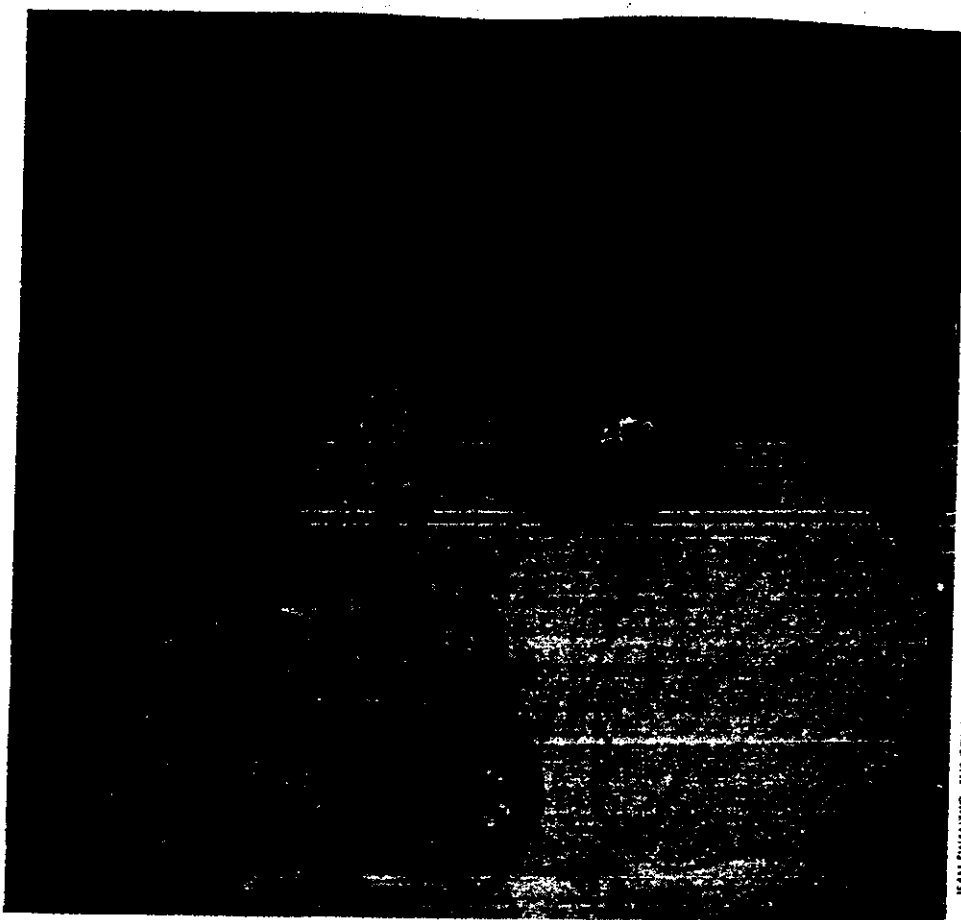


Taking Our Children, Part II

My Son Michael

by Isaac Dawson

JAN SWARTKO, THE COMMUNITY AT ISLAND NOVA

Isaac Dawson and his son, Michael (1990): "his usual smiling, bubbly self."

AS I WRITE, I AWAIT A DECISION from the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia to tell me whether or not, under the law, I kidnapped my own 12-year-old son, Michael. He has lived with me since he was three years old, and since 1986 I have lived in the Community at Myrtle Tree Farm in Waterville, Nova Scotia.

The press and others have repeatedly accused our communities of kidnapping children and separating families. When that flamboyant claim is made, no one seems to remember that family breakdown and custody disputes are routine nowadays in our broken culture and that parents living in our communities must make the same hard choices as anyone else—as do all parents who love their children.

Trying to follow my Christian faith and raise my son accordingly, I have experienced the painful double bind of two persistent lies: the one that blames the Community at Myrtle Tree Farm for the choices I make about my son, and the other that, simply because of my association with the community, discredits me and presumes me guilty. The persistent lies and inaccuracies reported in the press have

nothing to do with me or with our beliefs as a community.

Almost a decade ago I left the life I had always known for the life I had always desired. My then four-year-old son loved his life in the Community at Myrtle Tree Farm. One sunny fall day in 1987 a sedan and a police cruiser drove up the long driveway to the farmhouse we shared with 25 other members. My son and I were in the yard feeding the chickens. Two women approached us. They informed me that they were investigating a complaint of child abuse. My son was his usual smiling bubbly self; I assumed that the women would quickly be able to discern that we were fine. They said, however, that they were going to take Michael to the hospital for a complete examination. I was stunned. In the more affluent neighborhood where I grew up this would never have happened.

I soon realized that my new beliefs and way of living had put me in a vulnerable position. The examination went well and the doctor gave my son a clean bill of health. Several days later, however, I was served with

a notice to appear in the local Family Court. It turned out that the doctor had been given some newspaper articles about the community, and he had signed an affidavit written by a social worker reacting to those articles. The affidavit bore no relation to what the doctor had observed of my son or to the truth of our lives.

Working from the affidavit, the judge gave the local social services agency author-

Two officers literally pried my son's hands from around my neck, ripping him off me as he screamed "No! No! No!"

ity to investigate. The judge assured me that she just wanted "a window on our life" to make sure nothing was amiss. That "window" turned into a five-month ordeal that eventually took us to the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia.

One evening during the course of the Family Court proceedings, five police cruisers and no fewer than 10 officers, accompa-

nied by social workers, came to the farm to apprehend my then four-year-old son. Michael was helping with chores in the barn when they arrived. It was a scene I will never forget. Although I didn't resist the authorities, I could not consent to them taking my son either. The officers pleaded with me and tried to intimidate me. Michael was clinging to me with all his might. An intimate, but divided crowd—our household and some neighbors amidst social workers and Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers—hovered intensely in our small barn. Two officers literally pried my son's hands from around my neck, ripping him off me as he screamed "No! No! No!"

They lowered Michael into the back seat of one of the cruisers and whisked him off into the night with lights flashing. When asked, one of the social workers ashamedly acknowledged with a nod of her head that what was happening to my son at that very moment was itself child abuse. The officers were clearly uncomfortable, but they were under orders—orders from the social workers. Our neighbors, a dentist and high school French teacher, in utter disbelief, watched helplessly.

Michael didn't see me or anybody he knew until a higher court returned him to me 44 days later. He had been taken to numerous psychologists and was extensively

grilled about my beliefs and the philosophy of our community. His foster mother kept copious notes on everything he did and said. It was almost as if they had captured an alien from another planet and wanted to know what made him tick. Michael held his own, and they were amazed at his loyalty. They called him "brainwashed," yet gave totally favorable reports of his personality.

The social service personnel were indignant and bitter about the decision to let Michael go home and immediately appealed to the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia. Meanwhile, as we continued in the lower court, the Family Court judge again ordered me to produce my son. I couldn't do it and

The "Cult" Scare is Nothing New

O THERWISE-INTELLIGENT PEOPLE JUST KNOW THAT certain groups are bad. They've probably never met a member, visited a temple, or read a word of the movement's publications. It's a cult—case closed.

It's interesting to note, in a community context, that there's nothing new about this kind of stereotyping. Some of the groups most beloved to students of historic communal societies were the targets of savage antagonism and stereotyping in years past. The passage of time has oddly changed our perspective; believers who once were dangerous cultists are now warm and cuddly.

The Harmony Society, the community of Pietist Christians whose life spanned the nineteenth century, survived and prospered despite experiencing some of the most demeaning stereotypes and outright attacks. Although it was a family movement in its early years, the Harmony Society eventually turned to celibacy and was duly attacked for denying its members sexual expression. The society was wealthy, so wealthy, in fact, that once it guaranteed a loan for a strapped federal government. That led, naturally, to accusations that community leaders were enriching themselves at the expense of the obedient grunts who did all the work. And on and on: the stereotypes were all there. The Harmonists even had to endure lawsuits full of outlandish allegations.

Even more did the Shakers endure hassles brought on by vicious stereotyping. People were jealous of their prosperity (the product of good minds and hard work) and skeptical of their decidedly unusual religion. People often seemed not to mind dumping their unwanted children on the generous Shakers, but their attempts to redress perceived grievances sometimes led to violence, up to and including murder of Shakers who were really guilty of nothing more than unconventional beliefs and behavior. The atrocity tales that ex-"cult" members tell today had their

Shaker counterparts; former members (or relatives or friends of former members) could often make good money on the lecture circuit telling lurid tales about these people who dared to live in conditions of community and celibacy.

The Mormons, whose United Order was one of the most substantial experiments in intentional community during the nineteenth century, were perhaps the most reviled religious group in America for most of that century. Their founder, Joseph Smith, was at various times tarred and feathered, threatened with castration, and finally murdered by hostile mobs. Nineteenth-century propaganda against Mormons was some of vilest literature to see print in its time, making the Mormons out to be violent fanatics, horse thieves, sexual outlaws, and statutory rapists. Why did the Mormons end up in Utah? Because they were being terminally harassed everywhere they went, and they finally found a place that was so unpopulated that they were finally left alone.

What these groups had in common, apart from a commitment to intentional community, was that they were victims of stereotyping. They were "different," and therefore obviously evil.

Sadly, this kind of stereotyping that leads to prejudice and even to violence is alive and well today. Literature put out by the team by major anticult groups today does to contemporary religious and communal movements what their earlier counterparts did to the Harmonists, Shakers, Mormons, and others. The antidiversity lobby has been alive and well for centuries, committed to the principle that different equals evil and that those in error have no rights. Many of the major anti-cult groups keep files on communal groups today, including a fair number with whom readers of this magazine are familiar. Friends of community would do well to be very careful about believing—much less supporting—what these folks have to say. —Tim Miller Ω

didn't do it. I was jailed for contempt and ordered to stay in custody until I divulged his whereabouts. Twenty-six days later, after the appeal was heard, the Supreme Court released me and upheld the decision returning Michael to me. We were elated.

How is it then that here I am now, years later, still having to defend myself, my son, my chosen life, and the community of which we are a part? One reason is that media reports of charges of child abuse in the Island Pond Community in Vermont—charges which they had been cleared of years earlier—were spread by newspapers and TV in Nova Scotia. It has only been in the last year or so that our community has come to understand that a network of so-called "cult" experts are committed to destroying groups who choose to live outside of the mainstream. It has become abundantly clear that there is a deliberate plan at work that incites government agencies, police authorities, and courts into actions that are neither based on truth nor founded in law. Often the actions that we have been accused of are the very actions that have been used against us—kidnapping, brainwashing, separating families, and outright child abuse.

As a part of this agenda, in March 1992, another attempt was made to take Michael from me. Down the same driveway came a police car driven by an officer whom we all knew and liked. He handed me a stack of court documents; once again my son was on the line. Before I could even gather my thoughts, another car sped up the driveway. Michael's mother got out. She had travelled



JEAN SWARTKOW, THE COMMUNITY AT ISLAND POND

According to his father, Michael (second from left) loved his life at Myrtle Tree Farm.

After consulting with my friends at the Myrtle Tree Farm and talking to my lawyer friend in Vermont, a fellow disciple, I agreed to allow supervised access but not to let Michael out of my custody until I had the opportunity to be heard. Michael's mother refused the supervised access. Given everything that Michael had been through at the hands of the Family Court, I couldn't see putting him through the whole thing again, and acquiesced.

Michael's mother had abduction charges laid against me. On February 4, 1994, I was arrested by the FBI in California, where we had been living for some time. Again, without notice or hearing, the authorities took my son. After two months in jail, I was released on bail. In September, 1994, I was tried for abduction and found innocent. The judge said I had lawful custody and possession of my son the whole time. I was so

happy and so relieved!

But within a few weeks time, again I was served papers. The Province of Nova Scotia had appealed my acquittal! Because I am confined to the province as I await the decision of the Nova Scotia Court of Appeals, I find myself without my community, my son, or my freedom.

The times we live in are not easy. At the appeal of my acquittal, my lawyer told the

court, "If Isaac Dawson were not a member of the Myrtle Tree Farm Community, I do not believe he would even be charged." I believe that to be the truth.

At this time in history, it seems to me that with the future of humankind in such question, there might be some room for individuals to seek the truth. "From one man He made every nation of man, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us." (Acts 17:26-27.)

I am thankful for the new life I have come to know and glad to be part of a community that is committed to one another in love. It has cost me everything to follow my God—even my son. One day Michael will be free to choose what he will do with his life. I believe that, regardless of the lies and other activities of the anti-cult movement, he will join me in the community—and that he will choose the truth. Ω

Isaac Dawson was a member of the Community at Myrtle Tree Farm, which moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1993

In July 1995 the Appeals Court of Nova Scotia overturned Isaac's conviction for disobeying a court order. Though acquitted of abduction charges at his first trial, because this ruling was overturned (permitted in Canada), Isaac awaits a second trial for this charge. He remains separated from Michael.

A network of so-called "cult" experts are committed to destroying groups who choose to live outside of the mainstream ... Inciting government agencies, police authorities, and courts into actions that are neither based on truth nor founded in law.

over a thousand miles and hadn't told us she was coming.

Who had put her up to this? She was always welcome to visit or stay anytime she wanted. Something was wrong. It turned out that a hearing had been held in the same Family Court earlier that week—without my being there. The court had issued an order for Michael's mother to have weekend access to him without my being informed about it.

AFFIDAVIT OF EDWARD DAWSON

I, Edward Frank Dawson, do hereby affirm the truth of the following based upon first-hand knowledge, or information and belief, as appropriate:

1. My name is Edward Frank Dawson and I am the defendant in the matter of *The Queen v. E.F. Dawson*, a charge of parental abduction.
2. Since my son Michael was again [the first time being illegally in 1987 for 44 days]¹ forcefully taken from my possession by the F.B.I. wearing bullet-proof vests and carrying guns, on February 4, 1994, he has been living in Montreal with his mother, Judy Seymour. She does not have custody order entitling her to him².
3. Over the course of the past three and a half years, I have seen Michael only very minimally, as there is very much resistance on the part of his mother, Judy Seymour.
4. On at least several, if not quite a few, occasions during this time, Judy has called me in desperation seeking help from me because she cannot control Michael. She does not believe in discipline, which is the way he was raised by me while I had him from birth until 11 with her consent, when he was taken from me in 1994, due to my arrest on the criminal charge.
5. She has told me repeatedly that she would return Michael to me if I did not live in the Community. Judy despises my faith because she does not believe in spanking. She has made it a crusade to save the children in the Communities associated with my faith from being spanked.
6. As recently as last week (October 1997), I spoke to Michael by phone and he volunteered to me his impression that his mother has an agenda to "save the children in the Community" because she does not believe in spanking.
7. For years prior to 1992 Judy Seymour took counsel from Michael Kropveld at *Infocult/Infosect Montreal* who persuaded her to have fear of my faith, although this man had no first-hand knowledge of me, my son or my faith³. Exhibit A, October 10, 1990, letter from M. Kropveld to Judy Seymour

¹ See *Family and Children's Services of King's County v. Edward Frank Dawson*, 12 RFL (3d) 104 (N.C.S.A. 1988)

² An interim custody order for Michael that she acquired in May 1992, after yet another *ex parte* hearing of which I had no notice, expired 30 days after Michael's seizure Feb. 4, 1994, by the terms of the order.

³ In a letter from Judy Seymore to Michael Kropveld written in September 1990, she expresses fantastic fears about the Community not based in reality, nor supported by any facts or evidence. She seeks his "expert counsel" to do anything to get her son Michael and she promises that once she regains him she will help "save the other children there."

8. Any time I would try to see Michael, as I am lawfully entitled to do, Judy would call the police and try to have them prevent me from seeing Michael. They got pretty tired of this situation, as it was obvious Michael wants to spend time with me.

9. In January 1997 Michael became 14. An officer of the Montreal Police Department, Officer Beauchemins, spoke to me at length encouraging me to gain physical custody of Michael because he was obviously troubled, trapped and getting into trouble. Michael's life has been in turmoil since age 4 because his mother takes issue with my faith, which she was fully aware of when she relinquished sole custody to me in 1986, agreeing to visit Michael at his place of residence with me. She did so believing it to be in his best interest.

10. Officer Beauchemins advised me that when Michael wanted to visit me I could bring him into the police station and have him verify it, so that when Judy called to complain, they could assure her there was no problem.

11. On the very rare occasions when I do see Michael, he very much likes to be with me. His mother usually badgers us by phone throughout the day, demanding that Michael return home at some arbitrary time decided by her.

12. I do believe that Judy Seymour's ability to speak the truth regarding Michael and the Community has been seriously undermined by her relationship with Michael Kropveld who specializes in interfering with individual's freedom of religion and conscience and persuades people of his interpretation of what he refers to as "cultic thinking" without discriminating between different groups. Exhibit B⁴

13. I do believe this has seriously effected my freedom of association and my freedom of religion because Ms. Seymour has had the room to present evidence at *ex parte* hearings at which I have had no notice or opportunity to be heard. The March 10, 1992 hearing was the sixth unfair hearing in the Kentville Family Court! (as determined by judges)

14. At least six times during the course of proceedings with my son since 1987 it has been found as fact that significant action regarding the life of my son has been taken either without me having notice, an opportunity to be heard, or by the court exceeding its authority. C.J. MacKeigan acknowledged that I had been denied a "hearing where inquiry was made regarding my son's best interest" and that is why the Family Court in Kentville lost jurisdiction in 1987. See *FCS v. Dawson* decision, see footnote 1

⁴ Exhibit B is an excerpt of Judy Seymour's testimony at the trial of *The Queen v. Dawson*, September 1994, where she testified that Kropveld "convinced her to take legal action and refrain from visiting the Community."

interest" and that is why the Family Court in Kentville lost jurisdiction in 1987. See *FCS v. Dawson* decision, see footnote 1

15. After my son's seizure Sept. 24, 1987, I went to court prepared with witnesses and law and ready to go forward on Sept. 29, Oct. 6, Oct. 15, and October 27 without being heard or having an opportunity to be heard. Id.
16. Again on December 24, 1987, when Michael was on a court-ordered Christmas access visit with his mother against my wishes, because I feared for his well-being and safety, yet another ex parte hearing was held!
17. As a result of that *ex parte* hearing Michael's stay was extended several days, which had the effect of eliminating his time with me prior to his next scheduled assessment by court-ordered psychologist Dr. Rhod Evans.
18. The grounds cited by Ms Seymour's lawyer were untrue, as later verified by the December 29, 1987 order, in which, after testimony by Dr. Evans who had interviewed Michael after his visit with his mother, he found it in Michael's best interest to be returned to me. So Judge Black denied Judy's independent application to increase access to anything more than two phone calls a week. This order became invalidated on Feb. 5, 1988 when the N.S.C.A. invalidated all orders after October 15, 1987 for want of jurisdiction because of lack of a fair hearing for me and Michael.
19. This order is also noteworthy because it clearly establishes that the 1986 agreement between Judy and myself was in effect at this time, as she made Application for increased access which was denied.
20. Judy Seymour had clear notice based upon the Feb 8, 1988 letter from her lawyer. Trevor Wheeldon, what she needed to in order to pursue an Application for custody of Michael.
21. She never did so. After her failure to voluntarily return Michael to me in December 1987, according to her access order, she never proceeded through the courts or through me personally to gain increased access or custody of Michael. For the next 4 1/2 years she did not seek an overnight alone with Michael according to the 1986 agreement we had lived by for five years.
22. Between the 1988 N.S.C.A. decision and her sudden appearance in my driveway with the March 10, 1992 *ex parte* order, Judy did not pursue seeking greater access to Michael through me or the courts, if she was no longer satisfied with the terms of our 1986 agreement. In fact, many times she would promise a visit to Michael and then fail to appear.

23. Given her long relationship with Kropveld, I believe she was greatly influenced to develop a "strategy" to "get" Michael from me, not really based upon his "best interests", but beset by her fears about my faith, which are not grounded in reality. Exhibit B

24. By choosing not to exercise her access according to our 1986 agreement and by failing to act in a good faith way to change the agreement, she, instead became a victim, but also a willing participant in an anti-religious agenda which, unfortunately, many authorities were deceived to believe was the truth. Tragically, my son and I have had our father-son relationship greatly damaged.

25. I regret to say that causing such damage is actually a tactic which the anti-cult forces strive to accomplish and they teach people how to do it!

26. Judy Seymour accomplished her goal quite effectively by deceiving Wendell Murchison, Heather Hill, Judge Black and others that Michael needed protection from me, his father, and from his faith, which he had wholeheartedly followed prior to the unjust intrusions and unfair hearings which have plagued the legal history and the living reality of his and my life for ten years now. (since September 1987)

27. It is noteworthy that the charges against me were laid between the time of the offer to contact the Attorney General's Office on Judy Seymour's behalf about her case (*Exhibit C*) and Brian Norton's letter to Ms. Hill (*Exhibit D*) in which he makes an untrustworthy, unsubstantiated and untrue statement about my faith on provincial letterhead in his capacity as an attorney general. This is significant because the consent of the attorney general is necessary to bring a charge under s. 283 (a) (1)

28. I am grateful that judges like J. Donald Hall, C.J. Ian MacKeigan, J. Nalachi Jones, J. David Chipman, as well as J. Sopinka and J. McLaughlin, and even J. Hallett somewhat, were able to see the truth of what was happening regardless of the scheme against me and uphold the law.

29. The fact the the 3 judge panel unanimously found that I had not disobeyed the March 10, 1992 order and that the hearing from which that order issued had denied me "fundamental notice and an opportunity to be heard in the first instance", and that ruling having been confirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada, who explicitly reserved ruling on the lawfulness of that order for this court gives me hope that justice can finally be rendered.

30. That could happen by this court ruling that the March 10, 1992 order is unjust and cannot be proven lawful by the Crown, which they have the burden to prove, and therefore cannot be used against me without violating the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

31. Based upon these five experiences where it has been judicially determined that I was denied fair hearings, receiving the March 10, 1992 order, having not been heard and knowing there had been *yet another ex parte hearing* gave me every reason to fear for Michael's safety if his possession was turned over to his mother at that time.

32. At the time I was aware of the tactics of organizations like *Infosect Montreal* and I had a solid basis to believe that Judy was intending to keep Michael from me, at any cost. I was also aware of her incessant fears and paranoia as to Michael's safety. These fears were not based upon reality, but I never have had the chance to tell a judge or jury the truth about all this.

33. I believe if I have a jury trial I need to be able to tell the truth to replace the lies she has placed before many governmental authorities in Nova Scotia. I have evidence to prove the truth and reveal the lies she has premised her entire complaint with me and my faith upon.

34. I affirm that copies of documents attached hereto are true and accurate to the beat of my knowledge.

Dated: October , 1997

Affirmed
 SWORN BEFORE ME this 31st day
 of October, 1997, at Kentville
 in the Province of Nova Scotia.

Lisa Taylor-Farris

LISA TAYLOR-FARRIS
 A Commissioner of the Supreme
 Court of Nova Scotia

Edward F. Dawson

Edward F. Dawson