

**Are you thinking of becoming a foster parent and getting paid by child welfare protection agency to look after kids in foster care? After reading the article below, you may want to think twice. Being a foster parent can destroy you, your family and to those around you who may try to support you.**

## **How a Crown Attorney's office, a police officer and a child therapist destroyed a foster family**

**The article below was written by writer Margaret Wente and published in the Globe and Mail Newspaper - Tuesday January 6, 2004**

In 1987, Anita and Dale Klassen welcomed three foster children into their home — Michael Ross, 7, and his five-year-old twin sisters, Michelle and Kathy. Their birth parents were deaf, alcoholic and dysfunctional, and all three children had been sexually abused. They had severe behavioural and emotional problems. Michael was the worst. He had to be kept under constant supervision to prevent him from abusing his sisters. He would sexually assault other kids whenever he was left alone with them.

The Klassens treated their foster children as their own, but Michael proved too much for them. Anita begged social services to remove him, and at the age of 10, he was finally sent to another foster home. Furious at being separated from his sisters (whom he continued to molest whenever he got the chance), he accused the Klassens of sexually abusing him. He got his little sisters to pile on with allegations of their own.

The stories were obviously the concoctions of deeply troubled children. But not, according to a court judgment, to the zealous lawyers at the Crown attorney's office of Saskatchewan, or to the Saskatoon police, or to the child therapist, who swallowed them whole and apparently egged the children on for more. Their extraordinary spree of prosecutorial and therapeutic misconduct resulted in the arrest of no fewer than 16 people. The defendants were charged with more than 70 counts of sexual

assault, including a bizarre array of lurid crimes. The bill of indictment included the sexual violation and murder of babies and animals, cannibalism and other unlikely perversions. The media quickly named it the scandal of the century.

Among the accused was Dale's brother, Richard. For the past 12 years he has fought tenaciously to clear his name and that of his family, and it is he who has become the public face of the case. Last week, he and all the rest were spectacularly vindicated when they won a malicious-prosecution suit against their tormentors.

Justice George Baynton found against three of the four people named in the suit — Matthew Miazga, the Crown attorney; Brian Dueck, the lead policeman in the case; and Carol Bunko-Ruys, the child therapist. His verdict was extraordinarily damning. "The real scandal," he wrote, "is the travesty of justice that was visited upon the plaintiffs in this civil action, by branding them as pedophiles." He also noted that the defendants were less than forthcoming, and had lost or mislaid important records.

Why the government lawyers ever thought they had a case is a mystery. All they had was the testimony of the Ross children, obtained over many months of leading questioning. At no time were the children instructed to tell the truth. Instead, they were showered with praise

and treats every time they found more horrors to "disclose." Brian Dueck told them that he believed every word they said. Incredibly, nobody tried to corroborate anything the children said.

Meanwhile, the therapist, Ms. Bunko-Ruys, insisted that the sisters be reunited with their brother in his new foster home, even though she knew he'd been molesting them. After they were reunited, they cooked up further tales together, and the stories of molestation escalated.

As for the accused, they'd been thoroughly traumatized. They were now social outcasts. Some, including Anita, were emotionally destroyed. No apologies were forthcoming. When the falsely accused launched their suit for malicious prosecution, the government thought it was unwinnable, and fought it tooth and nail for the next decade.

In 1999, Michelle Ross, now 17, recanted and apologized to the Klassens. Her brother, Michael, signed a declaration saying he had made up all the stories. In 2001, Kathy, too, admitted she had lied in court. Undeterred, the government fought on to defend itself. The

sisters have now launched lawsuits of their own, claiming that their protectors miserably failed in their duty to protect them.

The settlement (yet to be determined) could cost the government millions in damages, on top of the millions it has already paid out to prosecute the case and, later, defend the indefensible. To Richard Klassen, though, the case won't be over until the government apologizes. It is, he says, only what's due his family. (His mother, Marie, who was among the accused, died during the proceedings.)

So far, there's no sign that the people convicted in this case feel the least remorse for the lives they wrecked, or even acknowledge that they were wrong. Nor have they paid the kind of price their victims did. Supt. Dueck still works for the Saskatoon police, where he is in charge, ironically, of the records division. Matthew Miazga, the prosecutor, still works for the Crown attorney's office. The child therapist, Carol Bunko-Ruys, continued working for the province's social services until recently; her current whereabouts are unknown.