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## Epilogue



For America's delinquent and dependent children, the twentieth century was the "century of the juvenile court." The court's presence made it impossible any longer to turn a blind eye toward confining children in prisons, almshouses, asylums or other forbidding institutions. Among thoughtful decision-makers and private citizens alike, the juvenile court inspired greater care and compassion.

History can be revealing, interesting, entertaining, even discomfoting. Studying the past, however, is most worthwhile for lessons that help shape the future. The lessons of legal history are particularly central to our essence as a nation. Chief Justice Edward D. Robertson, Jr. put it well in 1992: "[I]t is often in courtrooms that we see our highest good, where we speak of our most noble aspirations, where we touch our most noble purposes, and where the lives of people can be changed for the better."<sup>1</sup> For the past century, Missouri's juvenile courts have seen judges, lawyers, child care professionals and other citizens nobly pursue justice for the state's most vulnerable children while seeking to change their lives for the better.

Many threads running throughout the nation's juvenile justice history remain discomfoting to contemporary sensibilities. Nineteenth century courts, for example, imprisoned children under inhumane conditions with little thought for their future in the community. Courts confined children in almshouses, asylums and houses of refuge long after perceptive observers knew that these congregate institutions helped few children and hurt many. By failing children for much of the twentieth century, the nation's training schools sacrificed rehabilitation while encouraging resentment and recidivism that compromised public safety.

Missouri's unhappy experiences with the training schools nonetheless demonstrate the true value of historical inquiry. "If we have learned anything

from the past," Chief Justice William Ray Price, Jr. said recently, "it is that the foundation for the future is change." Learning from years of frustration, Missouri closed the Boonville and Chillicothe training schools in the early 1980s while other states held stubbornly to the past. The result is a success story that remains the envy of states still searching for a juvenile justice compass. These states have not yet learned their lesson, and they look to Missouri for the right answers. Juvenile corrections in Missouri, says National Council on Crime and Delinquency president Barry Krisberg, "is as close to the child savers' vision as you can get in the United States today." Willingness to learn from history goes a long way.<sup>2</sup>

What lies ahead? Much remains to be done, yet people remain the Missouri juvenile justice system's most valuable resources. Consider, for example, Judge Marybelle Mueller, who savors her years on Cape Girardeau's juvenile court bench because "nothing is more important than helping, protecting and making life better for a child." Consider Betty Conyers Patton, a St. Louis City juvenile officer for thirty-seven years before retiring as chief in 1999, who spent her entire career in the court because "children are human beings with . . . dignity and worth, . . . [and] we have a responsibility and obligation to love, teach, discipline and care for them." Or Jackson County's longtime juvenile services administrator Bettylu Donaldson, who counsels perseverance because "[w]hen you give your best, . . . you may not learn until much later the great impact you had on the child and family." Or state Supreme Court Judge Ronnie L. White, who found fulfillment as a young public defender in the St. Louis City juvenile court because "these are just kids, and most have insufficient parental control and no one who cares about them. They just want to be loved and . . . have a family like everybody else. Few are truly incorrigible." Or Jackson County lawyer Fred B. Rich, who has spent nearly a quarter century representing abused and neglected children because "you count your successes one child at a time." Or former Representative Kaye H. Steinmetz, who believes that while "government cannot be a parent to a child, it has the responsibility to help make good things happen for children in need because tomorrow they will be our adults."<sup>3</sup>

So many juvenile justice professionals are unsung heroes because they walk the extra mile, usually unfortified by public recognition. Consider St. Louis City family court judge Thomas J. Frawley and his wife Ann, foster parents themselves who have adopted three of their foster children. Consider St. Louis City juvenile court judge Anna C. Forder, who adopted two boys who had been wards of the juvenile court. Or Jackson County commissioner and juvenile officer David W. Kierst, Jr., who once reached into his own pocket to buy a rocking chair for a blind disabled child who liked to rock. Or Division of Youth

Services Director Mark D. Steward, who brought a boy home for Thanksgiving dinner with his family one year because the agency had not yet found a foster placement for him.

Consider former Schuyler County juvenile officer, Jim Cottey and his wife Clara, who opened their own rural Lancaster home so often to abused, neglected and delinquent children that they were licensed as foster parents by both the Division of Family Services and the Division of Youth Services. Once, Cottey was assigned to transport a local delinquent to Mexico, Missouri for commitment to the Division of Youth Services. After talking in the car halfway from northeast Missouri to Mexico, Cottey decided the fatherless boy would be better off living in the Cottey home. Cottey pulled off the road and telephoned juvenile court judge E. Richard Webber, who agreed to place the boy with the Cotteys, where he lived for a year and a half. "You would like to think you made a difference," Cottey says.<sup>4</sup>

These selfless public servants, and hundreds or thousands more like them in all corners of the state, comprise a perennial honor roll that reinforces the optimism and bold challenge articulated by retired Supreme Court Judge Andrew Jackson Higgins: "We have made some giant strides in the state, but we have just touched the surface. We have done some good work in juvenile justice, and we will do more. . . . As long as we have the sort of devoted people who have served us in the past, things will continue to happen in Missouri."<sup>5</sup>

## Acknowledgments

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Like service in the juvenile justice system itself, writing this book was a team effort. The juvenile justice system depends on lawyers' collaboration with professionals trained in a variety of disciplines that affect children's lives and legal interests. This book depended on collaboration with several professionals who helped fashion the final product.

Joseph Fred Benson, the state Supreme Court archivist, provided yeoman's service. He prepared a detailed index of nearly a century of Missouri statutory law, participated in the three dozen-plus interviews conducted during the writing process, and reviewed the manuscript with a fine-tooth comb. He freely offered constructive insights drawn from his training in legal history.

Four perceptive readers carefully reviewed the manuscript and provided helpful advice and comments: Julie Cole-Agee, Judge Andrew Jackson Higgins, Dr. Fran Reddington and Gary J. Wait. Stephen Blower and Michael McCrary provided research assistance.

I thank the professionals who shared valuable information and insights during lengthy interviews about their service to Missouri's children: Betsy A. Baird, Judge Evelyn M. Baker, Marian Barnholtz, Premier Dave Barrett, Judge Duane Benton, Judge Susan E. Block, Loretta Burns-Bucklew, Commissioner Ann-Marie Clarke, Julie Cole-Agee, Judge Frank Conley, Jim Cottey, Bettylu Donaldson, Judge Ninian M. Edwards, Tyrone J. Flowers, Judge Thomas J. Frawley, Judge R. Jack Garrett, Judge Stanley A. Grimm, Judge Andrew Jackson Higgins, Judge Robert G.J. Hoester, Judge John C. Holstein, Judge Ramona F. John, Judge Patricia S. Joyce, Rep. Mary C. Kasten, Prof. Kimberly Kempf-Leonard, David W. Kierst, Jr., Dr. Barry Krisberg, Ronald L. Larkin, Chief Justice Stephen N. Limbaugh, Jr., Bart Lubow, Dean Louis W. McHardy, Jack Markway, Vicki Martin, Judge Marybelle Mueller, Judge John E. Parrish, Betty

Conyers Patton, Robert L. Perry, Fred B. Rich, Lt. Jim W. Richardson, Judge Marco A. Roldan, Judge Martin Schiff, Jr., Rep. Kaye H. Steinmetz, Mark D. Steward, Gary J. Waint, Judge Ronnie L. White and Jane Wilhite.

For producing such a handsome book, I thank the University of Missouri Press, particularly Director/Editor-in-Chief Beverly Jarrett, Production Manager Dwight Browne and Graphic Designer Jennifer Cropp. I thank the superb University of Missouri-Columbia law library staff, particularly Tamara Guilford-Davis, for securing rare books and other sources. I thank the State Historical Society of Missouri, particularly Photographic Specialist Christine Montgomery, for their cooperation and assistance. I thank The Missouri Bar for granting permission to reprint material on abuse and neglect from chapter 6 of *Missouri Juvenile Law*, (c) The Missouri Bar (2d ed. 1999). All rights reserved.

Finally, a special thank-you to the students in my juvenile law and family law classes at the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law. My students are thoughtful men and women whose classroom give-and-take helps refine my own thinking about important juvenile justice issues. Many enroll in these two electives because they hope to devote their professional energies to child advocacy after graduation. Some will pursue full-time careers in the juvenile courts. Others will serve occasionally as retained or pro bono counsel for children. Others will choose government service in the executive, legislative or judicial branch. Still others will serve on bar association committees, law revision commissions and similar bodies that committed to improving children's welfare in the public interest. To whatever stops and destinations their career paths lead, these students will make Missouri proud. Their efforts will influence the next history of the state's juvenile justice system when it is written years from now.

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Columbia, Missouri  
December 15, 2002