

"He worked his way through the sub-trades, stating he wanted to build his own house some day, but he was often plagued with on-the-job accidents. Again, I suspect a lack of judgement. He fell off roofs, he put a nail through his hand with a nail gun, objects landed in his eye, etc. Through all this he maintained a cheerful attitude, often working 12 hours a day.

"On July 5, 1990, Jeff attended a friend's party in the suburbs where he lived. During the evening he took four prescription pills that were being passed around. The other kids took two pills. Jeff didn't read the label because he couldn't read it. The pills were slow acting morphine. He died of an accidental drug overdose. He was 21 years old.

"I have shared this very private story to emphasize this isn't an academic exercise for me. I, as a very conscientious pregnant mother, had the right to know alcohol could damage my child. I believe Jeff's death was connected to his birth. I urge you to use your position on this committee to advocate for the right of every parent to have the knowledge that when you are pregnant there is no safe amount of alcohol."²⁸

ADOPTIVE CHILDREN WITH FAS/FAE

Evidence presented to the Sub-Committee indicates that many FAE children, and some FAS children, are adopted, their birth mothers being unable or unwilling to keep them. In many, perhaps most, cases, the adoptive parents are unaware that the children have been damaged by alcohol until the child is at least several years old, and perhaps not until he or she starts school. At that stage, their learning disabilities and their inherent socially dysfunctional traits will usually become obvious.

The adoptive parents then find themselves faced with a medical and social situation for which they are often totally unprepared. The Sub-Committee received testimony from two adoptive mothers of FAS and FAE children, Mrs. Shirley Joiner and Mrs. Lesley Carberry. Their testimony, often poignant and sometimes even shocking, deeply impressed the members of the Sub-Committee. Their testimony should be read by anyone wishing to appreciate and understand the immense difficulties encountered by parents — adoptive or natural — who must cope with the rearing of children afflicted by FAS and FAE. Excerpts from their testimony are presented below.

Mrs. Shirley Joiner and her husband, Dennis, adopted a boy with FAE:

"Eleven years ago we adopted a five-year-old boy named Ethan . . . Last year my 15-year-old son spent over 100 days in prison. He is no longer in prison, but he is not free either. He is serving a life sentence for consumption of alcohol before birth . . . When we adopted Ethan we knew he was hyperactive. Lots of kids are, so we didn't pay too much attention to that . . . When he started Kindergarten, that is when his problems started.

"These kids have no fear of danger. I remember even when he was five years old . . . (he) would climb trees as high as they grow them in British Columbia without any fear at all of falling . . . They can never relate behaviour to consequences. If they suffer consequences in one situation, they cannot transfer that information to another situation.

"These kids need 24-hour supervision. You'd think by the time they reached adolescence you could back off a bit, but it's exactly the opposite. It seems as though they need even closer supervision in their adolescence, more so even than when they're toddlers.

". . . one of the rules we (had) established was that my bedroom was my refuge and he had no business coming in there when the door was locked. Consistently he'd force his way in. It just seemed as though he delighted in tormenting me. A few months later we discovered that during this

²⁸ Proceedings, Issue 13, pp. 27-28.