

# St. Petersburg Times

DIGITAL NEWSBOOK



## FOR THEIR OWN GOOD

**Part One:** They were screwed-up kids, sent to the reform school in Marianna for smoking, fighting, stealing cars or worse. The Florida School for Boys — that'd straighten them out. Fifty years later they are, by their own account, screwed-up men — afraid of the dark, unable to love or be loved, twisted by anger, scarred by the whippings they endured in a cinder block hell called the White House.

**Part Two:** What is the school like today?

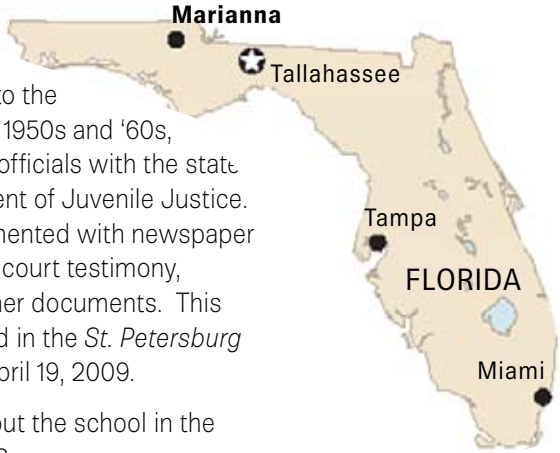


STORY BY BEN MONTGOMERY AND WAVENEY ANN MOORE  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY EDMUND D. FOUNTAIN OF THE TIMES

# FOR THEIR OWN GOOD

## ABOUT THIS STORY

**PART ONE** is based on more than 100 hours of interviews with 27 men who were sent to the Florida School for Boys in the 1950s and '60s, and with current and former officials with the state, the school and the Department of Juvenile Justice. The interviews were supplemented with newspaper clippings, congressional and court testimony, archival photographs and other documents. This story was originally published in the *St. Petersburg Times Floridian* section on April 19, 2009.



**TIMELINE:** What was said about the school in the years between 1903 and 1983.

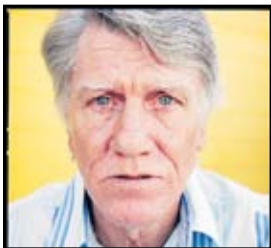
**PART TWO** is based on more than 8,000 documents obtained under the state's public records laws, including e-mails, internal incident reports, grievances filed by boys at the school, personnel records, surveillance video and DCF investigative summaries. This story was originally published in the *Times* on October 11, 2009.

The *Times* plans continued coverage of the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys. To talk to a reporter, call (727) 893-8650 or (727) 892-2283.

## ON TAMPABAY.COM

For a video in which the men describe their experiences at the school, for more photos and documents, and to read the 1968 *St. Petersburg Times* story go to [www.tampabay.com/specials/2009/reports/marianna/](http://www.tampabay.com/specials/2009/reports/marianna/).

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George Goewey, 62. "If you cried, they beat you harder."



Don Stratton, 64. "It was a shameful thing."



Dick Colón, 65. "I looked over to my left and one dryer was going. There was a black boy in it."

A one-armed man. A leather strap. Bloody pajamas.  
Fifty years ago, the state taught these men a lesson they'll never forget.

# FOR THEIR OWN GOOD

## Part One

MARIANNA

**T**he men remember the same things: blood on the walls, bits of lip or tongue on the pillow, the smell of urine and whiskey, the way the bed springs sang with each blow. The way they cried out for Jesus or mama. The grinding of the old fan that muffled their

**STORY BY  
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*Times Staff*



The White House. "There was blood on the walls." — Jerry Cooper



Eddie Horne, 59. "A 3-foot-long leather strap. It had metal in it."



Don Stratton, 64. "It was a shameful thing."

cries. The one-armed man who swung the strap.

They remember walking into the dark little building on the campus of the Florida School for Boys, in bare feet and white pajamas, afraid they'd never walk out.

For 109 years, this is where Florida has sent bad boys. Boys have been sent here for rape or assault, yes, but also for skipping school or smoking cigarettes or running hard from broken homes. Some were tough, some confused and afraid; all were treading through their

formative years in the custody of the state. They were as young as 5, as old as 20, and they needed to be reformed.

It was for their own good.

Now come the men with nightmares and scars on their backsides, carrying 50 years of wreckage — ruined marriages and prison time and meanness and smoldering anger. Now comes a state investigation into unmarked graves, a lawsuit against a dying old man. Now come the questions: How could this happen? What should be done?

Those questions have been asked



**The small, flat-roofed building known as the White House — on the right — stands toward the back of the reform school campus. Some former students say this is where they were beaten with a wide leather strap attached to a wooden handle.**

again and again about the reform school at Marianna, where, for more than a century, boys went in damaged and came out destroyed.

**IN THE LATE 1950S, A 13-YEAR-OLD KID** who slicked back his long hair like Elvis stood in front of a judge in Tampa. A car had been stolen from the neigh-

borhood. Someone said they saw Willy Haynes driving it.

Willy didn't know how to drive, but the judge didn't know that. Here was a boy who grew up in a little house off Columbus Avenue, in Six Mile Creek, a scrappy neighborhood on Tampa's eastern edge, where a poor kid learned early how to protect himself. When the judge warned the boy to behave or he'd

be sent to reform school in Marianna, Willy surprised the court.

*Why can't I go now?*

He had heard the Florida School for Boys had a band and a football team and maybe even Boy Scouts, and it didn't cost a penny to participate. He kissed his mother goodbye at the courthouse and left Tampa in the back of a state cruiser. Big, beautiful, oblivious Florida blurred by outside the window.

This was before the interstates sliced through the state, and they took Highway 41 north and connected with U.S. 19, then transferred to Highway 90 west, through Tallahassee, to the tiny panhandle town of Marianna.

Willy wasn't scared as the state car pulled onto the gravel road that led to the state's only boys' juvenile reformatory, the Florida School for Boys.

No fences. Manicured lawns. Tall pines and stately buildings. It looked like college. It had to be better than home.

Inside, he signed a ledger.

*William Haynes Jr.*

*April 11, 1958.*

The books were shelved in rows, and each was filled with names of hundreds of boys from across Florida. Some were man-sized boys with criminal records. Others were retarded, or so young they didn't have hair under their arms.

A boy escorted Willy Haynes to Ty-

ler Cottage and told him to keep his belongings in Locker No. 252. He was given a toothbrush and pajamas and his own military bunk. The poor kid from Tampa felt like he was finally home.

He was there barely a week when it happened. Some bullies caught him outside the showers, and the next thing he knew he was in the middle of a tangle of feet and fists. Willy knew how to fight, and he was choking one of his attackers in a headlock when a cottage father busted in.

The school's disciplinarian, R.W. Hatton, asked Willy who he had been fighting, but the boy would not give up the names. Better to be punished than be branded a puke.

*You're going down,* Hatton told him.

They dragged him across that manicured campus, toward the squat concrete building called the White House. They dragged him through the door.

**BOYS WERE DRAGGED TO THE WHITE** House in ones and twos and threes, and sometimes there was a line outside, and sometimes a white dog kept watch.

Here came Marshall Drawdy, Eddie Horne, Robert Lundy, Manuel Giddens ...

And Jerry Cooper, snatched from his bed at midnight and dragged through the dark, bare feet over wet grass.



*Shut your f----- mouth! one of the men told him. What do you know about a runner?*

Just outside the door he saw a limp figure lying still. A boy. Blood on his pajamas.

And Larry Houston, Bryant Middleton, Donald Stratton . . .

And William Horne, waiting to go through the door when he heard a boy scream inside.

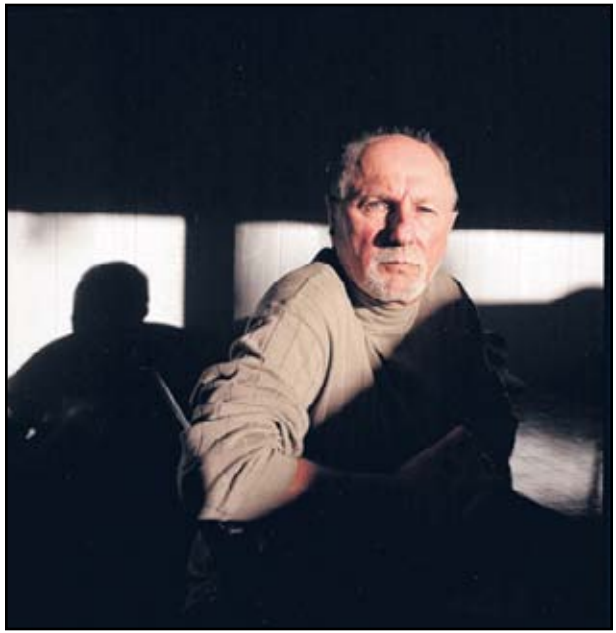
Then: *I think we done killed him.*

And Charles Rambo, George Goewey, James Griffin . . .

And Roger Kiser, a scrawny orphan. The stench hit him as he walked through the door. He tripped and fell and a man grabbed him and slung him on the bloody mattress. Over his shoulder, he could see that the man only had one arm.

*Bite that pillow.*

And Paul Carrin, Michael Greenway, Henry Williams, Roy Conerly, Willie Roberts, John Brodnax, Frank Marx, from different cottages, different years, different circumstances, the same destination.



**Roger Kiser, 63. "I was praying to Jesus to come save me."**

And Willy Haynes, who had asked the judge to send him here, who had wanted to throw a football under the pines. Over 18 months, the men dragged Willy into the White House again and again.

*Lay down. Hold the rail. Don't make a sound.*

He could hear the strap coming. It started with the pivot, the shuffle of boots on concrete. The strap hit the wall, then the ceiling, then thighs and buttocks and back, and it felt like an explosion.

When he got back to the cottage, Willy stood in the shower and let the cold water wash bits of underwear from his lacerations, as his blood ran toward the drain.

### THE MEN GATHERED AT THE FLORIDA School for Boys on Oct. 21, 2008.

The last time they had stepped on this sprawling campus, they were fresh-faced punks with the world before them. Now their hair was gray and their faces sagged. Their backs ached from a night in motel beds. They carried pictures of children and grandchildren in their wallets.

Dick Colón had flown in from Baltimore, where he owns an electrical contracting company. The 65-year-old was tormented by the memory of seeing a boy being stuffed into an industrial dryer. Next to him stood Michael O'McCarthy, a writer and political activist from Costa Rica, who was beaten so badly he was treated at the school infirmary. To his left was Roger Kiser, a *Chicken Soup for the Soul* contributor who had driven down from Brunswick, Ga., bent on retribution. On the end was a quiet man named Robert Straley, who sells glow lights and carnival novelties. He drove up from Clearwater. He had been having recurring nightmares of a man sitting on his bed.

Then there was Willy Haynes. He was 65 and went by Bill now. A tall, broad man, Haynes had worked for 30 years for the Alabama Department of Corrections. Haynes didn't feel good. There were plenty of places he'd rather be. But he knew he had to do this.

The men now called themselves the White House Boys.

In the past year, they had each searched online for information about the Florida School for Boys, for something that suggested they weren't the only ones burdened by their experience at the school. They had found Roger Kiser's Web site. Kiser added their memories and photos to his blog.



**Dick Colón, 65, displays scars on his left buttock from the beatings he received nearly 50 years ago. He says he was taken to the White House 11 times and received more than 250 lashes.**



They approached the state, seeking official acknowledgement that they had been abused and hoping to find some resolution along the way.

They found a friend in Gus Barreiro of the state Department of Juvenile Justice. He set up this ceremony to close and seal the White House. He even ordered a plaque to be mounted on the building:

*In memory of the children who passed these doors, we acknowledge their tribulations and offer our hope that they have found some measure of peace.*

*May this building stand as a reminder of the need to remain vigilant in protecting our children as we help them seek a brighter future.*

A small crowd gathered that Tuesday morning: state officials, school staff, television crews and newspaper reporters.

Bill Haynes approached the podium. He was nervous, but he tried to speak clearly.

“I have tried to understand why as a child in need of supervision I had to be beaten in such a brutal and sadistic manner,” he said. “My experience at



**Marshall Drawdy, 70, holds his head at a reunion for men who were at the reform school in Marianna. He spent 17 months there in the '50s for throwing a boy's bicycle into a ditch. "The whole place was just a damn hellhole and I can't forget it," he says. "They need to be in hell."**

F.S.B. has mentally scarred me.”

When it was time, the men turned to go inside the White House. The reporters and photographers surged close.

Bill Haynes stood at the door and stared into the darkness. He had driven so far. He had to go in, to face as an adult whatever it was that haunted him.

He tried to step through the door. His knees buckled.

**ONCE THE WHITE HOUSE BOYS TOLD** their stories in front of the cameras, other men came forward with other memories.

George Goewey heard about the newspaper story at a St. Petersburg Starbucks. He remembered how the one-armed man would swing from down low, and how the strap would hit the ceiling, and how you could time the pain.

Eddie Horne was at work at a downtown St. Petersburg Publix when he saw the newspaper photograph of the White House. God's got a beating coming for the men who swung that strap, he says.

One man told of how he had holed up in the library, reading *Tom Sawyer* 11, 12, 13 times, to hide, to stay out of trouble. One remembered a kid who tried to run away and died from exposure while hiding under a cottage. Another had a story about a boy who was taken to the White House and never seen again.

Most of the men recalled being beaten by two staffers: R.W. Hatton and the one-armed man, Troy Tidwell. At least three men described being sexually abused by other guards in an underground room they called the rape room.

And there was something else. Newspapers had published a photo-

graph of a small cemetery. Thirty-one white crosses. No names.

As stories of deaths and disappearances emerged from their collective memory, the White House Boys began to believe that they were the lucky ones.

When Troy Warren heard of the cemetery, his mind went back to his stay at the school. He says he and another boy were ordered to dig three holes behind the chow hall. They were to dig at night. Tidwell and another guard told them to make the holes 4 feet deep, and as long as a boy.

**MONICA ADAMS WAS IN BED AT HER** home in Tampa, drifting in and out of sleep with the television on in the background. Life had not been the same since her husband, Ed, died in September 2004. He weighed heavy on her mind, always.

About 1 a.m., something made her sit up straight. There it was, on CNN. This is what he had been talking about.

Ed had died a painful death. He was abusing antidepressants and had stopped eating. He had shriveled from 165 pounds to less than 100. As he neared the end, it seemed to his wife that he was reliving his childhood. He sat up at night for hours on end writing, filling pages of notebook paper.

*After I saw these straps — long ones, thick ones, short ones — they reminded me of razor straps on the side of barber chairs. . . . I knew something horrible was going to happen to me. I was taken into a room and placed on a small bed about 3 ft wide, maybe 5 or 6 feet long. The bed was near the floor and had a filthy mattress on it. I was told to hold on to the end of the bed and not move or cry out. And then I remember the sound of something cutting the air, followed by a pain I can't describe. The most horrible pain a human being can imagine. It hurt so terribly bad. I would try and move to get up from the bed. God, Please make them stop beating me. But they beat me and beat me so bad.*

He wrote of being beaten by the one-armed man.

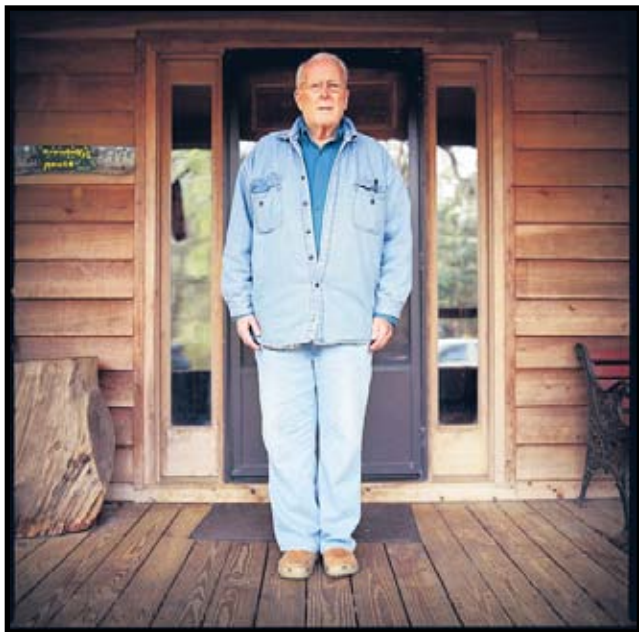
*I can't write any more about this. God make them stop.*

Night after night, while his family slept.

*God please stop this! Please!!*

Just before Ed slipped away, he scribbled a note for his wife and children, a last will and testament on notebook paper. He had two dying wishes.

The first was to transfer the Elvis songs he had recorded from cassette to compact disc. The other was to tell people how he had been abused at the Florida School for Boys.



**Former superintendent Lenox Williams, 76, told the *Times* recently that if any abuses happened, they were kept from him. "I'd be foolish if I said no, it cannot happen," he said. In a 1997 deposition, he admitted punishments at the school at times got out of hand.**



**Gov. Charlie Crist has ordered the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to investigate 31 graves near the school. “Please determine whether any crimes were committed and, if possible, the perpetrators of these crimes,” Crist wrote.**

### **THE WHITE HOUSE BOYS GOT A LAWYER**

and filed suit against several state agencies. More than 200 men signed on. R.W. Hatton was dead, but Troy Tidwell, the one-armed man, was still alive. He is named in the suit.

Gov. Charlie Crist called for an investigation into the graves. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement started

pulling records and asking questions. They talked to Troy Warren, who remembers digging boy-sized holes.

How could this happen? How was this allowed to continue? Why didn't someone speak up sooner?

But people have been speaking out about the Florida School for Boys for more than 100 years.

**THE FIRST SCANDAL CAME IN 1903,** a mere three years after the school opened. Investigators found children “in irons, just as common criminals.” This was no reform school, their report said. This was a prison for children.

The investigation would launch a seemingly endless cycle of exposes and fleeting reform.

In its first two decades, investigators discovered that school administrators hired out boys to work with state convicts. They also learned that students were brutally beaten with a leather strap attached to a wooden handle.

In 1914, six boys and two staff members died trapped in a burning dormitory. A grand jury learned the superintendent and staff were in town on a “pleasure bent” when the fire started.

The superintendent lost his job.

Trouble continued with each passing year, from reports of inadequate medical care to the murder of two students by peers.

Outsiders had no idea. Every year, thousands of families came from miles around at

Christmastime to see elaborate decorations built by the boys. Headlights stretched down dirt roads as people pattered through the campus, past waving mechanical Santas, plywood nativity scenes and angels with tinfoil wings.

By 1956, the overcrowded Marianna facility housed 698 students and 128 staffers. It had become the largest boys’ school in the country, and it was growing.

In March 1958, a Miami psychologist and former staff member at the school told a U.S. Senate committee about mass beatings with a heavy, 3½-inch-wide leather strap.



Times files (1968)

**Gov. Claude Kirk toured the facility in 1968 and found it overcrowded and in deplorable condition. “Somebody should have blown the whistle on Marianna a long time ago,” he said then.**

“The blows are very severe,” Dr. Eugene Byrd testified. “They are dealt with a great deal of force with a full arm swing over his head and down, with a strap, a leather strap approximately a half-inch thick and about 10 inches long with a wooden formed handle.”

“What is your opinion?” a senator asked.

“In my personal opinion it is brutality.”

In 1968, corporal punishment was outlawed in state-run institutions. By then, the school had been renamed the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys, after a longtime superintendent. That year, Gov. Claude Kirk visited Marianna. He found holes in the leaking ceilings and broken walls, bucket toilets, bunk beds crammed together to accommodate overcrowding, no heat in the winter. Kirk declared it a training ground for a life of crime.

“If one of your kids were kept in such circumstances,” he said, “you’d be up there with rifles.”

An official from the U.S. Department of Health called it a “monstrosity.” One juvenile court judge who toured the facility vowed never again to send boys there. Another said it was so understaffed that boys were left alone at night and sexual perversion was common.

A year later, a reporter for the *Chris-*

*tian Science Monitor* visited the school and found a 16-year-old named Jim in solitary confinement. Jim had eaten a lightbulb, then used a glass diffuser pried from a lighting fixture to gash his arm a dozen times from wrist to elbow.

“No one seemed to care,” the reporter wrote. The headline read, *Bulldoze them to the ground.*

More reforms were ordered, administrators were replaced. A preacher began a ministry at the school. Staffers visited a successful juvenile program in Red Wing, Minn., and brought back lessons. Love, not fear, is the best remedy.

For a few years, all was quiet.

Ten years later, in 1978, Jack Levine was teaching delinquent kids at a short-term residential center in Tallahassee when he heard about the Dozier school. The kids said it was a bad place.

One Sunday afternoon in November, Levine drove up to the entry gate and showed Health and Rehabilitative Services credentials. He found a lock-up facility at the back of the campus. He could see a long hallway lined with metal doors. It was dark and reeked of body odor and urine.

*Are there kids in here?*

Yeah, said the guard.

*I want to meet one. How about this cell?*

There were top and bottom slip



locks and bolts. One lock wouldn't budge. The man went back to his desk, grabbed a book — the Holy Bible — and whacked the lock.

Inside on a concrete slab, not a mattress, Levine saw a very thin, small, frightened boy with a shaved head and pajama bottoms, no shirt.

*How long have you been in here?* Levine asked.

The boy shrugged.

He's been here for a while, the guard said.

The guard told Levine the boy was locked up for his own protection. The boy said the older boys were sodomizing him with a broom handle.

*Why is his head shaved?* Levine asked.

*The boy has been pulling his hair out,* the guard said.

*Is he getting any help?*

*We just pass the food in.*

Levine, who would become a well-known child advocate, told his supervisor back in Tallahassee. Nothing



Times files (1968)

**A staff member feeds a boy a meal through a slot in the door. The superintendent at that time, Lenox Williams, said the school was understaffed. "A youngster can go through here without getting any real attention at all," he told the *Times* in 1968. "We are more or less warehousing kids."**

came of it until Levine brought it to the attention of an ACLU attorney. In 1983, the class-action “Bobby M” lawsuit was filed on behalf of students at Marianna and two other state reform schools.

The suit made a number of allegations, the most serious concerning isolation cells where boys were held for three weeks, sometimes longer. They were hogtied – forced to lie on their stomachs with their wrists and ankles shackled together behind their backs.

The suit was in the courts through three governors. Superintendent Lenox Williams was transferred. On the eve of the 1987 trial, the state settled, agreeing to sharply reduce the population at Dozier and another juvenile institution. “These reforms launch Florida into a new and progressive era in the way we treat young offenders,” HRS secretary Gregory Coler said at the time.

It didn’t last.

In 1993, teenagers attacked two British tourists at a rest stop near Monticello, killing one. Already upset with increasingly violent youth, Floridians were in no mood to coddle young criminals. By 1994, Gov. Lawton Chiles asked a federal court to throw out the population caps at Dozier.

Juvenile justice rides the waves of public perception. Investigations bring



**A bathroom in an abandoned school cottage.**

outrage. Outrage brings promises of better funding and training, better monitoring, better checks and balances. Then the attention fades, and with it the reforms. In 1903, investigators found kids in shackles. Nearly 80 years later, investigators found kids hogtied.

The school is still open, and still called the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys. It houses about 130 kids.

The state now makes available a telephone that children at the school can use to report abuse. The Department of Children and Families monitors those calls.

From July 2004 to March 2009, DCF investigated 316 allegations of abuse at the school, according to documents obtained by the *St. Petersburg Times*. Seventeen of those were veri-

fied. Thirty-three had “some indicator” of legitimacy.

One incident was caught on security camera. Now it's on YouTube.

On Feb. 11, 2007, a skinny 18-year-old named Justin Caldwell is standing still in a dormitory at the school. A heavy-set guard approaches him and stands there for a moment. Then he grabs Caldwell by the throat and slams him backward on the ground. The guard drags the boy into the center of the room, his head bleeding, and leaves him. Caldwell looks to be unconscious. His legs twitch.

Two months later, the school's superintendent and a guard were fired. State officials decried operational problems at the school that “span the chain of command from top to bottom.” The school's 200 employees would be trained to use verbal intervention instead of physical contact.

Again.

### WHAT IS THE COST TO SOCIETY OF SUCH

a place? It's hard to know whether trauma at the Florida School for Boys set children on a course for violence. But one man knew that the school was harming kids: Lenox Williams, who took over as superintendent in 1966.

The *St. Petersburg Times* interviewed Williams for a 1968 story, “Hell's

1,400 Acres.” He acknowledged the school was so understaffed that kids were learning how to sniff glue, break into groceries, or sodomize other kids.

“I know some children are harmed by their experience here,” Williams told the reporter. “But what can we do?”

Studies at the time showed that in facilities with fewer than 150 children, only 6 percent got into trouble and were sent back. Overcrowded Marianna had a returnee rate of nearly 30 percent, Williams said, while the rate of children going on to a life of crime was even higher.

Many of the children who left the school in the 1950s and '60s went on to rape and rob and kill.

After 14 months at the school, Leon Holston killed three younger boys in Pompano Beach. He has been serving a life sentence in state prison since 1968. Roger Lee Cherry is facing execution for the 1986 murder of an elderly DeLand woman. Robert Hendrix is on death row for shooting a Sorrento man and slitting his wife's throat in 1991. Frank Smith died on death row.

Donn Duncan is serving life for the 1990 murder of his fiancée in the Orange County home they shared. He broke a knife off in the woman's back in front of her 13-year-old daughter. “I remember that place like it was yester-

day,” Duncan wrote in a letter to the *Times*.

The list goes on. Others have been in and out of prison their whole lives.

George Goewey has been arrested 38 times, most recently accused of cocaine possession and sale. He says he’s clean now, and the 62-year-old has a stable job at a scooter shop in St. Petersburg, but he blames the school for ruining his life.

“You learned how to be sneaky,” he says. “I lost all respect for authority.”

Manuel Giddens was serving time in Marianna while his father was founding Lighthouse Gospel Mission, preaching to Tampa’s homeless and building a successful recovery program. By the time Giddens got out, he had learned to hot-wire cars and pick locks. Shortly after his release, he broke into a hardware store in Fort Myers. Then he started running marijuana and cocaine out of Colombia, through Miami and Fort Lauderdale, into Fort Myers in shrimp boats, to cit-



Photo courtesy of Roger D. Kiser

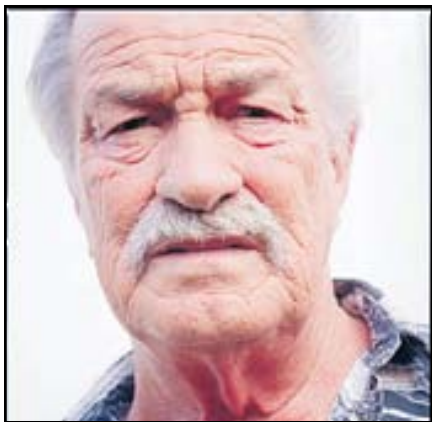
**In October, five men returned to the White House, where they were beaten as boys. The rooms were so small the strap would hit the wall. “It smelled like death,” said George Goewey, 62.**

ies up and down the East Coast. He has been in and out of prison for 40 years.

“Marianna is the root of my whole problem,” he says. “If I hadn’t have been through that period of time, I would have took on my father’s religion. I was born to be a pastor, and it didn’t happen. I was born to take over the mission, and I turned and went the other way.”

What about the others? How does childhood trauma manifest itself in law-abiding adults?

Robert Straley stopped leaving the house much when he nearly had a meltdown at a Wal-Mart. Roger Kiser



**Jerry Cooper, 64. “Even today I have a problem with authority.”**

is in his sixth marriage and still has trouble with hugs. Charles Rambo couldn't sleep in the dark until he was 25. James Griffin is 63 and still can't.

Jerry Cooper is 64 and takes Lexapro to calm his nerves. His wife once told him that the manager at the grocery store had asked for her number. Cooper drove to the store and waited in the parking lot. He walked to the man's car and punched through the window. It took five police officers to pull Cooper away.

“Even today I have a problem with authority,” he says. “It has plagued me all my life.”

Robert Lundy tried to drink the demons away. It cost him three marriages.

Michael O'McCarthy turned to alcohol, too, but the drinking led to paranoia and depression and self-loathing. Just a few years after Marianna, O'McCarthy tried to rob a gas station in California with a pretend gun. He spent seven years in prison.

“Look at what they did to us,” he says. “We were children. We were still kids.”

Bryant Middleton earned a Purple Heart in Vietnam. He'd go back there before he'd go back to Marianna.

Eddie Horne sometimes has phantom pain. “I'll be laying in bed and I can feel the pain from where they beat me,” he says. “I just want to go up there and make them pay.”

**FROM OUTWARD APPEARANCES,** Stu Kruger has enjoyed good things in life. The 67-year-old worked on Wall Street and now runs a credit repair business in Miami. But he's never been able to stay put more than a year or two. He feels like someone is always after him.

“I've never told anybody this before,” he says. He fishes into his pocket for something.

In Marianna, he and another boy had tried to run. They were marching back from the Saturday matinee in town, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, when they tore off into the woods.

They stole a car and peeled toward New York. But the state police caught them a mile or two out of town.

At the White House, the other boy went in first. Kruger sat in another room. As his friend screamed for his life, Kruger bent over and picked up a small pebble off the floor and rolled it in his fingers and thought about how small it was and how good it felt.

Fifty years and five marriages later, he pulls his hand out of his pocket. In his palm is a tiny pebble.

“I can’t go anywhere without it,” he says. “Fifty f----- years.”

## THE CITY OF SOUTHERN CHARM:

Marianna, pop. 6,200.

On weekends, hunters chase white-tailed deer through the thick pine woods. Preachers pack churches on Sunday mornings. Traffic along Marianna’s picture-postcard main street slows to a crawl at 5 o’clock on weekdays, when the bells ring at the First Baptist Church and the sun sets on a tall Confederate memorial downtown.

In some ways, not much has changed in 50 years. But Interstate 10 cuts south of the city now, and a cluster of chain hotels and restaurants and a Wal-Mart Supercenter have sprung up around Exit 142, edging the city toward modern America.

Since the allegations of abuse were made public, some in town have pulled together to defend the school. They’ve suggested the White House Boys are exaggerating — even lying — and trying to milk money from the state. During a Chamber of Commerce breakfast, someone suggested the memorial plaque at the White House be removed. The local newspaper launched a series: “In Defense of Dozier.”

“Unfortunately, you can throw mud and dirt further than you can throw clean sand,” wrote a columnist for the *Jackson County Times*. “These claims have not been proven or substantiated, but much national media attention has been generated which includes very negative publicity for our community.”

A few men who worked at the school long ago still live in the area.

Sammie West lives outside town. He’s 71 now.

West started at the school in 1960 and stayed for 40 years in a number of jobs including cottage father. He says he personally spanked two boys, and he administered fewer than 10 swats each. He even remembers their names. But that was state-approved protocol at the time, and it was always witnessed by a supervisor. The staff stopped paddling boys in 1968, he says.

“I do not know what went on behind closed doors,” he says. “I would not say





**Marianna is nicknamed the City of Southern Charm. The town readily accepted the reform school in 1900, thinking it would provide an economic boost. Today, some residents resent the accusations against the school, which has employed local families for generations.**

that there has never been a boy abused. It's going to happen. But I never saw it or heard about it. ... I think they was spanked, and that's it."

He recalls three deaths at the school

in his 40 years: A boy was found at the bottom of the swimming pool, a boy died from a heart condition in the gymnasium, and a boy drowned during a canoe trip on the Chipola River.

He says when the boys would run, he and other men were responsible for tracking them down, a task that often took hours. And a lot of boys ran before the campus was fenced in.

“Sometimes you’d go a month without boy hunting,” he says. “And sometimes you’d go boy hunting every night.”

Former Gov. Claude Kirk, now 83, remembers boys locked in their dorms at night with a chain. But he says he never heard about physical or sexual abuse. “None of that surfaced at the time,” he says. “If it had, I would have done something about it. Put somebody in jail.”

The men who were beaten say there’s no way the abuse could have been kept secret. They say they sent photos of their backs out with friends who were being released. Some told their families on visits, but things didn’t change. Many needed medical treatment after their beatings. Some recall a Dr. Wexler smearing ointment on their lacerations.

Wexler is dead, but his daughter remembers helping her father, who had poor eyesight, when their family lived on campus. Sheila Wexler says he occasionally treated boys who had cuts or welts on their backs. “But if they needed a stitch,” she says, “it would only be a few.”

Lenox Williams lives down a dirt road, in a sturdy cabin he built himself, where a sign that says “Grandaddy’s House” hangs beside the front door, and the porch radio is tuned to a Southern preacher. Inside, the walls are covered with antique farm implements and family photos. A framed certificate proclaims Williams a deacon at Trinity Baptist Church.

When he was hired as a psychologist in 1960, the school had a history of anemic funding. Buildings were falling apart. Mentally handicapped children shared the campus with 18-year-old sex offenders, because the state had no other place to send juvenile delinquents. The population swelled to more than 900 boys supervised by only 140 adults, which made keeping order a constant battle.

“There probably were some abuses,” says Williams, who was superintendent from 1966 to 1986. “Anytime you’ve got human beings together, you’re going to have people abusing each other.”

Williams does not believe anyone was beaten to death. The old cemetery was there when he arrived. He ordered a Boy Scout troop to clean it up and fashion 31 new metal markers. He asked a Florida State graduate student to compile a history of the school and try to learn who was buried there.

The student found that the cemetery held six boys who died in the 1914 fire; 10 who died during an influenza epidemic in 1918; a boy who died after a prolonged illness in 1935; a runaway whose decomposed body was found under a private residence in Marianna in 1941; a boy found dead in the laundry after being beaten by another boy in 1949; two dogs and a peacock named Sue. He could account for 22 of the 31 graves.

Williams suspects the names of the others have been lost to time, not something more sinister.

He says he has never seen a leather strap the men talk about. He says it was protocol to give 10 to 12 licks, depending on a boy's size.

"We used a paddle," he says. "We were supposed to administer it to the buttocks and nowhere else, and we did."

Williams may have a faulty memory. In 1997, he was deposed when former boys' school student Roger Lee Cherry appealed his death sentence. "Was corporal punishment used at that time in 1962?" an attorney asked.

"Yes," Williams replied.

"Did that ever get out of hand?" the attorney asked.

"At times it did, yes."

A later superintendent, Roy McKay, who has died, offered a sworn statement for the same appeal.

"Although I never witnessed or participated in the strappings that were used as a form of punishment in the 1960s and 1970s at Dozier, I did witness the aftermath of this form of discipline. On many occasions, a child would come to my class and would be unable to sit down after being beaten with a leather strap in the woodshed we called 'the White House.'"

In a later interview with the *Times*, Williams says he may have been aware of the beatings before he was promoted to superintendent in 1966. He pauses over his grits. "I think there were some who might have enjoyed it on our staff," he says. "Might have enjoyed the over-spanking."

### TROY TIDWELL LIVES IN A WHITE HOUSE

near the center of Marianna. He doesn't answer his door.

"We're trying to shield him as best we can," his landlord says on the phone. "He's an 85-year-old man."

"You're just trying to ruin a good man's life," says his ex-wife, Mary. "Leave him alone!"

Tidwell's granddaughter, Tiffany Pippin, says her family doubts the stories. They know a man who danced the fox-trot on Friday nights, who took his grandchildren fishing, who flirted with the ladies behind the perfume counter

at the mall in Dothan, Ala. They know a man who always dressed sharp before he left the house and sat quiet in the First Baptist Church on Sunday mornings. “He’s a good man,” says Pippin, 29. “He loved his wife. He never beat his children.”

Tidwell’s family lived in Bascom, a tiny town north of Marianna, Pippin says. His father died when he was young. When Troy Tidwell was 6, he played with his father’s shotgun. He leaned on the barrel and accidentally fired the gun, which severed his left arm.

He’s self-conscious about it and sits with his arm facing the wall when the family goes out to dinner. Pippin says her grandfather has worked hard his whole life to overcome the handicap, and after more than 40 years at the school he deserves a peaceful retirement. That’s why the allegations burn.

“It’s an embarrassment and defamation of character,” she wrote in an e-mail to the *Times*. “That’s why we are so upset about the lies and exaggerations made up by these men in an attempt for them to receive retribution.”



Photo courtesy of the Tidwell family

**Troy Tidwell with his great-granddaughter. The former school staffer is named in a lawsuit filed by the White House Boys. His family disputes the accusations and calls him a loving person.**

But she says neither her mother nor her uncle have asked Tidwell about the allegations. They respect him too much to ask.

Tidwell’s lawyer, Matthew Fuqua, says Tidwell admitted that staffers used corporal punishment, but says the White House Boys’ accounts are exaggerated or completely false.

“He said, ‘I never saw any child with bloody pants, bruised and bloody from being whipped. Certainly I never did

it, and I can't imagine that anybody else did it either because I would have known about it.' ”

How does that square with the stories?

“I don't know,” Fuqua says. “I don't know whether they're lying, or the abuse that happened when they were a child was magnified over a time. All those kids, it was a bad situation they were here. Most of them were lonely and from broken homes. I don't know if it was magnified in their eyes. But the allegations of bloody underwear and that type of stuff, he just says didn't occur, or he was not aware of it occurring.”

**BILL HAYNES IS RETIRING AFTER 30** years working for the Alabama Department of Corrections. He and his wife have a nice patch of land off a dirt road in a small town outside Montgomery. They live in a warm little brick house with a dachshund and a china cabinet full of glass Jesus figurines.

He's been having a hard time sleeping. His old nightmares are back. He dreams he is running through the swamp, dogs behind him. He wonders if he ever should have gotten involved.

What is he owed? How do you measure a life of conversations cut short? How do you repay a man for years of distrust?

He wants reparations from the state, if it will make the juvenile officers of Florida think twice before hitting a child. He'd like to see Arthur G. Dozier's name come off the school. He says he took a beating from Dozier himself, and that kind of sin should preclude the man from posthumous honor.

Bill Haynes thinks about Troy Tidwell sometimes. He thinks he'd like to knock the taste out of his mouth. “But that would make me no better than him,” he says. “I should have compassion for him.”

He is told that Tidwell has been upset by the lawsuit, physically and emotionally, that it has disturbed what little life he has left. He stopped going to church. He hasn't been dancing. He asked his granddaughter if she would like to have his furniture.

Haynes is told that Tidwell can't sleep at night, and that he's alone, blinds drawn, scared to come out of his little white house. Maybe, he says, that's good enough. ■

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Manuel Giddens, 64. "Marianna destroyed me."



James Griffin, 63. "Marianna took a piece out of everybody's life."



Frank Marx, 66. "They beat me 'til I passed out."



Roy Conerly, 63.



Willie Roberts, 61.



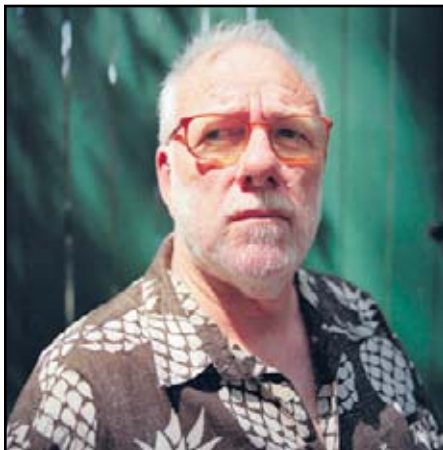
John Brodnax, 66.



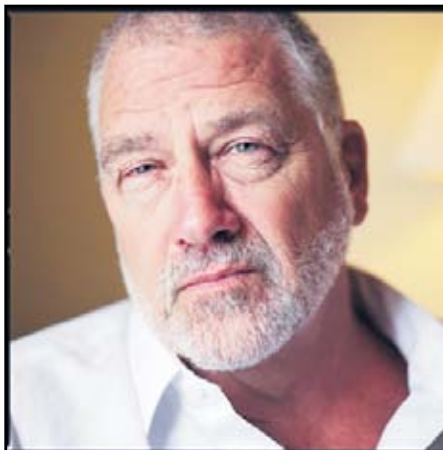
Henry Williams, 67.



Robert Lundy, 61.



Robert Straley, 63. "They were like wolves. They ruled the night."



Michael O'McCarthy, 66. "The little kid inside me didn't deserve that."





Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys today. “We do things totally differently now.”  
— Frank Peterman Jr., Department of Juvenile Justice secretary

## ON TAMPABAY.COM

For a video in which the men describe their experiences at the school, for more photos and documents, and to read the 1968 *St. Petersburg Times* story “Hell’s 1,400 Acres,” go to [www.tampabay.com/specials/2009/reports/marianna/](http://www.tampabay.com/specials/2009/reports/marianna/).

# A TIMELINE: WHAT THEY SAID

## **June 1, 1903: Report from investigative committee to the Florida Senate**

“We found them in irons, just as common criminals, which in the judgment of your committee, is not the meaning of a ‘State Reform School,’ as defined by the law creating said school, and should not be so construed by those in authority of said Reform School. We have no hesitancy in saying, under its present management it is nothing more nor less than a prison, where juvenile prisoners are confined.”

## **1911: Report from an investigative committee**

The children are “at times unnecessarily and brutally punished, the instrument of punishment being a leather strap fastened to a wooden handle.”

## **Jan. 5, 1915: Jackson County grand jury**

“We ... find that the employees were men who were not settled in life, who have had no experience in raising boys of their own or anybody else’s and who know nothing about the science of bringing up children in the way they should go. We find that the young men having direct supervision of the boys were immoral and not proper persons to lead wayward boys toward reformation.”

## **March 18, 1948: Superintendent Arthur G. Dozier**

“When a boy leaves Marianna, he is in good health, has caught up with his studies, has a new set of values, a fair basic knowledge of a trade and is usually resolved to lead a new and better life.

“The chances are about three to one that the boy will have no further conflict with law enforcement agencies.”

**March 3, 1958: Dr. Eugene Byrd, testimony before a U.S. Senate subcommittee on juvenile delinquency**

“There are two rooms, one room in which they weighed in; the other room in which they are beat consists of a cot on which they lay down. They are told to hold the head rail and not to yell out nor to move. They are beaten by the director of the department, not the superintendent of the school. The superintendent does witness each beating.”

**March 11, 1958: Superintendent Arthur G. Dozier**

“There has been no brutality in this school.”

**Dec. 21, 1967: Joseph Miele, a Pinellas County court-appointed defense attorney, arguing his client, Gary H. Reed, shouldn't be sentenced to Marianna**

“If you send him up there, you will be putting a good apple in a barrel with some rotten apples. Up there they are going to teach Gary to do things without getting caught.”

**March 20, 1968: *St. Petersburg Times* news story**

“Roy Manella, an official of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, said at a Tallahassee news conference that the Marianna institution was one of the worst examples in the nation of a boys' reform school.”

**March 31, 1968: “Hell's 1,400 Acres,” *St. Petersburg Times***

“Here, friends, are 605 of your delinquent children. If they weren't Really Bad when they got here, chances are they're learning. Learning to sniff glue, gasoline and shoe wax. Learning to steal cars and break into groceries in a more professional way. And sometimes learning about sodomy and other perversions.”

**Feb. 24, 1969: Judge Frank Orlando, Fort Lauderdale**

“When a couple of boys I sent up there came over to say hello I felt like a rat for sending them to that place.”

**Feb. 25, 1969: *Evening Independent* editorial**

“It is time that we quit being shocked every time an outsider visits Marianna. It is time we found out why such conditions continue to exist and who is responsible for them.”

**Nov. 24, 1982: *St. Petersburg Times* editorial**

“The cruel practice cannot be justified. Guards wouldn’t be allowed to hogtie inmates in adult prisons. Why should authorities be allowed to do something that barbaric to children? State officials responsible for allowing the practice deserve more than admonishment. They should be fired.”

**For Their Own Good** | Part Two

# 100 YEARS LATER AND IT'S STILL HELL

STORY BY BEN MONTGOMERY AND WAVENEY ANN MOORE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EDMUND D. FOUNTAIN | *Times Staff*



**T**he boys were watching. They had noticed the old men and the television trucks gathered at the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys.

MARIANNA

They were not allowed outside, but this day last October was about them, too. So said the plaque about to be fixed to the building called the White House.

Bloody noses. Broken bones. At the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys, reform seems to be mostly in the rhetoric.

*May this building stand as a reminder of the need to remain vigilant in protecting our children as we help them to seek a brighter future.*

The men outside called themselves the White House Boys. They were assured that the abuse they endured here 50 years ago — beatings that left them bloody, ruined their sleep, wrecked their marriages and destroyed their lives — would never be repeated. This was a different place now. The boys inside were safe.

After the ceremony, the superintendent would write to her staff: “I am proud to show what our Dozier is truly all about today.”

But behind closed doors, were those boys safe and protected? Were they being nurtured toward brighter futures?

“When the media was around, they would hide us,” said a boy named Matthew Schroeder. “They didn’t want us saying a word to anybody, because they knew what we would say.

“We’d tell the truth.”

Here is what the men there that day did not know:

That five months before, a boy had his ear sewn back together with 10

stitches after a scuffle with staffers.

That four months before, a 39-year-old guard punched a 16-year-old boy three times in the face and slammed him into a fence.

That a month before, a 16-year-old boy was attacked by other boys in an unsupervised bathroom.

Or that three days before, a boy who had been peeing blood for days sat down and wrote: “I was refused medical attention and I need to see an urologist about my kidneys.”

Today, the state’s oldest reform school houses about 130 of the 6,000 juveniles in the custody of the Department of Juvenile Justice.

They are kept behind fences topped with razor wire, at a place where kids have been abused for 100 years. Over the years boys have been beaten here, shackled here, hog-tied here. Kept in isolation, driven so crazy they ate glass. Eight died in a fire here, neglected by guards. Hundreds of men who were beaten here in the 1950s and ‘60s have sued the state. Dozens of boys are buried here on a little hill, their graves unidentified, the details forgotten.

What kind of place is the Dozier School for Boys today?



The Department of Juvenile Justice, citing the pending lawsuit and strict privacy laws, refused for months to let the St. Petersburg Times on campus to inspect conditions, interview boys or talk to staff. On Friday, as this story was headed to publication, DJJ officials agreed to schedule a visit.

For now, that leaves little more than the word of the state and the public record.

Using the state's public information laws, the Times obtained more than 8,000 documents to better understand the school's recent history. Those documents betray a place of abuse and neglect, of falsified records, bloody noses and broken bones.

In the past two years, according to the school's own reports:

A suicidal boy drank cleaning fluid when no one was watching.

A boy so disturbed he threatened to cut off his finger to prove he wasn't human climbed to a rooftop before guards could tackle him, breaking his arm.

Two boys went missing on campus for nine hours. Five staffers failed in their duties that day, and the superintendent of the high-security portion of Dozier didn't report the incident. When it came to light, he resigned.

Another guard slapped an inmate during a basketball game, bloodying

his nose. The boy asked to call the state's abuse hotline, but was denied.

When an inmate is allowed to report abuse, the complaint goes to the state Department of Children and Families. In the past five years, DCF has opened 155 investigations at Dozier and verified seven cases of improper supervision, four of physical abuse, one of sexual abuse and one of medical mistreatment. An additional 33 cases had "some indicator" of abuse, mistreatment or neglect.

DCF's investigative summaries were released by a judge after the Times argued that the public has good reason to see the records. According to those documents:

In January 2006, a guard grabbed a boy by the neck and head-butted him, breaking the boy's nose.

In July 2006, a diabetic boy whose blood sugar was low was unresponsive for 20 minutes as two staffers ignored him. One staffer later quit and another, still on staff, was reprimanded.

One guard allegedly stuffed a boy in a laundry bag, and when the boy tried to chew through the strings, the guard encouraged others to scratch and pinch him. Investigators found "some indicators" of abuse: the boy's bruises. Without video or witnesses, the allegations are sometimes impossible to prove. The guard resigned.

Yet another guard chased a boy through the dining hall with a broom, broke the broom on a refrigerator, then chased the boy with the sharp end. The guard grabbed the boy in a headlock and fractured his jaw. The guard then tried to sabotage the investigation. He was placed on leave and is no longer on staff.

The Dozier campus sits on the edge of town on a patch of land carved out of the pines. Some of the buildings date to the early 1900s. Boys complain about mice, spiders and roaches.

“While in the Dining Hall I was eating my food and a roach crawled out of my food,” a boy wrote in February. “This is not the first time this has happen.”

The response from the staff?

“Dining Hall was cleaned and checked. We will control this as much as we can.”

Late last year, a visiting supervisor found roaches in the suggestion box.

**MATTHEW SCHROEDER IS 18, AND SMALL** for his age.

He was born with cystic fibrosis, a condition that requires daily medication and care. When Schroeder was arrested in the little town of Crawfordville for burglary and larceny, he landed at Dozier, because it was



**“I don’t want to see anybody who made a mistake like I did go through what I did in there,” said Matthew Schroeder.**

thought to be the facility best equipped to deal with his medical needs.

Schroeder said he spent the first 65 days at Dozier sick in his cell with vomiting and diarrhea, his stomach knotting. Schroeder can’t digest food without medication, and day after day in June 2008, he said, he received his medication late or not at all.

“I couldn’t get out of bed,” he said.

“He was in excruciating pain,” said his aunt, Susan Lidondici, who complained to the school.

Boys were often overmedicated or undermedicated. In a single week in September 2008, at least eight either missed getting their medication or

nurses failed to document it.

Nurses at Dozier worked 12-hour shifts, plus overtime, because of staffing shortages. At times, the school had four nurses when it should have had nine. The starting salary for a licensed practical nurse at Dozier was until recently \$11.80 per hour, below most all other nursing jobs in the area. At one point, an administrator warned of a “highly contagious bacteria” in the infirmary.

The head nurse repeatedly warned superiors about the shortages.

“I am very concerned for the youth in our care,” she wrote in August 2008.

And in October 2008: “Our medical department has reached its most critical level ... “

And in December, after she quit due to a stress-related medical condition, her replacement wrote: “We need nurses now! ... I am unwilling to continue to jeopardize the well-being of the youth in our care.”

Schroeder got so ill he spent a week at Shands Hospital in Gainesville. Doctors told his family his bowels were impacted and his condition was exacerbated at the school. He lost about 50 pounds there, he said.

On March 19, after almost a year, Matthew Schroeder walked out of the reform school.

“Hell,” he called it.

## WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO WORK AT DOZIER?

The state has two requirements — you must be at least 19 and have a high school diploma or equivalent. But superintendent Mary Zahasky, the school’s sixth leader in eight years, expects more.

“The first thing we look for is someone with good character,” she wrote in an e-mail to a potential applicant. She looks for someone who is “a good role model to teenage kids.”

But a number of employees have criminal charges, including passing worthless checks, driving under the influence and domestic abuse.

In the past two years, one guard came to work reeking of alcohol and was referred to counseling. Another came in high on cocaine and marijuana. And another admitted to being a habitual drug abuser after he came to work high and was sent to the emergency room.

In 2005, the school hired James Edge. Three years before, the 265-pound man with a snake tattoo on his leg was arrested for domestic battery and violating a protective order. According to his wife’s sworn complaint, Edge wrenched her arm behind her back, fracturing her shoulder.

Edge is the same officer involved in the May 2008 scuffle in which a boy’s ear was split open. The following

month, records show, he bloodied a boy's nose and slammed him against a fence, cutting his thumbs. Then Edge was fired. Officials now say they are investigating his hiring.

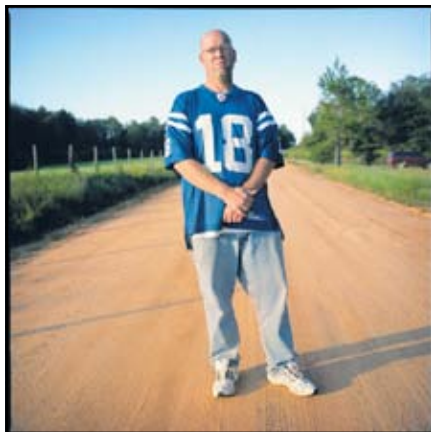
Guard Arthur Edmon Jr. posted photos on his MySpace page in which he makes obscene gestures and poses on a cash-covered table (caption: "f---u haters"). He also posted a homemade rap video of friends dunking a basketball and pointing a gun at the camera.

Guard Frank Bernaldo has a MySpace page that contains sexual images and language and the following biographical nugget: "I like to go hunting but not for animals, only for people who piss me off."

"We didn't know about this," said DJJ spokesman Frank Penela. "We would certainly not want someone with a character that portrays negativity or violence or bad personal conduct to be working with kids."

Starting pay for an entry-level guard is about \$11.29 an hour, or about \$23,500 a year. "But we train them well," Penela said. That includes 240 hours in topics such as first aid, verbal de-escalation techniques, adolescent development, gang awareness and ethics.

John Bennett, 41, worked as a guard at Dozier for more than a year, often alone with boys, often at night, and



**"They knew I had a learning disability. They'd make fun of me," said John Bennett, a former guard.**

sometimes, he said, as the sole adult in charge of three teens on suicide watch. Bennett took special education classes throughout his schooling, his brother said, and struggles to read and write.

"I have a learning disorder," he said.

"We were shocked that he got the job," said his brother, Ed Bennett. "We thought that maybe they'd hire him as a janitor or something."

Asked if training was hard, John Bennett said: "It was easy. They gave us all the answers to the tests."

Bennett said a boy once slapped him in the face. He told the boy not to do it again. The boy slapped him harder.

His biggest problem was with the supervisors. "They made fun of me."

They called him slow and stupid, he said, and ribbed him over mild infractions. One day, he was a minute late for work and got a stern warning. The next day, he came to work 15 minutes early and announced his arrival over the radio.

"Mr. Bennett, reporting for duty 15 minutes early, sir!"

That got him in trouble for using the radio.

"He wasn't retarded," spokesman Penela said. He doubts Bennett was helped with the test.

Bennett was fired in July 2008 for absences and sleeping on the job. He thought sleeping was a minor infraction because his own supervisor would regularly sleep in a van on the night shift.

Records show this is common. A nap might seem minor until you consider what happens when guards aren't looking.

Documents show that boys had oral sex in a van and in the showers. A boy said he was raped in the shower. A juvenile sexual offender roamed at night so frequently that boys would barricade their doors with their desks.

Fights often broke out in the showers. A boy from Yulee, who asked the Times to withhold his name because

he was arrested as a juvenile, was blindsided as he entered the bathroom. "They came up behind me and hit me in the back of the head as I was walking in. I woke up on the floor."

His mother and father visited him a few days later.

"He looked terrible," said his mother, Laurie Bland. Black eye, constriction wounds on his neck, impact wounds on his chest, back and rib cage.

The boy doesn't know how long he was unconscious, just that it would not have happened had the guards been doing their jobs.

The boys on the outside say not all staff are bad. They can easily rattle off staffers who made an impact on them.

"The staff is generally there for the kids," said Chris Windau, who was arrested for breaking into a CiCi's Pizza. "But there are others who, it's just a job for them."

Child advocate Gus Barreiro took an interest in Dozier. The former state legislator from Miami was hired last fall to oversee Dozier and three other programs. He was fired in January after DJJ found adult pornography on his state laptop. He denies the charge. The rumor among the boys at Dozier was that he was helping them too much.

"That place is full of generational employees," said Barreiro, 50. "My great-grandfather worked there,

grandfather worked there, so I work there.”

Barreiro wanted to know why turnover was so high. “I was asking things like, ‘What brought you here? What do you like about the job?’” he said. “The No. 1 answer was always benefits or retirement or salary or job security. It wasn’t until you got to No. 5 or 6 that they said anything about working with kids.

“It’s like working at Sea World and getting to No. 5 before you say you like whales.”

**DOZIER ISN'T THE PLACE IT USED TO BE,** because now boys have options to report mistreatment. They can file a grievance. They can call the abuse hotline.

But that system fails.

If they want to call the hotline, sometimes they have to phone in front of the alleged abuser.

“Twice, I asked to call abuse and they told me it wasn’t an option,” Matthew Schroeder said. “They told us if you called abuse and if it came back false, then they could press charges on you for making a false report and the maximum penalty was five years.”

“They told us that all the time,” said the boy from Yulee.

And grievances?

One boy wrote that a guard told him they “wipe their a---- with grievances.” Another wrote, “I don’t know why y’all have grievances. They never work.”

On April 6, a boy wrote: “I’m afraid of Mr. black. He has an anger problem and I feel like he might hurt me.”

The response from a supervisor: “I talk to Mr. Black about this youth he just Doing his Job.”

Child advocate Cathy Corry filed a complaint in November after someone posted allegations on her watchdog Web site: Younger kids being beaten up; staff members sleeping, threatening boys to keep them quiet and falsifying reports.

Dozier’s assistant superintendent dismissed them outright.

“All of the above allegations apparently came from the Justice4Kids Web site where anyone can report their own opinion!” wrote Milton Mooneyham. “We will conduct an internal investigation to disprove these allegations.”

Asked whether an “investigation to disprove these allegations” is really an investigation, spokesman Penela defended the school’s second-in-command.

“When we do an investigation, it’s certainly unbiased, it’s certainly thorough,” he said.

Corry, who has been an activist for 10 years, wasn't surprised.

"It's pathetic," she said. "The child is viewed as a liar right away, so the child has to prove that they're not lying, and that's difficult for them to do."

### MARK CALDWELL CHECKED INTO ROOM 115

at the Ramada Inn in Lake City, caught a few hours of sleep and was up before the sun.

In the lobby, he flipped through pictures of his only child.

Here was Justin cooking. Here he was on a lawn mower. Fishing. NASCAR. And here they were with matching haircuts.

"He's my baby," Caldwell said.

The photos stop when Justin hits puberty.

That's when Justin started getting into trouble. He stole money from a neighbor and threw a rock at a school bus. Then his stepmother caught him touching his little brother.

He was 13 when he was sentenced to a South Florida DJJ program, then later transferred to Dozier. His sentence was extended due to allegations of bad behavior, his father said.

He turned 18 in Dozier.

Then came Feb. 11, 2007.

What happened that morning is Justin's word against the guard's.



**"He needed help and counseling, not to lock the door and throw away the key," Mark Caldwell says of his son.**

James Wooden said Justin elbowed him in the cafeteria, then head-butted him, knocking off his DJJ hat. Wooden tried to take down Justin, but their feet got tangled. When Wooden stood up, Justin kicked him.

Justin claimed Wooden head-butted him. Several boys testified that Wooden slapped Justin on the forehead, according to news coverage of the short trial.

In court, Justin's attorney pointed out that Wooden was 5 inches taller than Justin, which would have made it hard for Justin to head-butt him. The attorney also showed it would have been hard for Justin to kick Wooden,



“What happens behind that razor-wire fence stays there, and you can’t get to it. You can’t find truth.” — Mark Caldwell

based on how the two were positioned.

A jury had to decide who they wanted to believe. A seven-year DJJ employee, or an inmate?

What is known is that later that day, Feb. 11, a video camera caught Justin standing still. A heavy-set guard grabs him by the throat, slams him backward on the ground, then chokes him. Guards pick up Justin and are leading him away when he falls and slams his head on a table. The guards drag him to the middle of the room where they leave him, bleeding. His legs twitch.

Police charged Justin with battery on a detention officer. Two months later, the superintendent and the guard, Alvin Speights, were fired.

The DJJ secretary at the time, Walt McNeil, called for a “change of culture” at the school.

Justin was sentenced to five years in prison, the maximum.

The guard, Speights, was not indicted.

“It’s a crime what they did,” Mark Caldwell said. “If my neighbor’s dog walks into my yard to do its business and I kick the dog and somebody sees me, I’m going to serve time.”

Every few months Caldwell, a tool

and die maker, rents a fuel-efficient car and drives 350 miles, from Spanish Fort, Ala., to the Lake City Correctional Institution, his Wal-Mart watch set to Eastern time — “Justin’s time.”

Every tick is a second closer to 2012, Justin’s release date.

Mark thinks about the man he’ll take home that day. He’ll be 23. He’ll have an arm covered with prison tattoos. His closest relationships will have been with criminals.

What Florida citizen, Caldwell wonders, believes that the best treatment for a 13-year-old is to jail him for 10 years? How did slamming Justin’s head into the concrete help to reform him? What kind of life can he expect to lead?

The White House Boys, those men who came of age at the school in the 1950s and ‘60s, overwhelmingly say they grew up angry and distrustful. They took out that anger on their wives and kids, even on strangers. They went back to jail.

Five decades later, can Mark Caldwell reasonably expect anything different for his son?

Caldwell bought Justin a ‘92 Camaro. When the time comes, he will

teach a grown man how to drive, how to pay for gas, how to behave on his first date.

He climbs into his rental and heads toward the prison, quarters in his pocket for vending machine pizza. He drives past a park and a forest and a community college and pulls up to a 894-bed prison surrounded by razor wire and men with dogs. He walks past a giant Florida flag and disappears inside.

### REFORM IN MARIANNA?

It was ordered in 1909, when investigators found faked records and the superintendent quit.

And again in 1911, when the superintendent was hitting kids with a leather strap.

And again in 1913, when children were hired out to pick cotton and the superintendent resigned and laws were changed.

And again in 1914, 1920, 1921, 1953, 1963, 1968, 1976, 1982 and 2007, two months after Justin Caldwell was beaten, when the DJJ head said: "There are systemic operational problems at our Dozier facility that span the chain of command."

Was it fixed?

Can it be fixed?

Matthew Schroeder's aunt: "The



**Frank Peterman Jr., the secretary of the Department of Juvenile Justice, concedes problems at the Dozier School for Boys. "There was a time when everything was shrouded in secrecy. I think that's changed somewhat."**

culture in that place was established long, long ago and it's just going to continue."

Matthew Schroeder: "Change the atmosphere, or cut it off."

Mark Caldwell: "Dozier is a place of evil. Dozier needs to be shut down."

Now comes a new DJJ secretary, Frank Peterman Jr., a Baptist preacher and former state representative from St. Petersburg.

He said Dozier has a cultural problem. He has no tolerance for hurting kids, and his agency fires guards who

do. He is already seeing results: lower numbers of employees filing for workman's compensation and fewer kids being sent to hospitals.

"What we've tried to do is change the culture ... to make sure we try to back off the kids," he said. "We will become restraint-free."

Peterman, appointed in February 2008, said he is focused on prevention, transparency and verbal de-escalation, and on hiring better people with better pay. Example: Today, Dozier's 10 nursing positions are filled thanks to a pay hike this year.

Better pay means getting more money from the Legislature to fund a place that has been strapped from its beginning.

So what about the people who control the money?

State Rep. Darryl Rouson, D-St. Petersburg, is arranging a visit to Dozier for the Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Committee, on which he serves. If the findings are true, "I would be as appalled and outraged as any human being."

So would Rep. Marti Coley, R-Marianna, she said, if she knew of any abuse. But so far, "I have not gotten any calls whatsoever except from you."

Sen. Al Lawson, a Democrat who has served in the Legislature for 27

years and whose district includes Marianna, initially said he did not accept the Times' findings about the school, and did not want the Times to send him the DCF reports.

"I've not had one complaint about conditions out there," he said.

But he did review the reports, and later expressed concern. "It's imperative and important that they have a way of dealing with the problem up there."

In February, Lawson spoke at a Jackson County Chamber of Commerce meeting in Marianna, according to the local newspaper. Near the end of the meeting, someone suggested that the plaque be removed from the White House. For some, the plaque is like a stain on the town.

Lawson told the crowd that he would try to get it removed.

Eleven days later, a boy was kicked and stomped by other youths, then placed in isolation. He asked to call the abuse hotline, to let somebody know what was going on. He was denied. ■

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