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Judge is torn in case of D.C. child molester

Therapy or prison? He can't decide

By Amy Koval
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A D.C. Superior Court judge yesterday delayed sentencing for a teen who sodomized three young girls, saying he cannot decide between a lengthy prison term or trying to help the defendant with counseling and less time behind bars.

Earl Roosevelt Knott, an 18-year-old high school dropout, could get up to 60 years in prison for the crimes. But Judge Truman Morrison said he is so torn over the case that he wants to consult other judges before handing down a sentence.

"On the one hand, Mr. Knott is a person who has had a life of remarkable dysfunction and depri-

vation," the judge said yesterday. "He has been a victim [of sexual abuse] himself and had no normal human support as a person growing up.

"At the same time, these are crimes of radical seriousness. Mr. Knott's actions have had a profound impact on these children that will last their entire lives long," he said.

Knott—who has been convicted of sexually abusing a total of five children, including a 5-year-old boy in New York—will be sentenced June 7 for sodomizing two cousins and a third girl, a family friend who is now 6. He is already serving an 18-month sentence for sodomizing a niece in December

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while he was out on bail and visiting relatives in Montgomery County.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Robin Ashton said Knott, known by the youngsters he molested as "Buddy," is "too far gone" to be helped.

"He is a very sick individual," she said. "He cannot control his behavior."

Knott apparently plied his victims with candy in order to get close to them. Mrs. Ashton cited a pre-sentencing report that quoted him as saying: "I can always get kids to do whatever I want to do. . . I just give them something. I'm very good with children."

But Knott's court-appointed attorney argued that his client is remorseful, that he admitted guilt and that he has asked for help.

"There's a strong possibility that he could benefit from [therapy and treatment]," said Thomas Abbenante. "This is a man who didn't come in here and give you a song and dance. This is a man who

came in here and told you everything."

Judge Morrison, who has been on the bench since 1979, was described in a 1988 Legal Times article as a middle-of-the-road jurist who tends to "give close calls to the defendants." Before becoming a judge, he spent nine years in the Public Defender's Office.

Knott and his stepgrandfather, William Ward, were accused of abusing the 6- and 7-year-old girls, who had been taken from their mother by the city amid allegations of neglect and turned over to their grandmother, Ward's wife.

Ward's record of 17 felony convictions—including two sex assaults—was not checked by the D.C. Department of Human Services until the 6-year-old was hit by a car and doctors at the hospital found signs of sexual abuse, Mrs. Ashton said.

Ward and Knott were subsequently charged with having sex with the two girls over a period of two years at the home they shared on Bruce Street SE.

Ward was convicted of five counts of child molestation in December and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Impersonal Sex in Public Places?

In 1970 *Tearoom Trade* was awarded the annual prize of the Society for the Study of Social Problems for "the best published book on a critical issue in the tradition of the late C. Wright Mills."

The quotations below illustrate the controversy engendered by *Tearoom Trade* immediately upon publication. On the one hand, the book was recognized as an important, imaginative and useful contribution to our understanding of deviant sexual activity. Describing impersonal anonymous sexual encounters in public restrooms—"tearooms" in the argot—the book explores the behavior of men whose deviant sexuality remains hidden from their families and neighbors. By combining participant observation with structured as well as informal interviews *Tearoom Trade* furnishes a controversial example of contemporary social science methods.

And it was those very methods that occasioned so much controversy. By posing as a deviant, the author was able to engage in systematic observation of homosexual acts in public settings, and later develop a more complete picture of those involved by interviewing them in their homes, again without revealing their unwitting participation in his study. The conflict between the scientist's need for objective data and the individual's need for protection against surreptitious invasion of privacy is manifest in Dr. Humphrey's work: its implications go far beyond this particular case.

This enlarged edition of *Tearoom Trade* includes the original text unchanged, plus a new retrospect that deals directly with just these ethical issues by presenting thoughtful criticisms of the book by three reviewers (Nicholas von Hoffman, Donald T. Warwick, and Myron Glazer), a response to Mr. von Hoffman's essay by Lee Rainwater and Irving Louis Horowitz, and a summary of the problems by the author himself. This added material adds a new perspective on the social scientist at work and the ethical problems to which his work may give rise, as indicated by the comments below.

"Incontestably such information is useful. . . but it was done by invading some people's privacy. . . No information is valuable enough to obtain by nipping away at personal liberty, and that is true no matter who's doing the gnawing, John Mitchell and the conservatives over at the Justice Department or Laud Humphreys and the liberals over at the Sociology Department!"—Nicholas von Hoffman, in *The Washington Post*.

"Occasionally a book is published in criminology that has all the earmarks of becoming a classic. *Tearoom Trade* is such a book. This study makes a contribution to criminology in at least three ways. First, it is one of those few studies of deviant behavior based upon detailed and direct observation of the deviant act. Secondly, the study is applicable to a wide range of behavior and not simply to homosexuals. Third, the research techniques used will provide something of a model for other studies that wish to utilize unobtrusive measurement and participant observation."—James C. Hackler, in *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*.

"A disgracefully poor example of social science research, and one finds it very difficult to understand its claim to the C. Wright Mills Award. Rather than being an example of sociological imagination, it seems to be closer to a sociological fantasy."—Lawrence Rosen, in *Journal of Marriage and the Family*.

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Tearoom Trade

Humphreys



Enlarged Edition

Including a Retrospect on Ethical Issues

Tearoom Trade

Impersonal sex in public places

Laud Humphreys

Recipient of the C. Wright Mills Award
With a foreword by Lee Rainwater