

WEDNESDAY  
17th May 2000

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# Home Truths

## False Accusation



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For 10 months last year, Carol and Peter's two children, John and Ruth were placed on the At Risk Register by their local council's Child Protection Unit ... (The family's names have been changed to protect their identity)

From the time he was three, John had suffered from various allergies and behavioural problems and his worried mother, Carol was forever having to take him to the doctor. **But the doctor tended to take the view that Carol was over-protective and over-reacting.** Last year, John took a turn for the worse and developed breathing problems. Eventually he was admitted to hospital where it turned out he had pneumonia. His recovery was a slow process and he developed Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. He was very weak and couldn't attend school, and this is where the family's problems escalated. The school, worried about John's protracted absences contacted the doctor, then **the Social Services got involved - a fog of official concern formed and thickened and last June, the children were put on the At Risk Register.**

The council considered that both children were at risk of emotional abuse and neglect, particularly from Carol, who described her reaction to the decision, **"I cried and cried - I just went inside of myself - did the other parents believe the things that had been said of me?"** John wrote me lots of little love letters and stuck them round the house saying 'Mummy it wasn't your fault, you were just trying to get help for me'."

John began to blame himself for the situation and Ruth was concerned that if she went to school, and her mother was upset there would be no-one there to comfort her. Where Peter and Carol looked to the church to help them through, they found they were being held at arm's length, "I think they were afraid - some authority had accused us and they didn't know what to think..." **The people who helped them most at this time were their friends, "They got us through," says Carol, "and we had each other.."**

Peter and Carol pursued a tactical policy of non-compliance with the authority,

causing them to have to decide whether to go to court to gain access to the children, or take them off the register. Peter and Carol knew there was no case for court proceedings, and along with strong political support, the council capitulated. **A consultant paediatrician also confirmed that without a shadow of a doubt, John had had Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and in March this year the children were removed from the At Risk register.**

It was a traumatic ten months for the family, who are recovering slowly from the ordeal, "All last summer it was on my mind that we were on a register for being abusers of our children," says Carol, **"Now we take one day at a time,** try to love each other, and try to savour moments, and all the things we missed for a year ..."

**If you're in a similar situation, and would like advice, call Radio 4's Action Line on 0800 044 044 for organisations which can help**  
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