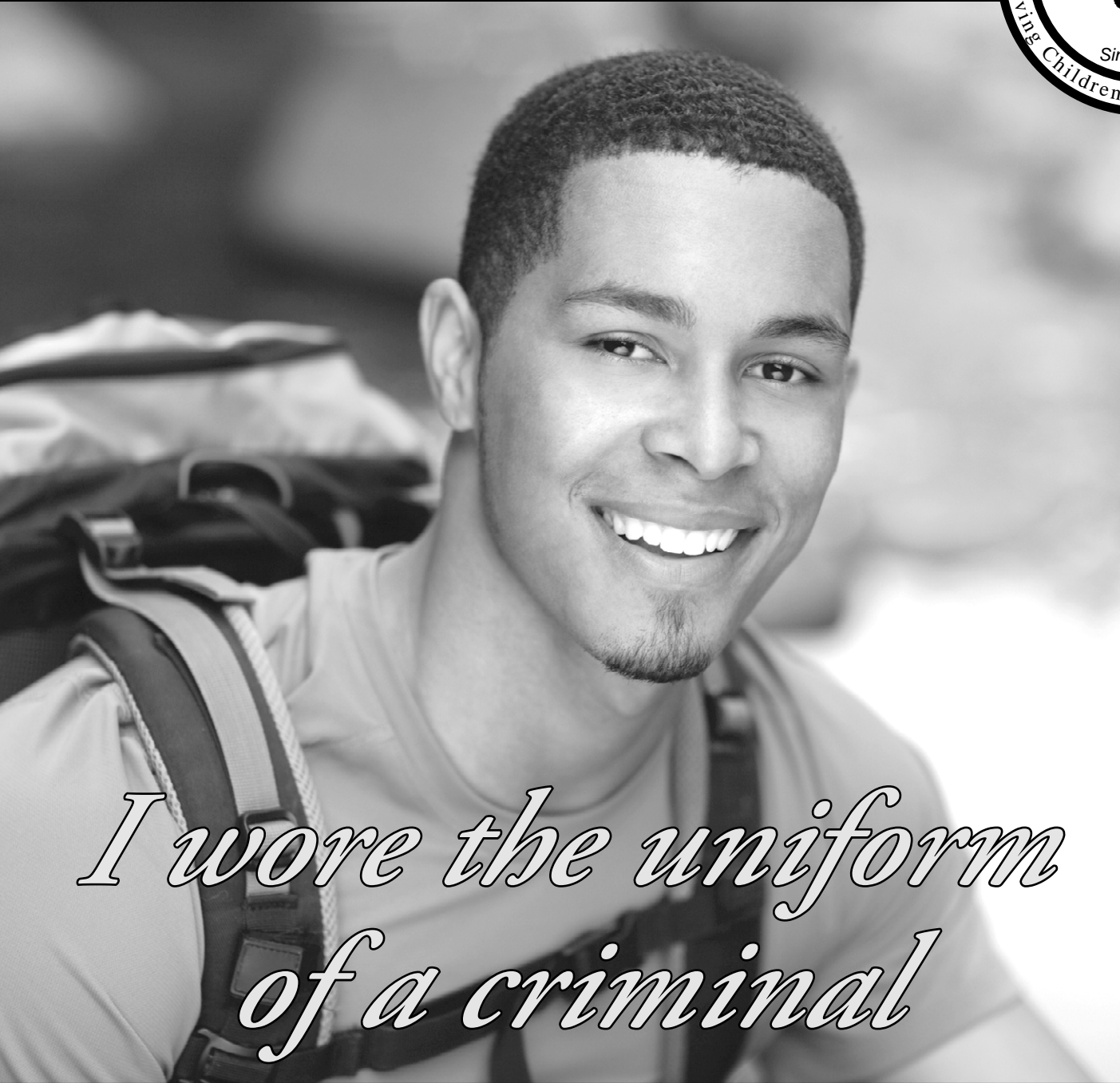


# The Record

*News from Epworth Children's Home*



## *I wore the uniform of a criminal*

On a cold night in February, 16-year-old \*Trevor found himself with his face and stomach pressed against the side of a police car. His hands were being cuffed behind his back and as he looked to his left his younger brother stared at him with tears streaming down his face. A police officer was tightening his wrists in cuffs as well. "Stay calm," Trevor told his brother. "Do everything they ask. I'm going to fix this."

Forty-five minutes earlier Trevor and his brother had entered their kitchen for something to drink.

Their mother was standing at the kitchen sink with her back to them. In an instant, she turned with a knife and pointed it at them. "She was screaming at us, and I had no idea why. It wasn't anything new really, but it still scared me every time," Trevor said. "I worry about my brother. We don't have a father figure, so I have to be a good man for him. I have to protect him." Trevor, older and larger, positioned himself between the knife and his brother. His mother lunged at him, cutting him on the arm. Using a maneuver he learned as a member of the wrestling team at Dreher High School, Trevor

*Continued on Page 3*



# *A Second Chance*

## Fall 2013

A Message from The Rev. John Holler  
President

Yesterday morning I came to work a bit early. When I arrived there were no cars in the parking lot of the Wright Administration building. There was, however, a young man sitting on the steps of the entrance to the building. I could not see his face because he was wearing a baseball cap and he was looking down at the sidewalk. As I pulled into my parking space he stood up and walked toward my car.

I was slightly apprehensive as he approached me, and as I wondered what he was doing at Epworth, and what he wanted. Then he spoke, "I have been waiting to see you. Do you remember me? I am Dillon\*. I lived here two years ago."

As I saw his face I began to remember Dillon. Dillon lived at Epworth for a brief time two years ago. He had been placed at Epworth because his parents were unable to provide for him and he had no home or anyone to care for him. Before he arrived he had had a minor brush with the criminal justice system, and a court date had been set for him to have this issue resolved.

A couple of days before he was to appear in court he panicked, and he ran away. A few days later he was found by the police and placed in the custody of the Department of Social Services. Until yesterday, that was the last I had heard about Dillon.

"Yes, I remember you," I said as I struggled to recall the details about who he was and why he had been a resident at Epworth.

"I want to come back to Epworth. I know now that I need the help and the support that I can get here. I have goals, and I want to complete my education," said Dillon.

"Let's talk," I said. Dillon and I went into the building and talked about his experiences since leaving Epworth, and about what he wanted. Life has been difficult for Dillon for the past couple of years, but he seems to have made the best of it. After our conversation Dillon and I went to the Epworth Social Services building to talk with Deborah Keller to inquire about a possible readmission. Mrs. Keller, in turn, contacted a case worker at DSS and Dillon's guardian ad litem, both of whom recommended readmission to Epworth.

Dillon is scheduled to be readmitted to Epworth today. He is now 17, and ready, I believe, to take full advantage of this second opportunity to build a life that is meaningful and productive.

Yesterday as I pulled into the Epworth parking lot I was thinking about the growing mound of paperwork on my desk, and about forms, files, and budgets, and I was not very excited about the day ahead. Two hours later I was rejoicing that I had been able to see the face of God in a 17 year old child who, through God's grace, will soon have a second chance.

wrapped his arm around his mother to try and take the knife from her. She bit him, and drew blood. He let her go at the same time their neighbors entered the kitchen. The neighbors were known drug dealers, and Trevor feared them. Trevor's mother began to scream, "They're trying to kill me."

By the time the police arrived, the mother and neighbors were repeating those words. The police took both boys into custody immediately. Trevor can tell you the exact moment – date and time. "I was in a cell for 72 hours. It felt like 72 days," he continued. "I wore the uniform of a criminal. I road in the back of a paddy wagon with my wrists and ankles shackled to my brother."

Trevor's brother was in a cell on a different block and they weren't able to speak to each other until their court date. Trevor worried about how his little brother was holding up or if others would try to hurt him. They were each assigned a defense lawyer to represent them in court. Trevor doesn't fully understand what happened in the court room, but he remembers his mother's outbursts and the judge making her be quiet. He also remembers seeing his wrestling coach, Mr. Brooks, and a school social worker in the back corner. They had been there for a different case and stayed when they heard Trevor's name called.

"I saw my coach after that in the hall," Trevor said. "He is a good man. He is good to me. What he said helped me through that. He told me the team missed me; they didn't know what happened to me or why I didn't come back to school. He told me they needed me; that the other team members looked up to me." Trevor thought for a moment, "Wrestling saved my life that day. My mother was coming after us and she wanted to hurt us. My wrestling moves helped me stay calm and restrain her until my neighbor came in and knocked me down. He was a big man."

After the court hearing, Trevor and his brother were placed in a foster home zoned for a different school. The foster mom was nice, but Trevor really wanted to return to Dreher, so he began advocating for himself and his brother. He had been in foster care before and had been returned to his mother. "I have an imprint of a belt buckle on my back and scars on my hand from where the jewels on the belt pierced my skin," he said. "I wanted to be some place that was close to Dreher. I wanted life to be stable for me and my brother." Trevor remembered seeing other teens walking to Dreher from Epworth. He knew some of them, and started researching online. He wanted to admit himself and his brother, but learned he had to work through his lawyer and case worker to help make that happen. Finally, it did.

"When they arrived, they were all smiles," said



Deborah Keller, Intake Coordinator for Epworth. She began asking the normal questions she asks during an admission, and Trevor told her the whole story. She asked him why he worked so hard to make sure he and his brother were at Dreher. "I had to. The system is broken," he said looking at his case worker.

It has been five months since that day. He finished out his junior year at Dreher with a 3.3 GPA, up from his previous 1.75. He was able to finish on the wrestling team, and plans to do track and football during his upcoming senior year as well. He has a job this summer working Monday – Friday mornings. He appreciates the calm worship presence where he can reflect on his life. "I still haven't forgiven my mother," he said. "I don't know if I ever can, but I hope to." Trevor has been on beach trips where Rev. John Holler, President of Epworth, helped teach him to swim, and on day trips with cottage partners. But his most recent trip, is his favorite.

***I just put my hands out and welcomed God like the song***

Each summer the older boys at Epworth are given an opportunity to hike 50+ miles of the Appalachian Trail. Trevor decided to go on the hiking trip, "for the food." It seems the food they cook out in the open along the trail left an impression with the boys who went the years before, and Trevor was looking forward to the trip with his friends. Trevor



is confident and as an athlete didn't feel like the physical challenge of the trip would be too much for him. What he wasn't prepared for was the spiritual challenge.

Before the group left their first shelter to begin their journey they sang camp songs together and shared fellowship. They were told that during the trip they needed to think about their "Little Foxes" and "Holy Grails." A Little Fox is something that might cause them to struggle and perhaps not finish. A Holy Grail is something they can focus on to help them succeed and finish the trip. There were lots of funny stories about good-ol' boy behavior during the trip, but more about what they learned.

"On the first day, I found myself ahead of the group," said Trevor. "I found myself at a fork in the road and didn't know how to read the trail markers yet. I was asking myself, what do I do now. I remembered feeling alone back in my own home. Then I heard a voice coming up from behind me. I couldn't see him yet, but Mr. Carter yelled, 'Wait for me. I'll show you the way.' I'll never forget that moment. It was like a God thing. After he caught up to me we walked together the rest of the day talking about all sorts of things, but especially about how hard it is to forgive."

Trevor continued, "Then later in the week, one of the staff got awful blisters. He wanted to quit. I wouldn't have blamed him if he did. He was really hurting. We all stopped and decided it was really slowing us down. Together we decided to carry his burden – like a little fox. We all divided his pack and carried our share of it. It was getting really heavy. His little fox became my little fox. I was walking down a path covered by trees and you couldn't see the sky. Going downhill, you can't look up because you will trip on a stump. Coming up hill though

is different. I remember toward the end of the last day, I was coming up a long hill that was killing me. The weight of my pack and carrying his burden was getting to be too much. I looked up and the light was shining through the trees. I spread out my arms and said out loud the words of a song we learned the first day, 'I'll hold out my hands. Let me be open to you.' It was another one of those God moments.

Trevor also shared his Holy Grails. "Well, I actually had three. One – they promised us warm, fresh cinnamon buns when we finished – I couldn't wait for those! Second, seeing the light shine through the trees on the way up that last hill was like the light at the end of the tunnel." He pointed to his chest and continued, "This is number three." He was wearing a t-shirt with five figures walking in a line. They were each connected by their hands. He continued, "This t-shirt. This trip really was about us being connected and growing stronger together. I have never had that, and when you haven't had it – when you haven't had a strong man in your life – you latch on to it when it finally comes."

### *My Deepest Fear in Life*

Trevor paused for a moment and gathered his thoughts. "My deepest fear in life is being a failure – not being a provider or protector," he said sincerely.

Trevor wants to be a police officer. He is beginning his senior year at Dreher and is in the process of deciding whether or not he wants to go straight to the Police Academy or if he wants to get a Criminal Justice degree first. He knows that Epworth will walk with him regardless of his choice. "The police have been an important part of my life. I don't blame them for arresting me. They were doing their job. That's why I stayed calm. I would hear them when they pulled up to my house again and again, 'watch out for the woman in here.' They knew how my mama could behave." He paused to manage his emotions, "I want to make sure other children don't have to grow up like I did. I want to be a protector. I want to provide for my family. My deepest fear is that I will fail at that."

Ask Trevor and he will tell you that advocating for himself and his brother to be at Epworth is the best thing he has ever done. "Some of the kids here complain that there are too many rules," he said. "They just want to think they can do whatever they want, but I tell them that Epworth has rules because they care about us. The people in our lives before just let us do whatever we wanted because they didn't care." He continued, "I just tell them that Epworth is perfect for us. It's comfortable, stable and safe. Those are things that really matter to us right now. I never had people in my life I could count on. I can count on the people here."



TRAIL →

# Please be Seated

Stokes Cottage is home to 10 girls between the ages of eight and 12. On Wednesday, August 14th, their cottage wasn't simply a home to them, but a welcoming dinner party for the maintenance staff members. As a part of Epworth's Life Skills Training component, the girls received hands on experience in creating a menu, preparing food and hosting a party.

"They were so excited when they walked into my office to invite me to the meal," said Rev. John Holler, President of Epworth. "You could see how proud they were to extend the invitation. When I got there, I could tell they had practiced where to stand and how to welcome their guests." The maintenance staff and others, like Rev. Holler, were served their choice of meatloaf, chicken legs or baked fish. They were also served mashed potatoes, salad, green beans and corn bread.

"Each of the girls worked to prepare a different dish, so of course we had to try them all," said Rev. Holler.

Each guest was greeted at the door and invited inside. They were seated and \*Maggie came around to each of them with a tablet and pencil to take their drink orders. Guests were served their drinks from young ladies wearing their best dresses and aprons. Each of them carried a smile full of delight and pride. After they served their guests, they served themselves and sat down for conversation.

After the meal, guests were given a choice of two desserts, banana pudding or cake.

"Of course, we had to try each of those too," said Rev. Holler. "We didn't want to hurt feelings," he continued with a smile. After the meal the guests were walked to the door. One of the young girls held the door and every guest was thanked for their attendance.

"We wanted to show the maintenance men that we really like them," said Maggie, an eight-year old hostess. "We wanted them to know that we like that they help make our cottages work and that they fix things that we break sometimes."

Teaching life skills is crucial to Epworth's purpose of breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect. Maggie came to Epworth malnourished. Her mother wasn't making sure she had food each day, and Maggie was too little to know how to find food or how to prepare it. No one had ever showed her how to do something as simple as prepare a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich. Epworth doesn't decide the next placement for children, and at times they are returned to environments that appear ready when in fact they are not. Epworth staff can't go with them, but they can send them equipped with the knowledge of how to better care for their own needs.



# Why are we doing this?

On Thursday, August the 15th, following Epworth's quarterly Board Meeting, more than 80 members of the community gathered for the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the new Midlands Family Care Center that will open on Epworth's campus. Guests and speakers included The Rev. Frank Griffith, Chairperson of the Epworth Board of Trustees; the Honorable Steve Benjamin, Mayor of the City of Columbia; Mr. Bob Toomey, Director of the SC Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services (DAODAS); Lillian Koller, Director of the SC Department of Social Services (DSS); Debbie Francis, President/CEO of the Lexington Richland Alcohol Drug Abuse Council (LRADAC); and Lee Porter, Chief Program Officer for Epworth.

As they all shared their expectations and excitement for the new ministry, it was Naomi Torfin who brought tears to our eyes. Ms. Torfin is the Executive Director of Children Come First, and the Family Care Center model grew out of her heart and mind. In an attempt to find out what service providers were doing that worked, she envisioned a place where children and parents would be offered something she never had.

Ms. Torfin shared her personal story with the guests. "My mother once said, 'I'm not a bad person. I just don't know how to live.'" Ms. Torfin and her siblings grew up in a home where addiction created a frightening and painful environment. "I would crawl onto my mother's chest, and place my ear to her heart," said Ms. Torfin. "Just to know it was still beating."

Ms. Torfin spoke of the many times she was in and out of the foster care system, and how the system never worked for her. She mourns the reality that while her father was able to come along and pick up the pieces of her broken heart and trust, the same was not true for her brother, who is currently in prison. When introducing her father and step-

mother, she said, "Without them, I would be the one walking through the door (of the FCC); not opening it."

Ms. Torfin was the driving passion behind gathering all the key partners together to bring her vision to reality. "As a group we built a heart," she said. "The heart can only beat if it lives in the body of Epworth and LRADAC. That (pointing to the Midlands Family Care Center) is not a building. That's hope. That's healing. No family can heal if they aren't together."

With the opening of the family care center comes change. Epworth already welcomes family members to campus

for visits with their children, family therapy and parenting classes. Some parents are invited to events on our campus as they work toward reunification with their children. However, primary focus of the ministry's service remains the children. Epworth's focus toward providing a safe, nurturing environment for children will not change. As Mr. Lee Porter noted to the guests, In 1963 the Epworth Board of Trustees voted to make Epworth a place that is "family centered." This is now being more fully realized.

Following the presentation, Rev. John Holler, President of Epworth, invited Ms. Torfin to stand next to him. "The Epworth Board of Trustees

*Midlands Family Care Center*



*Ribbon Cutting Ceremony Program  
Thursday, August 15, 2013 at 1:00 PM  
Epworth Children's Home*





met this morning,” he explained. “There is an apartment in the Family Care Center that mothers and their children can move into as they progress in their life skills curriculum prior to graduating from the program.” The apartment will serve as a step-down toward independence. Rev. Holler continued, “The Board voted today to call that apartment the “Torfin-Brainerd Apartment of Hope” in honor of you and your brother Duncan.” Ms. Torfin’s dream and vision is one shared by both Epworth and LRADAC, as well as the other partners involved in the collaboration. Together we will work to break the cycle of abuse, neglect and shame and replace it with an opportunity for each child and family to live lives of self-respect, responsibility and productivity.





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Children's Home

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Rev. John. E. Holler, Jr.  
President

*\*Children's names have been changed for confidentiality.*

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**The mission of Epworth Children's Home is to serve children, youth and families through a caring, accepting and safe Christian community, where hurts are healed; hope is nurtured; and faith in God, self and others is developed.**



## ***Remember Grayson and Randy?***

Last December in The Epworth Record, Volume 119, Issue 4, 2012, we told you about a young lady named Grayson Jeffords from Highland Park UMC in Florence. Grayson had met Randy at Asbury Hills, and gave up her own savings to help pay for him to return to camp next year. He did return, and we have the report.

“Well, it rained more this year,” Randy said. “But that made the new slide more fun.” Randy, who Grayson accurately described as a hilarious and talented artist, has grown a great deal over the last year. He is disappointed that he hasn't returned to his mother, who continues to struggle, but he is thankful he has a safe and nurturing environment at Epworth. He is blossoming as a leader among his cottage mates and sets the tone for a friendly cottage community.