

My Life With Randy

by Cara Spence Hall

The first thing I remember about Randy is seeing him born. After being knocked out for the birth of my three other children, I was determined to see my last one born and I did. He came rather quickly and I almost missed it because the mirror wasn't adjusted correctly, but we soon fixed that and I saw it all. He was all red and gooey with stuff and he promptly peed all over my stomach. But he sure could yell!

When he was about 18 months old he learned to climb out of his playpen, but with 3 siblings (all under 6 years old) he rapidly learned to climb back in to get away from them.

Early Years

By the time he was 5 years old we had moved to the house he grew up in, in Garden Grove, California. He was already exhibiting signs of his hyperactivity: he got into my purse one day and took my wallet outside, where he proceeded to empty it—scattering the money to the winds, along with the Raleigh cigarette coupons I had been saving for 2 years. This was before the fences were put in and everything blew over a 2 block area. For days neighbors were bringing Raleigh coupons back. Funny, the money never turned up.

About the time we moved to Garden Grove Randy started bedwetting. Randy shared a bedroom with his big brother Alan and was constantly in trouble because he wouldn't leave Alan's things alone—this may have contributed to the bedwetting. It was very embarrassing for him and he had to get up and change the sheets himself. We tried limiting his intake of fluids before bed and that didn't work. His father thought he was being deliberately willful. We didn't have the money at that time to pay for therapy sessions, and his father didn't think they would do any good anyway. We eventually paid for a contraption that you put under the sheet that gave a mild electric jolt if it detected any water, and that finally did the trick. It only took 2 or 3 jolts to permanently cure Randy of his bedwetting. We kept the device for years just in case we needed it again, but we never did.

About this time Randy caught mumps and chicken pox at the same time. The doctor told me to keep him inside and resting most of the time. He wasn't reckoning with Randy and his hyperactivity. I couldn't keep him inside, much less lying down and resting. Finally in desperation I blocked his door so he couldn't open it. He then managed to get out through the window by pushing out the screen, and went outside to play in nothing but a T-shirt.

That's another thing - he hated to wear pants of any kind. For at least a year I constantly had to keep watch on him to prevent him stripping. He had to wear a T-shirt and refused to wear pants!

Troubled School Years

We made a major error with Randy. His birthday is December 3, and the cut-off date for entering kindergarten was December 2—so he was going to have to wait another year before entering school. We changed his birth certificate to December 2 and got him entered in kindergarten a year early. But he wasn't emotionally ready to enter a structured situation like school and let everyone know by acting up in the classroom. At the time, hyperactivity was not recognized the way it is today and he soon got labeled as a troublemaker, which followed him all through school. And of course, he responded by acting even worse.

One of the things we did for Randy was to take him to a local doctor who had reportedly had success with hyperactive children. What he actually did was dose him with Ritalin which we thought was a blessing because it slowed Randy down so much that at times he appeared to actually listen to us when we tried to talk with him about his behavior. We also enrolled Randy in a special reading school where he got one-on-one instruction; this also seemed to help. The school tested him and told us he had "swiss cheese" intelligence - there were holes in his knowledge and he was intelligent enough to recognize this and was very frustrated over it.

A few years later our whole family went into family counseling. We had had too many children in too few years and neither Randy's father nor I were really equipped to handle it. I vividly remember something Randy said to the counselor. We had been talking about never having enough money, and one of the kids lamented that we weren't rich. Randy piped up with: "We are too rich – we're rich in being poor."

When Randy was about 14 years old we felt he needed a more structured lifestyle than he was getting, so we enrolled him in a military academy. They had their hands full, as Randy did not appreciate what they were trying to instill in him. He continually ran away, once ending up being taken in by some kind people who called us. After he was returned to the school he met a boy from Thailand who befriended Randy and he soon stopped running away. We had the Thai boy home for the weekend, which had its cultural anomalies; Essie had made some salsa with tomatoes and chilies and when his friend started to take a large spoonful of it, we all gasped in horror because it was HOT! We didn't realize at the time that Thai food is among the hottest in the world. The military school closed after the year that Randy spent there and he came back home to try the local school.

Good and Bad Influences

In 1969 we moved to Candleberry Avenue in Seal Beach and Randy met some boys who would have a profound effect on him; some to the good and others not so good. Two of the good influences were Clayton Harley and Mike Gordon. One of the bad influences was Robbie.

Mike Gordon had an uncle who was a pilot and the three boys used to go flying with him, which thrilled Randy so much that he later took aviation classes at Long Beach City College. Robbie, on the other hand, was a thief and got Randy to grow marijuana. Thank God Mike stayed in Randy's life and was always a steadying influence!

When he was sixteen, Randy decided he had to have a motorcycle and I finally (reluctantly) agreed. Soon after he got it I got a call from the hospital that Randy had been in an accident. Someone had run a stop sign and hit him and he was hospitalized with a broken back. One day when I was visiting the hospital, someone burglarized our home and stole almost all my jewelry. It turned out that it was Robbie, but we just had word of mouth so we couldn't press charges. A few days later I went to visit Randy and was informed that he had checked himself out of the hospital.

A year later Randy was again riding the motorcycle when someone ran into him and broke his thigh bone. It was the other driver's fault; Randy sued and got about \$90,000. We tried to get him to invest it but he had his heart set on starting a recording studio and spent much of it, after paying the medical bills, on equipment. He soon lost interest and eventually gave the equipment away.

As Randy grew up his problems also grew up. I had to constantly be on the lookout for marijuana growing in and around the house. He cut a hole in the ceiling of his closet to

gain access to the attic space. I don't know what he used it for but I suspect it was not good. One day I drove into the driveway and glimpsed something on the roof. Turned out Randy was growing marijuana up there!

During Randy's teen-age years he was seldom home for family holidays and gatherings. He preferred being with his friends to spending time with the family. And of course he got in trouble. He dropped out of school and seemed headed to a dissolute life no matter how much I talked to him trying to get him straightened out.

There was one ray of sunshine in all this. He was crazy about Bruce Lee, collected everything he could find about Lee's life, and went to see his movies, even though they were R rated (he had our housekeeper, Essie, go with him). I took him to Los Angeles to Athena, so he could buy magazines and other collectibles which he still has today.

As I said, Randy did eventually drop out of school after repeated absences. He got a job as a cable installer and did very well at it, but eventually tired of the physical work and wanted to better himself. He started selling clothes, at first to his friends and then at a swap meet, doing well enough that he also took a job with me as a gift sales representative. He was very good at "schmoozing" the customers and they all loved him, but that didn't last long. His first love was retailing and he wanted to return to it in a more substantial way, so he opened a very small store in Laguna Beach, selling T-shirts and beach wear. He did well, and opened another store in Belmont Shore in Long Beach, closing the one in Laguna. In this new store he put the emphasis on young women's clothing and at last he had found the winning combination.

He convinced his father to let him rent a great location we owned on Forest Avenue in Laguna Beach. He sold the Belmont Shore store to a friend. Randy was very good at product mix and knowing what would appeal to young women, but he was weak in the financial end of things, so he asked his cousin Steve to help him get the finances straightened out. They worked well together and eventually opened more stores, one in Belmont Shore and one in San Francisco, then another in Palm Springs. Eventually they split up, with Steve taking the San Francisco store and Randy the Belmont Shore store and selling the Palm Springs store to another friend.

Unfortunately, Randy let his success go to his head. He bought a Mercedes convertible, he traveled extensively. There was nothing wrong with that, but unbeknownst to me, he was also doing cocaine, drinking too much and fooling around with one of his employees, who later caused all sorts of problems for him.

We didn't see much of Randy during this time. Maybe he felt guilty for his lifestyle; I don't know. By then I was spending much of my time in Mexico and he used to come down to visit, but mostly spent his time on the beach drinking with his Mexican friends.

Fate Steps In

In 2000 Randy and his girlfriend came to Mexico for a week. The first I knew he was there was seeing him in Todos Santos with the girl—he had come looking for me. I was surprised to see the girl because I thought Randy had broken up with her. He sent her home on Friday and stayed over until Sunday before leaving so we could visit. I also left on Sunday to drive to Seal Beach. When I got home I sent Randy an email inviting him to get together with Alan and me for dinner one night soon, but he never answered it.

I was going through a divorce at the time and things were a little hectic at home so I didn't think too much about it. On a Tuesday morning about a week later I got a phone call from Mission Hospital in Mission Viejo, asking me if I had a son named Randy.

When I said yes, the nurse said she was sorry to tell me that Randy was undergoing an operation on his brain as we spoke.

I got my soon-to-be ex-husband and we frantically drove to the hospital where we found the girlfriend. She told us that someone had come into Randy's house and beat him up the previous Wednesday night. She claimed that Randy had gone out on the town that night and gotten into an argument with someone in a bar. We later found out that none of that had happened. In fact, she and Randy had gone to a session with Randy's psychiatrist and then she left (we thought) and Randy went home.

She said that when she went to Randy's house on Sunday morning to go to church with him she found him in a confused state and upon investigating found blood on his bed. She took him to the hospital and returned to his house and stripped the bed and went out and used Randy's bloodstained money to buy new sheets. She said she didn't call us because she didn't know the number, even though she knew Randy's father. The nurse in the hospital took it upon herself to get the number and call us.

Randy was put into a temporary medicine-induced coma while they operated and removed part of his skull. When I saw him after he came out of the recovery room I didn't recognize him because he was so battered. But when I held his hand and talked to him I could tell he heard me, and he responded by squeezing my hand. Unfortunately he developed an infection in his brain and went into a real coma—which lasted 2 years!

At one point the doctor in charge of the facility in Laguna Beach told me point blank that Randy had lost 70% of his brain function and would never be more than "a vegetable" and we might as well "pull the plug" on him. I had never been more furious in my life! I told the doctor that Randy responded to me and other family members and that he was a survivor and I would NEVER give up on him. We soon moved him from that facility and found a much better one.

Through all this, Randy's brother Alan, with whom he had never gotten along, stepped in and basically took over Randy's life. Alan fought for Randy like I've never seen him fight for anyone or anything else. He not only ran Randy's stores, he fiercely guarded Randy from anything that might harm him, from medical matters to fighting with the insurance company like a bulldog. He accomplished more than anyone else in the family would have been able to do.

(Note: Randy's mom passed away in March, 2006. She always said that it would be wonderful if Alan—her firstborn—could be more like Randy, her "baby,"—and vice versa. She thought that they would both be happier. The brothers are finally working through past differences, and hope their mom is pleased. —Editor)