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The Ward family today
photo by Chris Fritchie



It began with competition. Then frustrations and anger appeared. In 5th grade, when the boys were told to do something as simple as their homework, they would run off and be gone for periods of time.

The most noticeable personality changes came as the boys approached puberty during the summer before sixth grade. There was a constant need for stimulation. Whether it was joy or anger, the reaction to the stimulation was the same – over the top. By the beginning of the 6th grade, the family was in complete crisis. The boys were constantly fighting with each other. No matter what David and Juli did, the boys were only getting angrier and angrier. There were broken fingers, bloody noses, busted lips and face punching. It was then that Juli and David took the boys to see behavioral pediatrician and adolescent specialist, Dr. Paul Warren. Dr. Warren diagnosed the boys with Type 3 ADD and called them “adrenaline junkies.”

Sibling Rivalry-Times Two

By Wendy Crooks

JULI WARD WAS SIX MONTHS pregnant before she and her husband David found out that she was expecting twins. At the time, although very excited, she could only imagine how difficult it might be to have a toddler and two new babies. Now Nelson and Tanner are 16 years old and Juli and David Ward have first-hand knowledge of how intense having twins can really be.

When Nelson and Tanner were little, they had their own little language that twins often develop. Between the two of them and their slightly older sister, Juli explained their lives as “a fun loving frenzy of play.” Juli and David decided that although they were identical twins,

they wanted to treat them as the great individuals that God intended them to be. They seldom dressed them alike and many of her family members and friends would give Juli a hard time about it.

As the boys aged and approached elementary school, their relationship with each other became more intense. It seemed to become more of a love/hate relationship. Juli and David started suspecting that the boys were having some issues, but when they went to school for parent-teacher conferences, there was nothing alarming reported. In fact, both sets of teachers would say, “He’s a perfect student.” At home, however, it was a completely different story.

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Both boys were tested for the gifted and talented program and it was determined that both have very high IQ’s. Unfortunately, these really smart kids were out of control with their fighting. In September of their 6th grade year, Tanner and Nelson were medicated for their ADD. It was then that Juli and David

finally had a reprieve. The boys really adjusted nicely to the medicine but by the spring, Juli and David's short-lived reprieve was over. When the boys systems got used to the medicine, things went from bad to worse. The twins started getting suspended from school over and over again for fighting – with each other.

MAKING THE FIRST MOVE

The parents decided to move the boys to a private school as they felt a smaller learning environment might help them. In the fall of their 7th grade year, they seemed to be thriving in their new environment. But, before the spring equinox, this second small reprieve was over. They were again fighting in school – and again it was with each other. Of course now they were fighting over something more important; a girl. This, combined with their raging hormones, led to more and more suspensions. In April, the biggest blowout to date occurred. After the boys brawled on the floor and against lockers, Juli was asked to take the two of them home. In a day that seemed to match the occasion, the sky began to open up and a tremendous downpour began. As Juli ventured home, the rain continued and Juli asked Tanner to explain his behavior. After much argument, Tanner began kicking the back of his mom's car seat. After several failed attempts to make him stop, Juli finally stopped the car in the parking lot of a nearby convenience store. She instructed Tanner to get out and wait until his father picked him up. Instead of going into the store like she intended for him to do, Tanner walked around the building in the pouring rain. He disappeared long enough for Juli to place the call to his father and while she was still explaining the incident to David, Tanner reappeared. Like a child possessed by a demon, Tanner looked



*The Ward family photo in 1997
photo provided by Juli Ward*

straight at his mother, and took a bottle cap to the side of the car. He walked the entire circumference of the car scraping the bottle cap all the way. This little outrage resulted in a whopping \$2,500 worth of damage to the family vehicle but was the first of a few things that helped David and Juli realize the severity of their problem.

It seemed like they were running out of options and running out of time before something really serious happened.

Not too long after that day, Juli and David were called into the school for a meeting with the administrators and ultimately were asked not to re-enroll the boys.

With little or no choice left, Juli and David started exploring their options. They soon became aware of a place in Ft. Worth called, All Church Home. This

home-like environment is a place for adolescences in crisis. With the help of trained professionals, Juli and David hoped that their boys would soon learn to live together without fighting and their family would be restored to normalcy. The boys could live there during the week, attend a local public school and come home on the weekends. The plan sounded solid and the family was very optimistic.

All Church Home gave the family another much needed break. While the facility is a great facility, it was not the right kind of place for Nelson and Tanner. Their time there did not address the specific issues the boys

had. It again provided only a temporary fix.

After a short period of time at All Church Home, the boys were suspended from the Ft. Worth ISD, summoned to appear in Teen Court and sentenced to community service. The administrator at All Church Home summed up what Juli and David already knew by saying, "These two people cannot live under the same roof." They pulled Tanner out and left Nelson there since he soon had to appear in court.

But now what? For the remainder of 8th grade and the summer before 9th grade, Juli and David did the best they could to get by with these struggling teens. When their oldest daughter said that she was afraid to go to sleep at night, Juli realized that they had more than just the twins to consider. They needed to think about the safety of their two other children, Mackenzie and Slayter. On some nights, although David is not particularly proud of it, he made the boys sleep in the garage. "It's just what we had to do so that everyone could feel safe. We didn't have a padded room with a lock," said David. Of course he made sure they had

a bed and the temperature outside had to be conducive, but nonetheless, they slept separate and apart from the family during these combative outbreaks.

Every so often, it seemed, they were given a small tool to help to deal with these boys. As Juli put it, "It was like a pot that was ready to explode. We found just enough at the right time to keep the lid on."

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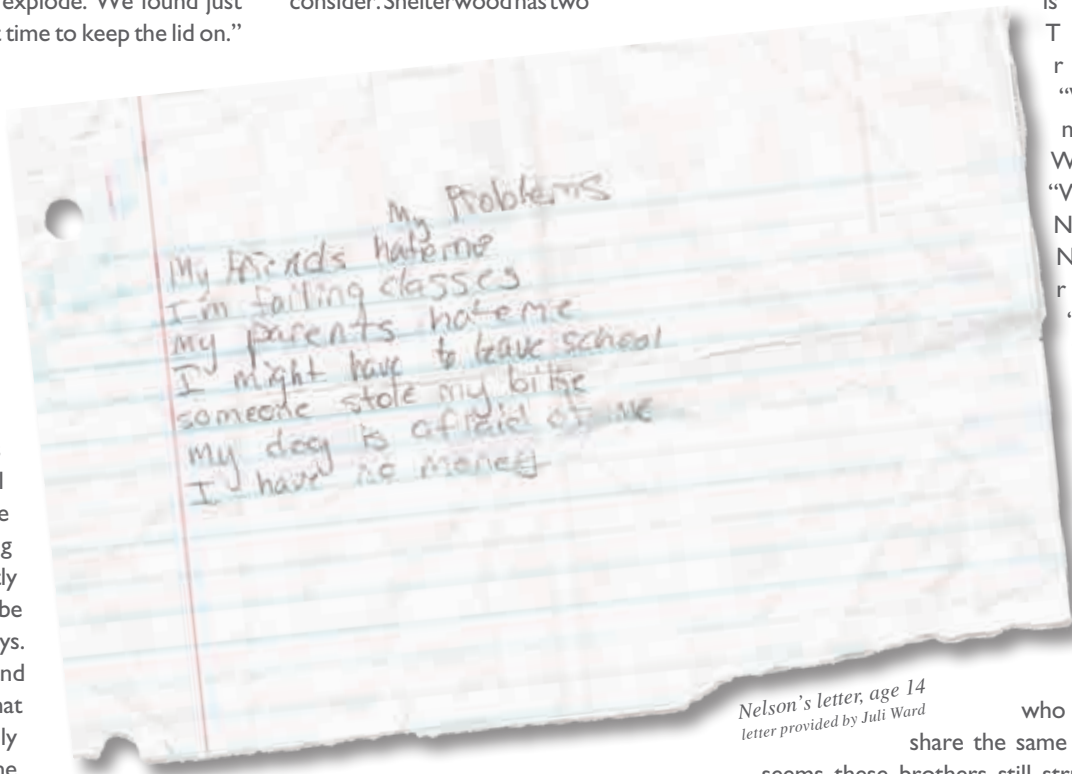
THE PROPER TREATMENT

Just a few weeks before school started, Juli woke up one morning and knew exactly what needed to be done for the boys. She had prayed and prayed about what to do and suddenly it felt right. She knew that as much as she loved these two boys and how difficult it would be to let them go, she knew that was exactly what needed to happen. They needed to go. The place she knew they needed to go was Shelterwood.

Shelterwood is a Christ-centered residential care facility that provides counseling and support for teenagers and their families in times of crisis. Why would this facility work when All Church Home did not? It seemed a lot like All Church Home but a few things stood out to Juli and she knew these things were the missing links for their boys. The facility is completely centered in Christ. David and Juli are strong believers and had raised their children in a strong Christian faith. At Shelterwood the program encourages the teens to find solutions to their problems by turning to Christ and deepening their faith. Additionally, the facility provides an on-site accredited private school with a low teacher to student ratio allowing them individualized academic attention. Lastly, Shelterwood touts a very successful big

brother/big sister program that enables these troubled students to be mentored 24/7.

After much debate, David and Juli finally agreed that Shelterwood was the place for Nelson and Tanner. With the decision made, there were plenty of details to consider. Shelterwood has two



Nelson's letter, age 14
letter provided by Juli Ward

locations: one in Branson, Missouri and the other in Denver, Colorado. Which son goes to which location? When do they leave? How will we afford it? How do we get them there? After the details were ultimately worked out, Tanner went to Branson on August 8, 2005. Nelson went to Denver on August 16, 2005.

At Shelterwood the program encourages the teens to find solutions to their problems by turning to Christ and deepening their faith.

After only a few months there, David and Juli realized that the twins were exactly where they needed to be. They

both agree that Tanner and Nelson each were placed with the perfect counselor for their temperament.

Although the teens are in separate states, their individual counselor asked them the same question and they had corresponding answers. When asked, "Who

is Tanner?" Tanner replied, "Well, I'm not Nelson." When asked, "Who is Nelson?" Nelson replied, "I'm not Tanner." Even though their parents have always treated them like two

individuals who happen to share the same birthday, it

seems these brothers still struggled with identity issues.

Tanner has returned from his stay at Shelterwood but Nelson remains. Nelson's return was delayed because he had a violent outbreak, which cost him three months in a Wilderness Camp.

Now Nelson looks back at how he used to feel and shared these sentiments:

"At the worst times it felt like I was at the bottom of a well looking up at the light. Everyone was in the light. I wanted to be there and I couldn't get there. God sent down the bucket and pulled me up into the light."

The family is optimistic about the future. From what they have experienced, so far, it seems to David and Juli that definite progress has been made. The boys really seem to have a genuine concern for each other now that they haven't had in a long time. After only a few days with Tanner home, David said gratefully, "They gave my son back to me."

Wendy Crooks is a freelance writer living in Plano.