

"Good Kids, Hurt Kids, Bad Kids"

By the Honorable and Brother Maurice B. Cohill, Jr.

This Short Talk Bulletin has been adapted from a presentation by Judge Cohill to the Conference of Grand Masters in North America in 1984. Judge Cohill serves on the U.S. District Court, Western District of Pennsylvania.

First, let me tell you of my first dream – the one that has already come true. This is the creation of the National Center for Juvenile Justice.

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is the oldest judicial council in the United States, founded in 1937 by the late Judge and Brother Gustav Schramm of Pittsburgh, and a few other dedicated juvenile court judges. It's now located on the campus of the University of Nevada at Reno.

The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania used to sponsor training sessions in cooperation with Judge Schramm. These occurred twice a year, with the Grand Lodge underwriting the cost of judges being brought to Pittsburgh from all over the country to sit and be taught at the feet of Judge Schramm. They were called the 'Masonic Institutes.' Some six years after his death, I followed Brother Schramm to the Juvenile Court bench of Allegheny County (Pittsburgh) and served there for eleven years. During that time it's been estimated that I heard some 25,000 delinquent, dependent and neglect cases – everything from rape, murder and drug abuse to school truancy and runaways. I was appointed to the federal court bench by President Ford in 1976.

Not long after coming to the juvenile court in 1965, I realized that the juvenile courts of this country were the stepchildren of the American juvenile system. I learned that people criticized the juvenile courts and their judges on the one hand for being too lenient and giving only a slap on the wrist to young, violent criminals, and on the other hand they were accused of sending innocent young children to reform schools which were hell holes and nothing more than schools for crime. At the same time the judges and their staffs were struggling with enormous caseloads and few resources.

While the public and certain public officials were quick to criticize, no one seemed willing or able to help. I made 152 speeches the first year I was on the juvenile bench. I spoke to PTA

groups, churches, teacher conventions and police-training seminars – I spoke to anyone who would listen.

After that year I concluded that, while critical, many people would be willing to help if only given direction. I also learned that there is not a more dedicated group in the United States than the juvenile court judges and their staffs.

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges in Reno had been devoting most of its efforts to training judges and juvenile probation officers, this tradition having been started by Judge Schramm's Masonic Institutes. This was excellent, but still no one knew for sure what worked and what didn't with kids; no one even knew how many children were moving through the juvenile court system; there was no source from which juvenile court judges could get answers to tough legal questions and practical solutions to day-to-day problems.

In 1968, a group of us who were active with the National Council met in Pittsburgh and decided to create a research center to seek answers to those questions. Because of the tradition established by Judge and Brother Gustav Schramm in Pittsburgh, and because there are a number of Pittsburgh corporate and family foundations interested in innovative ideas and willing to support them, we decided to locate the Center in Pittsburgh if I could raise the money.

After five years of knocking on Pittsburgh doors, and with help from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration in Washington, we opened the Center in 1973. The creation of the National Center of Juvenile Justice was my first dream. I've been chairman of its board from the beginning. It is legally a part of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, serves as the research division of the Council, and I feel is a resounding success. The United States Department of Justice has made it responsible for putting together all of the juvenile court statistics in the United States; it also publishes, teaches and researches.

A couple of years ago I was thinking of Judge Schramm and the help that the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania used to give him by sponsoring the Masonic Institutes. I wrote to our Grand Master, to see if the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania would be interested in sponsoring some of the work of the Center. I am happy to say that he thought this was a good idea and got the ball rolling. The idea was enthusiastically embraced by his successor Brother Samuel Williamson. He not only became interested in the work of our Center but, with great vision, he saw potential for Masonic interest to touch many young lives and established the Pennsylvania Masonic Youth Foundation. The Pennsylvania Masonic Youth Foundation and the Grand Lodge now sponsor an annual judicial training seminar conducted by the Center for Pennsylvania judges and is underwriting the cost of an annual publication of the Center called "Today's Delinquent" which is becoming a classic in the field. This book goes free of charge not only to Pennsylvania judges but, to the best of our ability, to every juvenile court judge in the country.

Our present Grand Master, Brother Carl Stenberg, also sits on the board of our National Center for Juvenile Justice.

I have spoken too long about my dream come true – let me tell you about my dream for all of us.

The young people of this country are our most precious asset. Significant numbers of them are being victimized by drugs, pimps, pornographers and, yes, in some cases by their own parents.

In my opinion, substance abuse – the use of drugs and alcohol by children and young adults is the primary cause of the wave of crime which has swept through this country. I saw it in Juvenile Court, and since I've been in Federal Court; in every bank robbery case I've had but two, the bank robbers were drug users and often robbed to support their habit.

I recently had to sentence a number of young members of a drug ring in Pittsburgh. Two of those young people come particularly to mind. Both were in their 20's. One was a lovely girl. If my son had brought her home to meet me, not knowing her background, I'm sure I would have been delighted. The young man had a promising future in athletics.

Much has been written and spoken about the impact of drugs in our society. So far as I'm concerned, the public, and particularly young people, are still essentially unaware of this menace. Despite the publicity the problem has still been understated.

My dream, and my challenge to you, is for our fraternity to attack this problem and the many others which are victimizing our children.

Now how can we unite to do it? Each grand lodge is an entity unto itself. Each has its own constituency and rules, but one thing we all have in common is an objective – that we are "Our Brother's Keeper." I am sure that the Great Architect did not mean for this to stop at the walls of the temple. I'm sure that we are expected to care for our brother's children as well. I think it can be accomplished without any Grand Lodge losing any of that autonomy it so dearly cherishes, while at the same time showing the world what this fraternity is all about.

Freemasonry has been one of the world's best kept secrets; it shouldn't be. With the exception of some of the ritual there is absolutely no reason that this should be. I'm convinced that if the Grand Lodges of the United States announced a new mission – the mission of holding out a hand to young people everywhere - the good ones, the hurt ones, the bad ones, the rewards would be fantastic – in terms not only of having a better reason for being – but in seeing an upsurge in the recruitment of new brethren such as we've not seen in many years.

Now, how can this be done while permitting the Grand Lodges to retain their traditional independence?

I propose that the Grand Lodges of the United States establish and fund the National Masonic Youth Foundation. (This is my thought for a name; perhaps someone will have a better idea). It would be a non-profit corporation with tax-exempt status. It would have rules and safeguards for the distribution of its funds and be governed by a board of directors consisting of the Grand Master (or his designate) of each participating Grand Lodge. Its general mission would be to

render assistance, guidance, care and education to young people. Thus the Grand Lodges could be united, not only in their mission, but now would be as one in their efforts, at the same time standing independent from each other.

Particularly, I would suggest that foundation's initial goals would be to render assistance to the juvenile justice system in attacking substance abuse by young people through programs concerned with prevention, education of potential victims, and rehabilitation of those already caught in the tentacles of drug and alcohol abuse.

There could be myriad off-shoots of this mission. Individual lodges could seek ways to render assistance to their local juvenile courts, their judges, youth agencies and young peoples' programs. Both the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and its research arm, the National Center for Juvenile Justice, which I represent, have any number of programs waiting to be put in place when resources become available. Some may have impact at the local level while others will have national and international impact. The Council and the Center have outstanding professional staffs available for consultation and stand ready to render guidance and assistance.

I respectfully suggest that you consider this proposal as one which is entirely feasible, and which could be funded with little effort by the millions of our brethren who constitute the fraternity.

Yes, brethren, we have a story to tell to the nation, and I hope that we can start telling that story, and performing our Masonic obligations, through the National Masonic Youth Foundation.

STB - July 1986