



Inside Dateline: Fighting for Dane

A personal note from producer Olive Talley on Dr. Federici and Karyn Purvis' work with abused or neglected children.

• [June 14, 2006 | 6:42 p.m. ET](#)

Fighting for Dane and other troubled kids -- a personal note (Olive Talley, Dateline producer)

As the producer of this piece, I'd like to introduce you to a behind-the-scenes expert who was critical in helping us tell the story of Dane and his family. In fact, it was Karyn Purvis who introduced us to the Jones family.

Just like the so-called horse whisperer, who turns the feral horse into a calm, trusting animal, Karyn Purvis does the same thing with kids. Those of us who have watched her work call her the Child Whisperer.

The first time I saw Karyn in action was at a summer camp at Texas Christian University called The Hope Connection, a respite for adopted kids who were at risk for being institutionalized because of their severe behavioral problems. The camp originally was designed as a research project by Karyn, then a doctoral student at TCU and her psychology professor, Dr. David Cross.

But this was no ordinary camp full of giggling, playful children. All the children here had suffered some level of abuse, neglect and deprivation before they were adopted and brought to America. Some had been rescued from deplorable conditions in foreign orphanages, while others had come out of domestic adoptions through child welfare authorities. As a result, they all had emotional and behavioral problems. Dane Jones was one of them.

I was there as a guest with Dr. Ron Federici, who consulted with TCU and helped evaluate many of the "camp kids." Suddenly, as we were watching the counselors lead the kids through songs, dances and tumbling, one of the kids went WILD in the middle of a play room. A darling blue-eyed, 7-year-old Russian girl erupted in a whirl of kicking, thrashing, and screaming. Her little blonde curls began to drip with sweat as she flailed and swung her arms and legs in an out-of-control rage that frankly scared the heck out of me.

I watched in awe as Karyn firmly, but calmly pulled the raging child into her lap, cradling and rocking her and speaking to her in soft, soothing tones. With equal doses of patience, love, and leadership, she brought the child to an emotional landing where she felt enough safety and comfort to relax and let go of the rage. The 30-minute ordeal ended with the child sobbing and melting into Karyn's snuggling arms. I will never forget the scene of the two of them walking away, hand-in-hand in search of gum. Much later, Karyn determined that the child had suffered a flashback to her own baby's sister's drowning after seeing another child at camp who reminded her of her sister.

Karyn is a former foster parent, a mother of three boys, a grandmother of six -- two of whom are adopted. After raising her family, Karyn Purvis went back to school and got her doctorate degree and now heads TCU's Institute for Child Development.

"We want to understand why children who suffer severe abuse and neglect in their early years have so much trouble developing normally," Karyn said. "And we believe we're making good headway."

"Our work has confirmed that these children's aggressive behaviors are fear based. We see the fear, the mental illness and anger disappear when we give them tools, such as words instead of physical violence and anger, to deal with the pain and fear," Karyn said in a recent article featuring TCU's work. "We think the greatest thing we can do is create an environment where they feel safe."

Karyn worked closely with Dr. Federici in the home program for the Jones that we featured on Dateline. They credit his amazing work, but she and Dr. David Cross have subsequently expanded into other research areas and developed their own parent-coach therapy program that emphasizes nurturing as much as structure. Just

like the Jones' credit Federici for helping them with Dane, many other parents credit Karyn with saving their families. You can read more about this in the articles below.

After our story originally aired in June 2003, Dateline, the Jones' family, Dr. Federici, and TCU received thousands of emails from parents with kids just like Dane. And while most of them said they felt more hopeful after watching our piece, they were desperate for help and direction.

Debbie Jones, Dr. Federici and Karyn Purvis agree that the answer lies with the parents themselves -- changing their attitudes and embracing new ways of dealing with their kids and providing a safe and nurturing place for their kids to develop. There's no "quick fix" with a pill or a punishment.

"We believe that empowered parents can become healers for even the most disturbed children," Karyn said.

"To those parents who are struggling, I want to say don't ever give up!" Debbie Jones told Dateline. "You are the key to helping your child. You will change as much or more than your special child. There are many questionable therapies and program or boot camps you could send your child to, expecting someone else to 'fix' your kid. But that's not the solution."

"I encourage you to keep your child with you and commit to sticking together as a family and getting the right help to learn how to get through all the challenge, frustration, grief, and fatigue that comes with it," she said. "It's the hardest thing you'll ever do, but it's worth it."

To read more about the work of Dr. Purvis and TCU's Institute for Child Development, go to:

- www.magazine.tcu.edu/articles/2006-01-cv.asp
- <http://www.fwweekly.com/content.asp?article=169>
- www.child.tcu.edu

To learn more about Dr. Federici and his work, go to his website: www.drfederici.com

To find other parents facing similar dilemmas, go to the Parents Network for the Post Institutionalized Child website at: www.pnpic.org

An encore presentation of Fighting for Dane airs Dateline Wednesday on West Coast only, 9 p.m.

URL: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/13327640/>

[MSN Privacy](#) . [Legal](#)
© 2007 MSNBC.com