depression was ... And I'd just seen her acting strangely ... And finally I phoned her sister to find out what was going on and that's when her sister told me that she was manic depressive. And that was all within a period of less than a week ... what was happening was I'd come home and Miranda would leave Thomas with, Thomas was only a year and a half, she'd leave him with the Native girls across the hall who Miranda had picked up and started drinking with at nights, and I'd stay home to watch Thomas. And I'd just, I'd be a little bit rattled at Miranda because that just wasn't her character. She was always a homebody.

... [Miranda] phoned the police on me, on the Sunday. She locked me out ... on the balcony and went over next door and left Thomas sleeping in the, the apartment. And I just, I crawled in through a window on the balcony and went over and got the keys from there and got myself into the apartment and waited for the police to come, and when the police came, I said, she's bipolar, I said she's, she's not safe to, but the police told me to leave. On three occasions throughout that week, the police directed me to leave the child with her even after I told the police that she was bipolar.

The police phoned the day after Miranda took off with Thomas and went to a women's shelter. The police aided and assisted her in that. At the time I didn't know what my legal rights were. I should have just held to Thomas ... I had as much custody as, as she does. Let her go to the shelter if that's where she wants to go. But the police told me to leave it alone, so the shelter jumped her to place

... all within a matter of a couple of days ... Miranda was, well she was making rants that I was gonna come and kill her and sexually assault Thomas and ... so they moved her and I didn't know where she was, I didn't know where Thomas was. And Jill (Children's Aid worker) had phoned to caution me about the arguing in front of the child. Because the police had called the Children's Aid on Sunday.

... I got a call on the Friday night from Children's Aid, they said they'd apprehended Thomas. And because of the allegations that Miranda had made, that I was a sexual molester and a rapist and all this from Miranda's, she's crazy, she's delusional, when she's in manic, yeah ... They basically, they conducted an investigation and put Thomas in a foster home for a month before I could get him back. (And then you did get him after that?) Yes.

Miranda, as soon as she got out, she started, she demanded, she got her car back and she, what'd she do, she started coming around the house every day, and as soon as Miranda got out, my mother was down looking after Thomas, and the day she got out of the hospital, I sent Thomas up . . . with my mother because I felt he was safer there ... and I'd go up every weekend. And Children's Aid kept making the demand that I bring him back and they were saying their court order specifies that the child is to remain in my home with me ... Miranda just started coming to the house every night. And she eventually did break in by Christmas of that year and just completely trashed the house ... Jackie (Children's Aid worker) started giving me troubles, saying it was against the court order, that I had to have him back in this area for Miranda to visit even though I'd made arrangements for, for the [other county's Children's Aid] to provide the visits for Miranda if she would go up there. But that wasn't good enough for Jackie ...

At the time, I was, well I'm still just barely making it here, financially. I've had to drop six thousand dollars to lawyers, that I'll be paying off for the next, probably three or four years. Just to go against Children's, just to go to court when, for Children's Aid service order ... Thomas was to reside with me. Miranda was to have supervised visits provided by the agency. ... But a lot of the things that they were pushing for which were important to me, that they helped Miranda get better, they just never followed through on. They just, and I just found that nobody can make anybody get better.

She would take her car, load it with her stuff . . . and run through the house and wreck the house ... and she'd just barge right in the house ... going through and ripping down shower curtains and grabbing, just grabbing everything she could. And I'd phone the police ... I don't know how many times through December. And I was telling Jackie this was happening, and Jackie ... told me that I should be buying and paying for a rental space and putting Miranda's stuff in ... my lawyer told me that ... she was completely out of her jurisdiction saying any of this. She is completely wrong in saying it. But the fact is, he said if you lay a complaint, they can make it harder for you. So basically I was bitched.

And when [I] complain to Jackie ... she'll say, "Well Burt, you know, she is mentally ill." And I think well, that's a pretty good answer Jackie, why don't you do something about it? I'd always complain to Jackie ... about how well supervised the visits were. Thomas would go with clothes or something and he'd come back wearing different clothes or, or she'd steal a hat or steal wet wipes and diapers and, strange, she would send strange stuff back on visits. Like desk mat, used desk mats. From construction or auto body places ... just a lot of strange things. And she would shove them into ... Thomas's pockets or clothes. And Thomas would say, say strange things. He, he called me "Bad daddy" for a long time when, whenever I was mad ...

Jackie had the gall to phone me and ask me how Thomas got that bruise on his shin. And I said, "Honestly Jackie, I don't know." ... Miranda could say whatever she likes ... but Jackie still feels that she has to question me on it. And I'm, I'm just so tired of, like what the hell do I have to go through, or like I'll take a lie detector test ... I always feel like I'm under their thumb, and I'd like to just tell them to just (Fuck off.) Yeah. Like how long do I have to, to put up with this? It's already gone on well over longer than it's supposed to.

And I thought, great. You just cost me another thousand dollars. Of wasted time in the courts. And that's basically what she did. I couldn't even call my lawyer that night and tell him not bother show up. I had to get a hold of him in the morning, he made it down to the court house and it's just stupid assed stuff like that, that Jackie should have made me aware of ...

At that time I've got interim custody. The Children's Aid is keeping status quo until June 29th, they're bringing it in again. They want to keep holding it on, then they want me to go into a voluntary, they call it a voluntary service order ... It's not very Goddamned voluntary. I have no say about it.

They conducted a Patel test on Thomas ... it's a developmental type of test. And they told me that Thomas was way behind on things ... they told me he was developmentally behind, and I said "No he's not, he was sick that morning that he did it ... Jackie would say, "Well no, he doesn't talk at his, he doesn't know his name, he doesn't talk at his visits with his mom." And he was, he was talking and yapping a mile a minute. And what they did is they pushed me to get him in the [assessment centre] for an assessment ... I said "I don't think he needs it" so I dragged my heels on that ... I did take him there to [the assessment centre] and he's fine.

... they've [CAS] sent me a letter, the telephone, while Thomas was bathing in the tub and I was watching him, and the telephone rang and I ran to the kitchen. And he, I don't know what he was doing in the tub ... and he scraped his back, I'm guessing on the tap, started crying, I went to him and the next day he had a visit, and the worker, or the supervisor phoned, or whoever supervised his visit phoned me and asked me how, claimed Miranda was asking about this scrape.

... and I got a letter saying that I was, I was negligent in supervising him which pissed me right off 'cause I got thinking ... but they just, I just found that they did the best they could to make me feel like an awful father ... (Has she ever given you positive feedback?) Jackie, never. It's always abrasive. Never, I've never received an apology ... never heard anything in the way of positive feedback.

They always feel that they have to phone me up and, or come and ask me about them, or, like any moment, I think they're ready to take Thomas away from me. And, and it puts me in a situation of stress, because I just, I don't want to be answering to them for the rest of Thomas's life ... And it just, and it bothers the hell out of me ... But they did everything they could to make certain she would get her access. And I don't think that would be available to a man.

I grew up in a rural area ... Fairly happy childhood. Nothing, nothing ever happened, no traumatic ... (How large was your family?) There's my father was married, and his first wife died and he had three kids, we're all a very close family. And then he married my mom and had brother and ... when brother and I were seventeen and eighteen, my, my parents split. And I lived with mom for a couple months and I, I usually lived with dad and my brother lived with, with mom. And then finished school and came down the line to start working down here ... at first I was working up North a bit, working at fixing appliances and [moved] ... and I just, first few years out of school, I wasn't just able to hold a job very long 'cause it was a bad economy and I wasn't really skilled at 'maturity'. Then I started to, when I was about twenty-one or twenty-two, I started working with my brother and my cousin, at, our cousin had a siding business, doing industrial construction. And that's basically what I've done since.

Just, went to school, there was only three hundred and fifty kids in grade, grade five to thirteen ... and my mother was a teacher ... She taught me grade five, so, that was kinda strange. But then again, like there's a lot of, lot of kids I went to school with, lot of kids in my grade whose mother's were teachers too. Nothing too, we just worked at summers, haying most of the time. From the time we were about eleven, ten, eleven to fourteen, fifteen. And then when we were sixteen we ... had jobs at the harbour. And I can't remember what, and then in the next couple years I worked at washing dishes and at night a tavern and cutting wood all day in the bush ... like we always, we grew up on a huge farm. We never owned any livestock, but we, dad always rented out pastures, so there was always cattle there, but we, we never had any real strict regiment I guess, for kids. We were just, we just went out and played every day and then I had a big bush I used to go crawl back in, climb cave, and bike to our friend's place ... It was, it was a good safe place to grow up ...

Whereas now, I, I want Thomas to have a chaperone on the way to and from school everyday ... I'd like to move back to an area like that, a little bit more of a rural setting. But there's not a lot of work for me in the rural setting.

(How about your dad, what did he do?) Real estate agent, and he was a, he was a farmer. Then he got into clerking and then he became a real estate agent 'til he retired ... he's eighty-one or eighty-two now ... He'd take brother and I out fishing and I, most of the time he's just go with his friends though. But, yeah he was, he's like, I'm very close with him . . . (What about your mom?) I'm close to her too. She looked after Thomas for me for and then she came down here in, actually well, my sister in law, my sister and Mom all took turns looking after Thomas up North.

I dated bad women, yeah. Oh not all of them were bad ones. Just Constance was a nightmare ... That was just before I met up, I'd be about thirty, thirty-two I guess - I'd lived with another girl who was quite a, a wack job, for lack of another word.

Sometimes I lived by myself, there was nothing, a lot of times I lived with friends. You know, share, share apartments with them ... for a few years I shared an apartment with a friend, Female Friend and her daughter ... we had an apartment ... I've lived in a lot of places ... and I've pretty much been, well I was alone there and then Miranda, I met her and she moved in ... She got pregnant. And she had a miscarriage, this is all within the first few months of us seeing each other. And then she got pregnant with Thomas probably about three months after that. And gave birth to Thomas in January ...

(But what was the experience of becoming a dad again like? And this was a, sort of a different experience?) Yeah, yeah because I was gonna be with him. I was quite happy, I was, it wasn't like I was visiting and holding the baby, it was like be there, it, I liked it. It kinda, I was working out of town ... so I was down there working all week and just basically home on weekends ... But Miranda looked after Thomas, she was breastfeeding him at the time and it was, it was rewarding but it was, I know this is gonna seem selfish to say, but I, I didn't mind getting back to [work out of town] ... I'd always get up with Miranda when she'd breastfeed, so I was up all night rocking him and, and he'd only sleep for two or three at a time and then he'd be up for three or four hours. I just wasn't, I was getting frazzled down, and, well Miranda was too.

Miranda's mother moved in with us ... 'cause Miranda's mother couldn't look after herself. And it was only then that it was disclosed to me that Miranda's mother had, was a manic depressive. And I didn't know what it was, there was a little pamphlet that came with it, and I read through it, and I thought, well, now this is hardly Miranda's mother. A hundred other people I can think of, but I was way off on that too...

[Losing Miranda] I had a huge loss. I feel like I had a huge loss. When it all went down the, the toilet and she took off with Thomas ... I was a zombie for about three weeks, I couldn't function. I'd wake up, go to work, I couldn't think. I'd be driving and, driving to work and I'd get off or hit a, or forget my off ramps, or get

off at the wrong one. I was getting lost just driving around the city, that I've known for fifteen years. ... I was a mess. I, I couldn't think straight, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't, couldn't relax. It was, yeah, it was, I've never ever been effected like I was then. It was dark, the darkest time of my life ... and I just felt powerless to do anything about it. There was nothing I could do.

[Since all this happened] I, I feel like I've lost a lot of freedom ... in just basically being a parent. I'm afraid to roughhouse with my son a little bit, like, roll around playing. Because I will, I think and, and the rest of my family as well, we protect Thomas. Like he's a precious diamond, because we don't want to have to explain a scratch to him ...

[My typical day] ... a circuit in my house went out, so my bedroom has no power ... I haven't had any free money to get an electrician in yet, so. Usually I'm up at five, I spend a half hour by myself, I'll have a cigarette, put on the coffee. And [my] roommate wakes up at five-thirty, comes up and I chat with him. About anywhere from ten to ... six o'clock I go and pick up Thomas out of bed, and I just sit with him and wrap him in a blanket on the couch and sit and hold him, try to gently wake him up. I've always, since him and I have been together, just the two of us, I just, I always try to wake him up gently. 'Cause it is awfully early in the morning, to get him to the babysitter . . . that's how I go about it [...] usually it's a scramble to get in and clean up dishes, get supper started. We never eat too early, it's usually, it's usually seven o'clock by the time we get supper on the table and get Thomas sat down, and then he's, he's a handful at supper, he doesn't eat for me. He eats well for everybody else, but I usually have to sit with him for an hour and half the time, I spoon feed him. Just to make him eat. I know he can do stuff, he can dress himself, he can put his shoes on, he can, he can eat himself, but because I am pressed for time, I'm by myself doing that, just to rush things along.

... lot of the times when Thomas and I get home, especially in the summer, what we do ... for an hour, we'll go and hang in the backyard and he plays, he's got lots of cars and stuff. I get his pool filled up for him ... we were both in it last night ... lot of times I just sit out in the front yard and let him push his car out on the lawn and then the driveway . . . sometimes we go down to the park, we have a park down the street, we usually do that on weekends ... about the first hour we just kinda chill out, we play together, we don't do anything too strenuous. In the winter we, we'll roughhouse in the living room, we'll make houses, do the forts out of the cushions and the couch . . . we don't do anything too special, I'd like to do more with him ... Bedtime is probably later than most three year olds. It's nine o'clock. Bath night's every other night, it's, get his bath ran and get him in the bath. And a lot of the times I bath with him, just 'cause I don't have time to have it any other time. Get him out of the bath, wrap him in towels and get him all dried off, read him a couple of books, I usually read books for at least twenty minutes before I put him to bed . . . a lot of the times I go to bed myself right after, when I'm beat. I usually stay up for another half hour or so just to make certain he goes down ... The odd time, like when, when we're up North at my folks, a lot

of weekends we go up North ... once a month we make it up North. He sleeps in good up, up North.

... I don't, don't like going to, I don't go out to bars ... I've got a lot of interests, hobbies that I used to do and I'd like to do, but I don't have time for it ... I love playing guitar and haven't been able to pick one up since, well since pretty much, Thomas was born. Like I dug a couple guitars out this last winter and tried playing a bit. It's just that I'll never get a chance to play [with ease] when Thomas's around, he's always up poking at it, and he's, Thomas's always wanting to fiddle with whatever I'm fiddling with, so. ... he comes around and wants to help, even stuff such as making a sandwich, I know it's gonna make a big mess, and he gets distracted and he wants to rub butter all over the floor and throw it in the sink ... he does want to help, but he's, he's a three year old, he's not much of a help. (... do you have sources of support ... ?) My family and my friends. My family especially. I talk to my mom on the phone. My dad, once or twice a week ...

Something that I've been wanting to do, I feel like writing letters and that's why I haven't been able to put things down in words here, in the last week, is 'cause I don't get any free time. Hopefully 'next year' Thomas will calm down a little bit and not be as demanding ... I can't even sit and read the paper for an hour on a, a Sunday or a Saturday. Unless Thomas's in bed. And by that time, there's too much mess to be cleaning up in the house, so. I'm not overrun, I'm not staying up 'til eleven o'clock getting things cleaned up, the house, the house does tend to get messiest through the summer, because it's just, we spend, a lot of times when we get home, I'll barbeque out in the backyard and Thomas and I will just hang out. Last summer we just pretty near lived in the backyard 'til nine o'clock every night. So. We'd read our books out there. I set up a tent for him. Him and I sleep out there the odd time in the summer.

(... what's it like to you, what's, how important is work?) It's very important to me. I, I'm proud of what I do. I don't know why, it's, it's, lots of people do it, but I, I take a lot of pride in my work, I like to do a good job. I've had a reputation that I'm a good worker, that I'm employable. I feel I've worked for that in the last seventeen years, basically that I've been doing construction. (Do you get satisfaction out of the work?) Yes, at the end of the job, I, I, and all the way through it, I do look at it, I admire it, 'cause I think I've done this one better than the last one ...

(What, what's important in your life right now? ...) Thomas ... and I being, Thomas to be happy, healthy. I worry about Thomas's mental state . . . bipolar can be, well it's pretty much hereditary ... Thomas's the most important. It's funny, 'cause parenting is the, the most important job that anybody has to do. If they're a parent, if they never have kids they don't have to worry about it. But how you parent your child is gonna reflect on, that's gonna tell more about that person fifty years down the road than any job or career that anybody ever had . . .

It means a lot to me. Although I'm so busy with Thomas and a lot of times I don't really sit back and, I feel proud that I am a good father. I love it when I get support from my family. My sisters, my sister in law, anybody in my family says I'm doing a good job ... and that to me, makes me feel very good. [...] Someday I'm gonna be a grandfather ...

(... What are the worst things in your life right now?) Probably Children's Aid . . . Financial bills. Just the worries, uncertainty of basically whether I'm gonna stay in the same home or, I hate the idea of packing up to move again. I do have some hopes, that I've been thinking about work wise. Um, I don't know, I don't really think too much other than just surviving the here and now for ... The worst things are ... in the last year and a half I've found that some friends aren't as good of friends as I thought ... I've just realized that I don't have that much in common with these people anymore. I'm not gonna sit at work and drink all night with the boys ... that's not what I envision being a dad.