



A Matter of Abuse



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Dedicated

To my wife and daughters

Chapter I

The Official Story

This is the official story of the incident as pieced together from written reports, interviews with staff and interested parties, as well as informal channels of communication. The narrative was written anonymously by a member of the staff known to have writing skills.

On the night of May 1, about eight-thirty p.m., while trying to put her eight-year-old daughter Melissa to bed, Mrs. Angela Gunnarsen (nee Bonicelli) hit her daughter in the face repeatedly when Melissa became defiant and refused to go to sleep. Though the child became passive and started crying out to her mother to stop hitting her, Mrs. Gunnarsen continued to hit the child harder and harder for a period of fifteen minutes. As a result, one of Melissa's eyes was partially closed and turned black and blue. Elsewhere on the child's face were inflicted scars, bruises and swellings.

Melissa's father, Andrew Gunnarsen, was not in the house at the time. He is a businessman, who was out on assigned duties commensurate with his occupation. There is no evidence Mr. Gunnarsen had any knowledge of his wife's actions in regard to their daughter until the next morning (see subsequent paragraphs for further information about the father's belated obtaining of such knowledge). Mr. Gunnarsen did not return home until

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close to eleven p.m. By that time, his wife had retired to her bed and his daughter was sleeping.

A second daughter Nicole, age eleven, was also preparing for bed at the time of the incident. Though she occupies a different room than Melissa, she heard Melissa screaming and ran to her sister's room. She saw her mother beating Melissa as reported above. What she saw caught her so off guard that for several moments all she could do was watch. This was interrupted when Melissa seeing her sister Nicole present, screamed out to Nicole for help. Nicole at that point yelled at her mother to stop. Nicole continued to yell for some five minutes. When this did not stop the beatings, Nicole threw herself at her mother and physically intervened, grabbing her mother's hands, courageously placing herself in between her mother and sister.

This action apparently startled Mrs. Gunnarsen and as a result she stopped beating Melissa. Mrs. Gunnarsen muttered an obscenity and sat down on the bed. She immediately hugged both of her children and assured them she did love them both and would never do anything to hurt either of them. The two girls cried and mother joined in. They sat and cried and hugged for about a half-hour. Subsequently, Mrs. Gunnarsen and Nicole left the room. Melissa went to sleep. Nicole went to her own bed. Mrs. Gunnarsen withdrew to the family room to watch TV for about another half-hour and then went to bed.

Upon returning home, Mr. Gunnarsen watched the eleven-p.m. news and read the daily newspaper for a short while before proceeding to bed himself. Mr. Gunnarsen does not leave for work until nine a.m. because of his regular evening hours out of the house. Consequently, he is the last person to arise in the morning. Mrs. Gunnarsen arises at six a.m. to prepare the children for school, Nicole being in the sixth grade and Melissa in the third. Mr. Gunnarsen usually awakens just prior to the children's departure, often seeing them out the door.

On the morning of May 2, the usual schedule was followed by all concerned. As the children were going out the door and Mrs. Gunnarsen was in the kitchen starting to prepare breakfast for her husband before he went to work, Melissa stopped,

turned to her father and said, “Daddy, Mommy hurt me badly last night.”

She pointed to her eye, which was still black and blue, and to her face, which exhibited signs of puffiness. Before her father could respond, she quickly exited the house and went to school. Andrew Gunnarsen moved into the kitchen, sat down for his breakfast, turned to his wife and said, “Melissa says you hurt her last night, and her face looks a mess. What the hell is going on?”

Mr. Gunnarsen reports his wife turned pale at the question and sat rather artificially in her chair at the kitchen table. She started to cry. “Angela, what happened last night?” Mr. Gunnarsen said he asked his wife.

“She would not go to bed for me last night and so I hit her. But I couldn’t stop hitting her. I couldn’t stop hitting her until Nicole grabbed me and actually put herself in between me and Melissa. I didn’t mean to; I didn’t plan to. It just happened. You know how difficult Melissa can be, especially at bedtime. I guess I was just impatient, angry and I couldn’t take it any longer. So I hit her, I hit her, I hit her!”

Mrs. Gunnarsen reports her husband Andrew looked at her in shock and in askance. “I thought I knew you better. How could you do such a thing?”

Her reply was to indicate that Melissa was a difficult child as even he knew and finally her patience broke. She could not take it any longer and just could not control her anger against Melissa. She knew it was wrong, but she was unable to stop.

She went on to suggest that she might need professional counseling and that he might have to watch the children for a while lest she repeat this action. He promised he would be home early that night, canceling any evening meetings and assuring her he would put the children to bed that night. She was also to call him at work several times during the day and let him know how she was doing. Such was the gist of their conversation.

He prepared for work and left at the customary time. Approximately an hour and a half later, while Mrs. Gunnarsen was at home cleaning the house, she received a phone call

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from the school nurse. The school nurse mentioned what she saw in Melissa's face and indicated that Mrs. Gunnarsen should get some help if there was a problem. She further stated that since this was a first-time incident, she did not foresee any other actions being taken by the school or appropriate authorities.

The principal of the school, Mr. Rizzick, had also seen Melissa's face that morning, as he had made it a policy to greet all the children on their arrival at school. He did not talk to the school nurse. Rather, after greeting all the children, he walked into his office and immediately called the state child-abuse hotline. He reported what he saw to the appropriate state authorities and provided names, addresses, phone numbers and other information he had available concerning the parents as well as the children.

Social workers Ann Brown and Jolene Raycox were assigned to the case. Under state procedures, they were to go to the house of the parents that day and interview them first (if possible) before the children arrived home. The children would be interviewed subsequently and privately. Following the interview, the social workers would report back to their immediate superior, the case manager. The threesome would proceed to decide on what would be the next step in the case. The possibilities ranged from the extremes of dismissing the case out of hand, if nothing was perceived to have transpired, to removing the children from the situation if the situation was perceived as imminently dangerous to the welfare of the children. Other than removing the children (if something was perceived to have happened), various possible actions could be taken. The social workers and the case manager had widespread flexibility in working out a plan of action depending on the situation itself.

At precisely 2:02 p.m., social workers Ann Brown and Jolene Raycox knocked on the door of the house of Angela and Andrew Gunnarsen. Mrs. Gunnarsen answered the door. She was informed that they were social workers for the state Children's Affairs Division. They were there to investigate a possible child-abuse situation. They needed to talk to Mrs.

Gunnarsen, her husband, and her children. Mrs. Gunnarsen was hesitant about admitting them until they informed her that if she did not cooperate voluntarily, they had the authority to call the police and force entry, have her arrested on the spot and brought in for questioning. Also, refusal to cooperate under state laws was an automatic admission of guilt. Children's safety required assuming the children must be protected at all costs and thus parents must be assumed to be abusers.

Upon hearing this litany, Mrs. Gunnarsen let the social workers into the house. The house was clean, perhaps compulsively so was the impression of Ann Brown. Compulsiveness would go far in explaining Mrs. Gunnarsen's abusing her child. A compulsive parent would be too demanding of a child and quick to strike out and eventually abuse the child when the child did not meet up to the compulsive's expectations.

Sitting in the living room with Mrs. Gunnarsen, the social workers took turns questioning her about the previous evening's events. Using tested procedures they alternated between threats and subtle cajoling. They could be judge or cop one moment and friend and confidante the next. Mrs. Gunnarsen quickly confessed to having hit Melissa, but she denied it was abusive. She insisted it was for the moment and that the child did not exhibit any significant facial characteristics that would demonstrate abuse.

Mrs. Gunnarsen was extremely nervous during this interview, unable to remain seated for more than a few moments, her right foot shaking continually, her right hand combing her hair almost non-stop. Her talk was fast but staccato. Her left hand seemed to gesture in contradiction to her words, felt both Brown and Raycox. Her eyes could not look directly at either Brown or Raycox.

The more they talked the more the social workers became convinced Mrs. Gunnarsen had indeed abused the child. At this point they were unsure of the husband's role in all of this, even though she told them her husband had not been home at the time of the incident as he had been working. Such statements

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are under regulation guidelines to be treated with skepticism, since both parents are assumed to be either involved in the act or one parent consciously or unconsciously gives the other parent permission to abuse the child. It would be up to the Gunnarsens to prove that Andrew Gunnarsen was not also abusing the child.

When the children arrived home from school, they were brought face to face with the social workers. They had to be told their regular schedules, for the day would be set aside. The parents had them both in dance, and this was their normal dance day. Obviously that had to be cancelled in order for the social workers to ascertain the truth of the situation and protect the children if necessary from further abuse. The children would also need to be told why the social workers were present.

Ann Brown insisted on the girls calling her Ann, feeling that would help ease their tension. She wanted to be their friend, someone they could talk to one on one and not be afraid to talk to. When she did explain why she and Jolene Raycox were in the house, Melissa started to scream and run throughout the house, finally coming to rest in her mother's lap and saying, "No, no, no!" She turned to the social workers and added, "I won't let you take my mother away."

Having been through this scene before, Brown told Melissa that she was there to help Melissa and Nicole and to help her mother too. She did not want to take her mother away; she wanted to help everybody.

This was of course a slight prevarication. Social workers in child-abuse situations may very well have to require the separation of parent and child, but that is not to be dealt with unless it actually happens. Telling the child that could happen (at least hypothetically, though often actually, in such actions) leads the child to assume it will happen. Once the child makes that assumption, the child can be very difficult to deal with. The child may refuse to speak up; the child may be too emotionally distraught by the possibility of losing the parent as to be unable to speak; and in a few specific situations, the child may want the

parent out of the picture and is more than willing to exaggerate the truth or make up stories if that will remove the parent.

Melissa, Mrs. Gunnarsen had said, was medically certified as hyperactive. Ann Brown had no background in the field of hyperactivity, but Jolene Raycox did. Ann Brown was the point person, the leader of the team, but Jolene Raycox was the medically, psychologically trained partner who could make sense out of such claims. Mrs. Gunnarsen did provide medical records to the team certifying that Melissa was indeed hyperactive.

As a hyperactive child, Melissa would require more discipline, more control. Specifically, the doctors had agreed that in Melissa's case, corporeal punishment would be necessary at times, simply to focus her attention. Despite this in writing, Ann Brown was uneasy about corporeal punishment; it could too easily be used as an excuse for abusive behavior by the parent. She had seen it before, and it appeared to her as if she were seeing it again.

On the other hand, Jolene Raycox had worked with hyperactive children before and knew whereof the doctors spoke. She also realized that raising such a child would and could be difficult. Additionally, if the child was medicated, that made the situation more complex. Certain types of medicines for hyperactive children were known to provoke bizarre, occasionally paranoid symptoms in some children. If such symptoms persisted, the child would be almost impossible to control by anybody, least of all a frustrated parent trying to put a medically unwilling child to bed.

Melissa's behavior to this point suggested hyperactivity. As Jolene Raycox reread the report with Melissa sobbing in her mother's arms, the social worker in her yielded to the frustrated mother and felt she had misread the situation. Maybe at the worst, the mother had overreacted but not abusively, and not without cause. If so, all the mother would need is some counseling. Surely the doctors could find some other way to treat Melissa.

Ann Brown maintained her reserve and skepticism. She had to be shown otherwise. She was still unmoved and as team

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leader, her word would have more authority than Raycox's. The fact is she had been a social worker in child-abuse cases for some fifteen years. Jolene Raycox had been one for only two years. Ann Brown's credentials and work with the agency were exemplary. She had been a team leader for nearly seven years. She was now partnered with Raycox for nearly two years in order that Raycox would be trained properly with a veteran in the field. It was assumed that within several months, Ann Brown would be appointed case manager herself. She had the seniority, the experience, the recognition within the agency and she had applied for the position. When the agency wanted to explain what a social worker did and was, it pointed to Ann Brown. The agency fully expected some of Ann Brown would rub off on Jolene Raycox.

Jolene Raycox had received a high honor in being teamed up with Ann Brown. The agency felt when Raycox was hired that she had the potential of being one of their top social workers, but she had to be trained in the agency way by the best; thus, she was teamed with Ann Brown.

Ann Brown turned to Mrs. Gunnarsen and said, "Angela—may I call you Angela? I really need to talk to the children now, alone. Why don't I go upstairs with them and Jolene will stay here with you?"

One reason Ann Brown had maintained her reserve and skepticism and why she asked at this point to speak to the children alone was Nicole's response to her answering Melissa's question about removing the mother from the children. Nicole had been quiet — brutally quiet, not so much a whimper or a sigh — no sound from her whatsoever. Physically, she did not change facial color; she gave no involuntary body reactions. To a person with a trained eye as was Ann Brown's, the reaction of Nicole suggested the child expected or assumed the parent would be leaving under the circumstances. She took it in stride as if the possibility of removing a parent was but the natural consequence of what the parent had done.

Ann Brown wanted to explore that reaction privately and now, while the thought was still fresh in Nicole's mind. At this

point, Mrs. Gunnarsen became highly resistant. There was no way she would allow the children to be interviewed privately. She insisted on her right to be present at the questioning. Brown and Raycox tried to reason with her, pointing out the necessity of finding out the truth of the situation, and that if the truth was that she did only what she said she did, she had nothing to be afraid of. Mrs. Gunnarsen, however, continued to resist, insisting that the social workers could and would manipulate the children into saying whatever the social workers wanted them to say.

Brown and Raycox denied this as even being possible. They cited studies showing that children do not lie about such matters. Further, the presence of the mother might intimidate the children. Only a private interview could secure the truth. Mrs. Gunnarsen would not hear of it.

Ann Brown calmly told Mrs. Gunnarsen that either she permit the interview or she would be forced to call the police. To emphasize the point and prove she was serious, Ann Brown walked to the phone. It was but a few yards away, visible to all the parties present and easily accessible to her. She picked up the phone, dialed the operator and stated, "This is a Children's Affairs Division emergency call. My code number is 630202. This is Ann Brown."

The operator checked into the computer, which could confirm or deny that such a call was genuine. The operator replied that the information was confirmed and she should state her emergency. Standard procedure is to ask the operator to hold and ask the client once more to give permission. If the client did so, the operator was told the emergency was hereby cancelled. If the client still refused, the operator was instructed to contact the local police and order they be sent out to the house to enforce the request of the division. Ann Brown put the operator on hold and following procedure, asked Mrs. Gunnarsen if it were necessary to call in the police. Mrs. Gunnarsen replied it was not — the social worker could talk to the children. Ann Brown cancelled the emergency.

While Jolene Raycox stayed with Mrs. Gunnarsen, Ann Brown escorted the children upstairs. Mrs. Gunnarsen was

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visibly agitated at this, and as a result, Jolene Raycox started asking Mrs. Gunnarsen all sorts of questions. Each in its own way would help the investigation along. Questions were asked about Mr. Gunnarsen, when he might return, his work, his relationship to the family, and specifically the children, who handled the discipline, who did the cooking, who did the cleaning, Mrs. Gunnarsen's out-of-the-house activities, where the family went on vacation last year, how often the children were out of school and for what reasons, who the family doctor was and how long they had lived in this house, among other questions.

In reply to these questions, it was discovered that the Gunnarsens had been in the state only six months. Mr. Gunnarsen's business had transferred him here. The family was still finding its way around. The children had been disoriented by the move as had Mrs. Gunnarsen. Raycox noted afterwards how the stress of the move could have impacted Mrs. Gunnarsen and made her abusive. Her husband's long hours could have complicated the situation, making her less likely to cope. She was the disciplinarian, he but rarely, as he was not home when discipline needed to be administered. She was the housewife extraordinaire, though tired of housework and maybe too tired of it, to the point of anger directed at Melissa for not being a housewife's dream child.

The children's school schedule here was normal but would be correlated with the school's reports. Since the family had been in the area a short time, the name of the family doctor in the previous residence was obtained. He would be contacted to see if there was a pattern of abuse. No specific answer could be given as to when Mr. Gunnarsen himself might return. The other information obtained in this interview was routine and held to be unimportant.

Meanwhile upstairs, Ann Brown had taken Melissa and Nicole first into the two girls' rooms and then into the master bedroom. This was done to obtain a geography of the events. Knowing what took place in each room, which room belonged to which person and the positioning of the participants in the

context of the geography made it possible to ascertain the truth of the situation if accusations did arise from the children.

The children were told that their mother had admitted hitting Melissa hard and their mother wanted them to cooperate by telling Ann the truth. This way “Mommy” could be helped, and Melissa and Nicole could be helped. “You do want to help Mommy, don’t you, Melissa and Nicole?” was the final question before the interrogation began.

At first the children were reluctant to answer the questions, but as Ann — as she kept calling herself and having the children call her when they spoke to her — kept prodding and using approved psychological teachings to get around their resistance, the children became cooperative. They stated what had been given at the beginning of this narrative. In response she gave them each one of her business cards and told them to call her or the official toll free number any time if any more such incidents occurred. The children were assured such behavior by their mother was inappropriate and not good for children. She was there to help them and her mother. She would make sure their mother never did this again.

She talked with the children about how they could protect themselves in the future. They were told that if they were afraid such an incident would recur, they should scream as loud as they could, they should try to run away, run out of the house, go to a neighbor’s, go to the police or call the police from somebody else’s house. In case of absolute necessity, one should try to distract their mother while the other ran for help. No one, however, should take undue risks. If all else failed, as soon as possible tell a teacher at school or the principal or someone else who could be trusted to call the state for help.

At this point, Nicole broke down and started to cry, followed by Melissa. Ann, seeing their tears, was herself caught up in the emotion of the moment and took hold of Melissa and cuddled the child in her arms. It was at this point that Mr. Gunnarsen walked into the room. He was told by a surprised Ann Brown that she was not through interviewing the children and would he

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be so kind as to wait downstairs. She then closed the door as he went down the stairs.

Mr. Gunnarsen had arrived home but a few moments previously. He had come home early from work to check up on his wife and children and found social worker Jolene Raycox talking with Mrs. Gunnarsen. He asked what was going on and was informed by Raycox that an official investigation was underway to determine if an abusive situation had occurred. Raycox was interviewing Mrs. Gunnarsen and her partner Ann Brown was interviewing the children upstairs. Since he was there now, she would like to ask him some questions. Mr. Gunnarsen asked how long the children had been upstairs. Mrs. Gunnarsen looked at her watch and estimated about an hour. Mr. Gunnarsen felt that was unacceptable and declared his intention to check on the children and see what was going on. Raycox tried to stop him but he ran up the stairs and hearing the speaking went in and saw the scene previously described. He headed back downstairs and went to his wife.

He took his wife aside for a few moments at which Jolene Raycox was not present. She felt they should have a few moments to themselves since this was the first he had known the investigation was going on. After approximately five minutes, she called out, "Mr. and Mrs. Gunnarsen, we do need to talk further."

The Gunnarsens returned. Mr. Gunnarsen sat to the left of Jolene Raycox, Mrs. Gunnarsen to the right. Mr. Gunnarsen was exceedingly hostile to the presence of Jolene Raycox and at this point was totally uncooperative.

Other than providing basic information about his work, he refused to answer any of Raycox's questions, no matter how she asked them. He kept interrupting with questions of his own, particularly with how long the children would be upstairs with the other social worker. Raycox could only reply as long as was necessary, but that it should not be much longer. Mr. Gunnarsen became more agitated as Raycox repeated this answer several times. By the third time she had given this answer, he jumped out of his chair and said loudly he would bring the children down if they did not come down immediately.

Upstairs, Ann Brown, after having been made aware of Mr. Gunnarsen's presence, was bringing her interview and consolation to a close. Mr. Gunnarsen's voice was loud enough to be heard throughout the house, and Ann Brown felt she had to go downstairs and into the living room as Mr. Gunnarsen was declaring that if they did not come down immediately, he would go up and get them.

Seeing the children, Mr. Gunnarsen immediately calmed down and embraced the girls. Both Melissa and Nicole were happy to see their father and almost seemed to jump into his arms. Both declared their love for their father and he reciprocated.

Seizing the moment, Ann Brown proceeded to question Mr. Gunnarsen about his whereabouts and his knowledge of the incident. He answered tersely but precisely as previously indicated. He volunteered no information. His answers were specifically formulated for the question he was asked. When Ann Brown and Jolene Raycox teamed up to try to prod him into providing more information, he became silent and simply shook his shoulders. When asked what that meant, he said, "Nothing."

Ann Brown bluntly asked if he were going to be more helpful, meaning more forthcoming, and he replied, "No."

Brown explained to him as previously to his wife the legal consequences of uncooperativeness, including calling in the police. He went to the phone and said, "Do you know the number? I'll call them myself and while I'm at it, I will call an attorney, if you don't mind."

Ann Brown declared neither was necessary at this point. This was an investigation; nobody was accusing anybody of anything. Besides, things could be handled, Mrs. Gunnarsen was open for counseling and Melissa was not hurt excessively. Furthermore, she had enough information now and wanted to thank them for their time.

The children had observed this whole scene but were quiet. They stayed around their father and appeared to avoid their mother. Melissa went so far as to sit on her father's lap toward the end of this scene until Ann Brown proclaimed the intention of leaving.

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Our information on the Gunnarsen's actions and reactions after the departure of Brown and Raycox is sketchy. We do know the parents questioned the children about what they said upstairs to Ann Brown. We also know the parents talked to each other about the presence of the social workers. We do know that Mrs. Gunnarsen came to believe the children were manipulated by Ann Brown, as will become clear below.

Ann Brown and Jolene Raycox returned to their office and presented their report to the case manager. When each one was asked by the case manger what their recommendations were for this case, each one clearly declared that she was convinced the situation was dangerous enough to warrant either immediate removal of the children from the house or the removal of the mother, the second option being only if the case manager could be convinced that Mr. Gunnarsen was not an abuser too. Brown and Raycox did not like his attitude, but they felt he had not been abusive. Nevertheless, they wanted an outside opinion. In either scenario, this meant the presence of the case manager.

Regulations require that no children could be removed nor could a parent be removed from a situation without the additional approval of the case manager. Such person would be required to visit the family and make an independent assessment, confirming what the social workers' preliminary assessment had found and recommended. Regulations further require that when a case manager must make this determination, that person is to be accompanied by the police, who would (a) actually remove the children present under the direction of the case manager, and (b) ensure the protection of both the division workers and the children.

The case manager would go with the social workers and the police to the house of the children and proceed to question the parents and children appropriately. After deliberation and consultation, if necessary, with her superior, the office manager, the children of a parent could be involuntarily removed from the situation.

It is standard procedure when the situation progresses to this point that the complete team (police and division staff)

converge on the residence in the evening when the family is all home. The police would be contacted prior to the convergence and directed to observe the home and ensure that all the family was present prior to the team's entry. Case manager Sharon Steinwitz accordingly called the local police and provided the prerequisite information and directions, citing the state law governing the procedures. The police did not know the case manager or these particular staff persons and thus insisted on credentials.

Steinwitz asked if they had a fax machine. They did and after making the appropriate connections, a copy of their credentials came through in seconds. The credentials were recognized as proper by the police and the procedures were instituted. Police records indicate arrival at seven-fifteen p.m. Originally, the team had planned to move in at seven-thirty p.m. but police surveillance indicated that Mr. Gunnarsen might be about to leave the house. If that happened prior to the team's entry, the team would at the least have to postpone entry until his return. At the worst, it would mean waiting another day to enter, but that could leave the children in serious jeopardy. Intervention without all family members present is difficult and produces complications the team would prefer to avoid. Among these would be legal ramifications such as insufficient legal notice prior to removing a child (courts have been known to chastise agencies for being impatient in such situations, to the point of rejecting the agency probe altogether in consequence).

Apart from the legal problems are the psychological problems. The agency appears too intrusive and bureaucratically insensitive when it intervenes without all parties present. A parent finding the children gone without having had the opportunity to say goodbye on being notified this would happen in many cases makes the agency's goal of reconciliation difficult.

On the other side, by going in at seven-fifteen p.m. instead of the planned seven-thirty p.m., the division staff were only able to endow the police perfunctorily with the knowledge needed to handle the case properly. The staff had a full-scale checklist and analysis to present to the police prior to entry. But

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such information needed all the time up to seven-thirty p.m., and even fifteen minutes less meant details had to be omitted. Such omission would create problematic situations. Indeed, this is why the situation developed as indicated below.

Ann Brown officially knocked at the door, as she was the senior social worker and one of the two the family would recognize. Mr. Gunnarsen answered the door. Seeing the police present, he became furious and was about to refuse entry when one of the police officers (there were two) informed Mr. Gunnarsen that under state law in a suspected child-abuse situation if the parent did not allow entry, the parents were to be arrested on the spot and the children seized and removed from the home. If the parents had not abused a child, there were no grounds for fear. Mr. Gunnarsen reluctantly relented and allowed the team entry; however, his mood was bitter.

He informed the team that he was considering obtaining a lawyer. Ann Brown said that was his right but that cooperation rather than legal confrontation in the present situation would be easier for all concerned. He did not call a lawyer. Ann Brown quickly introduced the case manager Sharon Steinwitz. Steinwitz explained it was necessary for her to interview the children and the parents in order to form her own opinion. The police were present because it might be necessary to take legal action, but she hoped that would be unnecessary and that all could work together. After all, the children were important, and as parents they surely could see the need for concern for their own children.

She explained she would like to interview the children with Ann Brown present to consider what happened. Mrs. Gunnarsen became hysterical at this point and shouted obscenities at Brown. She declared that her daughters had told her that Brown coerced them into saying there was abuse when in fact there was not. Mrs. Gunnarsen made a move in the direction of Brown, but Mr. Gunnarsen stopped his wife. Police officer Tom Gisowski also moved over to Mrs. Gunnarsen and informed the Gunnarsens that a repeat of such an outburst would mean immediate incarceration and the removal of the children.

Nicole and Melissa had been upstairs playing until they heard their mother scream. They both rushed downstairs and saw Mr. Gunnarsen's intervention and heard police officer Gisowski's comments. Nicole blanched. Melissa panicked and went into a frenzy. She ran throughout the house screaming, hitting at the wall, kicking furniture, even falling down and spinning around on the floor. She proclaimed she would not go, nobody would hurt her mother, she loved her parents, everybody was out to get her, meaning herself, Melissa. On her second pass to the foyer where the team stood, she suddenly veered at Ann Brown and kicked Brown in the left leg and started to punch her. Brown and Mr. Gunnarsen were prepared to stop this and would have, but the second police officer, Emilio Antonez, perceiving this as a threat to Brown, pounced on the child and knocked her to the floor.

This action, of course, was against regulations. A child would have had to display a weapon and been capable of using it before such action would be warranted. Neither situation was present here, and thus the officer's action was unacceptable. Naturally, the unfortunate deviance from regulations occurred because of the missing fifteen minutes. It was simply not possible to say all that had to be said before entry. Consequently, the police officer did not understand such behavior was improper. In light of the possibility that Mr. Gunnarsen would have left before the planned entry, any court would realize the inadvertence of the error and the importance of upholding the agency despite the incident.

Jolene Raycox was the first to regain composure and chastised the policeman publicly. She apologized to the family and to the children with a special apology to Melissa. She tried to explain that she knew Melissa was overwrought, that she knew Melissa was sometimes sick, that she understood the disease called hyperactivity and how it set her off at times of stress. She knew that Melissa was scared for her mother and herself, and it was okay to be afraid. Also she knew that being afraid like this could cause Melissa to go into hyperactive behavior and she understood that. So of course Melissa would try to strike out at

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her perceived enemies, especially Ann Brown. Ann had talked to her and was the one Melissa knew best and indeed would be the one to blame.

Jolene Raycox said if she were in Melissa's situation she would want to do what Melissa did. But she wanted Melissa to know that Ann, the police officer, Sharon, or herself, Jolene, were not her enemies but her friends there to help her if she would just let them. They wanted to help her parents too and not hurt anyone. They had to be sure she was safe and protected. Could she understand that?

Melissa indicated she could and calmed down. She immediately ran to her mother, who took Melissa in her arms and led her to a sofa in the nearby living room, where they both sat down. Mr. Gunnarsen asked the team to come into the living room. All did except Officer Antonez, who felt he had to stay by the door, just in case. Officer Gisowski moved to the left of Mrs. Gunnarsen and Melissa but remained standing yet keeping a watchful eye on the two. The other team members and Mr. Gunnarsen sat in various chairs around the living room.

Steinwitz again explained the necessity of her interviewing the children with Ann Brown present and not the parents. Mr. Gunnarsen said that would not be possible. He had been led to believe that Ann Brown manipulated the previous interview; consequently, he would not allow final action with regard to the children to occur without his presence and knowledge. Steinwitz relented and indicated he could go upstairs and listen to her interview the children provided, with Ann Brown being present as well. Mr. Gunnarsen was reluctant but agreed. The police would remain downstairs just in case, along with Raycox and Mrs. Gunnarsen.

Upstairs went the threesome plus the children. Brown remained in the background for the interview and never asked a question of the children. Both Steinwitz and Mr. Gunnarsen asked questions of the children. The interview reconfirmed the story already given. The children further indicated that their father had never beaten them, a light spanking once in a great while, but nothing serious.

On the other hand, Mrs. Gunnarsen had committed abuse previously to both children. Mr. Gunnarsen was visibly shocked and disturbed by the answer of the children. Though he pressed like a defense attorney to a hostile witness on the courtroom stand, the father could not shake the children from their story. Eventually, he broke into tears and had to be consoled by Steinwitz. When he broke into tears, Ann Brown also broke into tears.

Steinwitz was reminded by Brown's tears of Mrs. Gunnarsen's accusation and Mr. Gunnarsen's belief. She asked the children if they had been coerced, forced, in any way threatened by Ann Brown to tell this story. The children said no. They were further asked if because of anything Ann Brown said or did, the story were untrue. The children reaffirmed the validity of the story.

The children were asked to stay upstairs while Steinwitz would talk to the parents. When the threesome came downstairs, Mrs. Gunnarsen was seen to be visibly upset. Steinwitz pulled aside Raycox while Mr. Gunnarsen sat beside his wife and held her. Raycox indicated that Mrs. Gunnarsen was angry, hostile, nasty and mean during the time the threesome were upstairs. Her language was filthy, her tone harsh and no ordinary conversation could be carried on. Both police officers had become concerned and tried to quiet down Mrs. Gunnarsen but to no avail. Officer Gisowski felt the situation was getting out of control and he was about to place Mrs. Gunnarsen under arrest when the three came downstairs. Mr. Gunnarsen was now able to bring control back to his wife, which made the situation controllable again.

Steinwitz asked to speak to the parents with the social workers present. Mrs. Gunnarsen screamed that she would not talk to anybody as long as that _____ (obscenity deleted from official records) was present, meaning Ann Brown. Brown excused herself and said this was a time for Steinwitz to be alone with the parents. Officer Gisowski declared that he would not leave Steinwitz by herself with the Gunnarsens. Steinwitz replied that Gisowski could be close, just in case, but she needed privacy to deal with the situation. Gisowski complied.

A Matter of Abuse

Steinwitz and the Gunnarsens went into the kitchen, where seated at the kitchen table, Steinwitz repeated the basic outline of the children's story and asked for Mrs. Gunnarsen's comments. Mrs. Gunnarsen stuck by her previous story. Mr. Gunnarsen then repeated what he had heard and observed. Mrs. Gunnarsen screamed, "It's all a lie concocted by that _____ (same obscenity as previously, officially deleted) Ann Brown."

According to Mrs. Gunnarsen, Ann Brown manipulated the children. Mr. Gunnarsen pointed out that the children denied this. Steinwitz indicates she was impressed with Mr. Gunnarsen for doing this in front of her. It clearly convinced her he was not abusive and that he was upset with his wife for her actions. He did not go out of his way to protect his wife or keep her in a lie. He was willing to protect his children. This factor became an important point regarding the children as will become evident soon.

Mrs. Gunnarsen cried. Steinwitz said she was convinced that the children had told the truth and that she would be required to take some action on the children's behalf, perhaps moving them. Both Gunnarsens immediately reacted negatively to this news. Steinwitz said the alternative would be the removal of Mrs. Gunnarsen from the household. Mrs. Gunnarsen would have none of this. Mr. Gunnarsen was quiet, apparently reflecting on this. He asked what that meant. His wife became linguistically abusive to him. But he repeated the question.

Steinwitz said he would be responsible for the children. Mrs. Gunnarsen would have to see an approved counselor, preferably one arranged by the Children's Affairs Division. In any such situation, the counselor would have to provide regular detailed information about Mrs. Gunnarsen in order for the division to be able to ascertain when Mrs. Gunnarsen might be allowed to return. The division, after all, was not interested in destroying broken families but rather fixing them like a mechanic does the family car. The division was the mechanic in this case. Mrs. Gunnarsen would also have to leave the house that night or else the children could not stay. This meant arranging a place to stay for her. Were there friends or relatives who could be contacted

that night and take her in for a time? Mr. Gunnarsen thought there were, but he would have to phone them first.

Mrs. Gunnarsen could not believe her ears and insisted either she or her children would have to be carried out, kicking and screaming all the way. Steinwitz insisted that while such could be arranged, it was not helpful and would definitely complicate any arrangements. Under the circumstances, it might be better to move the children than force Mrs. Gunnarsen into such behavior. Mr. Gunnarsen interrupted and asked to be allowed to speak to his wife alone. Steinwitz felt this was a good idea, said so and left the kitchen.

While we are not privy to that conversation, we do know the consequences. Mrs. Gunnarsen agreed to leave the house that evening. Mr. Gunnarsen would have control over the children. Mrs. Gunnarsen would see a division-authorized counselor, who would report regularly to the division on Mrs. Gunnarsen's progress. Mrs. Gunnarsen and Mr. Gunnarsen would sign papers, not legally binding, but rather acknowledging that the aforementioned agreement would indeed be the procedure in the present situation. Mrs. Gunnarsen was calm and composed. Thus, Steinwitz dismissed the police, feeling any threat in the situation was resolved. The police did tell Steinwitz that if she needed them, call and they would be right back. She did not call them back. Mr. Gunnarsen called a friend and though did not explain the situation on the phone, was able to arrange for housing for his wife. He did promise his wife would explain all upon arrival.

Mrs. Gunnarsen did pack up and leave. She was told prior to departure that if she forgot anything to call her husband and he would arrange for their pick-ups. Also, she was not to see the children for at least a week, possibly longer. The division would decide when that was best. Therefore, if she needed to come home for anything, she must do it before the children were released from school. The school would be notified of this provision as would the police. Nonetheless, all records would be confidential.

After Mrs. Gunnarsen's exit, Steinwitz instructed Brown and Raycox to return first to the office to clear up the paperwork

