

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA
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Eldora

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN CREATIVE WRITING

By

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Newcastle, Oklahoma

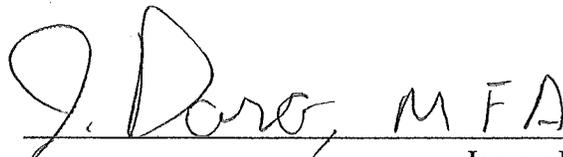
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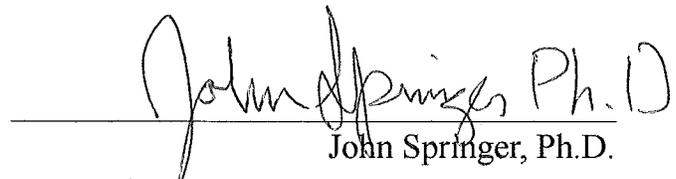
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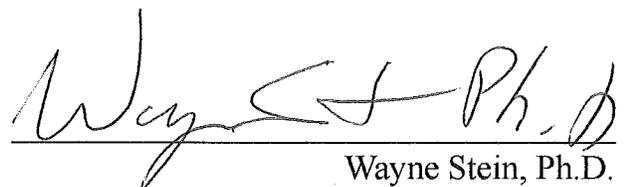
A THESIS

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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"ELDORA"

Based on the true story of Carl Petersen

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"Eldora"

FADE IN:

EXT. CORN FIELDS AND FARMS GIVE WAY TO 1941 SOUJX CITY,
IOWA - EVENING - EST.

INT. 1941 - THEATRE - NIGHT

Sepia-toned newsreel boxing match. The BOXERS in hooded robes, warming up, dance around in their respective corners.

Trainers and staff huddle around.

White lettering: ROUND ONE, comes onto the screen.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

New York City, 24th of July. Here we go into
round one. Gallento is much heavier than Louis.
Tony weighs 233 and Joe is 200.

The boxers exit their corners, touch gloves; gloves thrown down by the ref, and the match begins.

Tony Gallento moves aggressively on Joe Louis, quickly throwing several punches.

Louis dances back, keeps his hands up and moving, little jabs, searching for the right punch.

FATHER (O.S.)

(whispering)

There. There. That's what I'm talking about.

SHUSHING sounds.

A theatre audience watching the film, shushes the FATHER. He shrugs them off, waving them away, and continues talking to his eleven-year-old son, DOWTY.

FATHER

(continuing)

Wait for it.

(continuing as V.O.)

See how he's setting him up. Waiting. Waiting for his moment. You watch it'll come.

The match continues, little jabs, little jabs.

Tony Gallento advancing, making a big move.

Landing a left hook.

ANNOUNCER

Joe was really shaken by that left hook. Tony is really dangerous. When he lands a fist you know you've been hit.

FATHER

Naw, he ain't hurt. Just waiting. He's patient. That guy don't know what he's talking about. You'll see.

SHUSHING O.S.

More boxing. Both boxers throw punches.

Joe, the patient boxer, finds an open spot and lands a knock-out, over-hand-right.

Tony falls against the ropes and then to the floor.

The referee counts down.

The father JUMPS to his feet cheering.

The boy does the same.

Then father and son punch each other, again and again, yelling and laughing, while the theatre crowd complains in the background.

The movie screen changes to a gray sky, Captain Marvel flying through the air, and the words: Republic Pictures Presents Adventures of Captain Marvel.

Father and son settle down to watch.

The father winks at Dowty, and putting his hands in a defensive boxing pose, silently jabs at him.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT - CONTINUING

B.g. Red neon sign glaring against a dark sky: ORPHEUM.
Rows of bulbs outline the marquee which proclaims the movie title: The Wizard of Oz.

Father and son, in good Wizard-of-Oz fashion, skip down the sidewalk.

Dowty, stopping, mimics Captain Marvel, taking the superhero pose.

DOWTY

Shazam!

Dowty mounts an assault on his father.

The father pokes with his right hand, uppercuts, undercuts.

Then holding his left hand close to his face makes little jabs at Dowty.

FATHER

Wait for it. Wait for it.
(swinging at the boy)

Bam!

INT. BOXING MATCH DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The father in boxing robe. A trainer working his shoulders, rubbing his arms. His MANAGER tying his gloves on.

Dowty sits in a corner, looking at a Whiz Comics book.

MANAGER

You gotta quit dragging this kid along.

FATHER

He ain't hurtin' nothing.

MANAGER

Yeah, but he's gonna end up like you.

FATHER

What's wrong with that?

MANAGER

Going to fights and reading that comic book shit. That's all he ever does.

FATHER

Don't worry about it.

MANAGER

That's what I'm talking about. You. Worrying about the kid. You're always thinking about the kid and not the fight.

The father looks at Dowty and winks.

MANAGER

(continuing)

You can't have no distractions if you wanta win more. You gotta win this fight. Tonight. You don't win, and you're not a contender. I can't do nothing more for ya, unless you wanta just be another bum fighter.

The trainer applies vaseline to the father's face.

The manager, finished tying the gloves, takes the father's gloved hands into his, slaps the gloves together numerous times.

MANAGER

This is your last chance.

INT. BOXING MATCH RING - NIGHT - CONTINUING

The father, unrobed, in the middle of a fight, in the same pose he used with Dowty after the movie; holding his left hand to his face, jabbing, jabbing at another BOXER.

The father, tired, is relieved when a BELL RINGS, and the two boxers move to the corners of the ring.

His trainer works at a cut on his face, pours water into him.

MANAGER

Come on, Kid. Remember. Jab. Jab. Uppercut.

The young son, sitting a row back, tries to reach his father, tries to go to his side.

His comic book falls to the floor, trampled by Dowty trying to get closer to his father.

A man holds Dowty back, shushing him, not addressing the boy's concerns.

The BELL RINGS and the father staggers back into the center of the ring.

MANAGER

(mimicking the action)

Jab. Jab. Uppercut. You can do this, Kid.

Dowty watches the fight.

The father and the boxer continue their match. Both men are tired.

The other boxer makes a series of combo punches at the father.

They end up in a clinch, the men leaning into each other, and after a few seconds, the referee separates them.

The father takes his signature south-paw stance, small jabs, waiting, waiting.

Suddenly the other boxer charges, landing a powerful overhand right, and then pummeling the father, ending with a knockout punch to the head.

The father crashes to the floor.

Dowty jumps to his feet.

Dowty

Dad!

Hands grab at the resistant, fighting boy as he tries to reach his father.

The father is carried out on a gurney.

Shallow breathing.

His head falls to one side.

Eyes close.

Blood trickles from a gash above his swollen left eye.

His gloved hand drops off the gurney.

Dowty, still shouting, struggles to get to his father.

INT./EXT. ORPHANAGE - EARLY EVENING

A red-brick, three-story building on a tree-lined avenue. A few steps at the curb, a sidewalk, and ten steep steps to the massive front porch. A sign reads: Sioux City Home for Girls and Boys.

INSIDE, the boy, DOWTY, now fourteen, sits in a small waiting room. He's listening to the radio.

The radio is broadcasting an Army vs Navy boxing match

Dowty grits his teeth, occasionally swinging his fists, taking his father's favored position, one hand jabbing, one blocking his face, as the announcer gives a play by play of the fight.

A woman clerk walks up to Dowty.

CLERK

Dowty, it's time.

DOWTY

Give me one more minute, please.

(turning back to the radio)

Come on. Come on Army.

CLERK

We can't keep him waiting.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

The Bradley Field boxer in a clinch with his
Naval opponent here at the base gymnasium at
Quonset Point . . .

Dowty reluctantly leaves the radio and follows the woman to
a door marked "Superintendent." He enters the room as the
radio fight continues.

INT. OFFICE-DAY-CONTINUING

The superintendent is in the middle of his speech to Dowty.

SUPERINTENDENT

You don't like it here, huh, kid? Always wanting
to escape? Now, listen to me, you got another
four years here. You need to stay the hell out of
trouble. We don't need or want any trouble
makers here at Sioux City.

DOWTY

Yes, Sir.

SUPERINTENDENT

Okay then. Get the hell outta here.

Dowty walks across the hall to the waiting room.

The radio is off, the boxing match over.

He turns away from the radio and walking down the hall, he
joins a group of children marching out of the dining hall.

They file down the hallway, and out to the play yard.

Children are playing ball and tag and other outdoor games.
Many stand around visiting.

Dowty, keeping an eye on the woman monitoring the play
area, and pausing momentarily behind a tree, moves to the
back of the grounds.

He climbs the fence and runs away down the sidewalk.

Dowty hurries through several blocks of residences, and
coming to a roadway, ducks into a culvert.

He folds his arms in, cowering into the culvert away from the chilly air and possible discovery.

INT. CAR - DAY

Dowty, hitching a ride with a married couple, hangs his head partially out the back window of their late-30s ford.

MAN

Where you headed?

DOWTY

I was going over to Des Moines, Sir.

(looking out the window)

My grandma's sick, and Momma wanted me to go check on her.

MAN

We're stopping in Beebeetown for dinner.

WIFE

My sister lives in Beebeetown. She wouldn't mind one more at the dinner table.

MAN

We can take you that far. But then we go south.

WIFE

To Omaha.

DOWTY

That'd be great. Beebeetown would be just fine. I'm hoping to make Des Moines by morning, to see my grandma and all.

WIFE

Well, she's a lucky woman, she's got you for a grandson.

DOWTY

I'm the one feeling lucky today, Ma'am.

The woman keeps chattering about mothers and grandmothers and Beebeetown and the countryside.

But Dowty is studying the newly-tilled fields they pass and doesn't hear.

EXT. SMALL TOWN - DAY

Dowty, holding money, shakes hands with the man, motions thanks for the money, then waves goodbye as the couple drives out of the town.

He stands on the street, waiting a few minutes until they have driven off.

Then he begins checking the half-dozen cars parked along the street.

Keeping an eye out for people who might catch him, he tries each car, looking for keys left in the ignition.

The third or fourth try, he finds a farm truck.

Dowty hops into the driver's seat and reaches for the door.

It is held open by a strong arm.

DOWTY

What the hell?

He turns, facing the farmer who owns the truck.

The farmer grabs Dowty's arm.

Dowty tries to wrench away, but the farmer holds fast to his arm, dragging him out of the truck and down the street.

INT. SIOUX CITY ORPHANAGE - DAY

A police officer leads Dowty into the building past the sign reading: Sioux City Home for Girls and Boys. They stop at a front desk.

OFFICER

Superintendent's office?

The clerk nods her head and directs them to the door.

INSIDE, the superintendent sits behind his desk. A calendar on the wall indicates that it is March, 1944.

Officer

Here's this one again.

The superintendent motions Dowty to a chair, nods thanks to the officer, who exits.

SUPERINTENDENT

This is your last escape. You're going to be sorry you didn't like it here at Sioux City,

(beat)

because I've seen enough of you, you little asshole. Tomorrow I'm sending you to Eldora. It's a place where if you run away, they'll beat the shit out of you.

EXT./ INT. IOWA TRAINING SCHOOL, ELDORA, IOWA - DAY

A huge three story brick building, several towers and tall chimneys, comes into view.

Large groups of boys (many of them young men) stand or march in military formation patterns on different parts of the lawns, lightly dusted in snow, surrounding the building.

They all wear the same gray drab, heavy shirt jackets with blue jeans. Most wear stocking caps, but in varying styles. One's is sagging to the side, another's stretched to the top, some rolled up and pulled tight to the head, and so on.

Some groups carry dummy rifles as they march.

A small marching band of about twenty five members practices formations on a concrete courtyard left of the main road, surrounded by snow-dusted hedges, a cement bird fountain to one side, ornamented with a filigree of fine frost.

The place is like a small town with two streets running along the sides of the main building. The cottages where the boys live look like Victorian houses, not like barracks. The buildings include a chapel with spire, a

school house, a couple workshops, a gym, a hospital, and a greenhouse. Farm fields and barns lie on the outskirts of the small town.

A police car pulls up to the main building and Dowty and another boy, a twelve year old named AXEL, are removed from it. They are handed over to a short, stocky man, gruff in action, MR. HASTINGS (known by the boys at the school as LIVERLIPS).

LIVERLIPS

This way, you little peckerheads.

INSIDE, a lady clerk gets their names and ages.

A silent inmate takes charge and escorts them to the hospital.

They are turned over to a nurse who fills out a two-by-five card as she asks Dowty about broken bones and such.

NURSE

(needle in hand)

Have you had smallpox?

DOWTY

Yes.

The nurse injects him almost before he answers. She really doesn't even listen to his answer.

She turns to Axel and gestures Dowty forward, where an inmate, CARL, hands him a stack of state work clothes, a toothbrush, bar of soap, a stocking cap, etc.

CARL leads Dowty and Axel down the hall, through a hospital ward with rows of beds, to a small room at the back.

CARL

(showing them to their beds)

You'll spend the night in here.

DOWTY

What for?

CARL

Make sure you don't got bugs, I guess.

He leaves, and Dowty and Axel lie in bed.

AXEL

You think this place is as bad they say it
is?

No response.

EXT. / INT. TRAINING SCHOOL - NEXT DAY - CONTINUING

Carl, with Axel and Dowty, in the school work uniform and wearing the stocking caps, walks along one of the streets of the Training School.

Dowty points to an area surrounded by black wrought-iron fencing at the very edge of the grounds.

DOWTY

That looks like a cemetery.

CARL

Maybe because it is.

DOWTY

What the hell? They bury people here?

Carl shushes Dowty as they pass several adult workers.

Carl salutes each one.

Dowty, forgetting the cemetery, has a half-way disgusted look on his face.

They march in silence.

Carl then salutes an adult who is way across the clearing from them.

That is too much for Dowty.

DOWTY

Why are You saluting everybody?

CARL

Eldora's a military school. So you damn well better salute all the state employees or somebody will beat your ass.

AXEL

You been beaten?

CARL

Not for failing to salute.

DOWTY

What for then?

CARL

Nobody gets outta here without a beating. Here we are at the tailor shop. We go in here.

Inside the tailor shop, another inmate, older than Dowty, maybe sixteen, seventeen-years-old, leaves his sewing machine to issue Dowty and Axel blue-gray military uniforms and a military dress cap with visor.

CARL

This is Skinny. He's in cottage number four where you'll be.

SKINNY rubs his fingers through his shiny, slick, three-inch-long hair and nods at Dowty.

The woman working the tailor shop, MRS. RINEL, shushes Carl.

Across the hall at the shoe shop they are issued shiny black dress shoes.

Carl leads them out of the building.

They walk a bit until they come to Cottage Two.

Carl walks Axel to the front door while Dowty waits on the sidewalk.

The matron smiles at Axel and at Carl, but only with her lips. The smile does not reach her eyes. She opens the door for Axel.

Axel goes inside while Carl and Dowty wait outside, no talking.

Dowty is busy studying a huge empty field behind the cottages, not too distant, surrounded by a field-wire fence about five feet tall. He notes that the field runs the length of the property and along Highway 75 which runs right through the middle of the Training School.

DOWTY

Looks like a person could escape outta here pretty easy.

CARL

(studying the fence line)

They'd catch you, and it wouldn't be worth it.

DOWTY

If a guy could make it to Des Moines, it'd be worth it.

CARL

Talking like that'll get your ass in some quick trouble.

Then a door opens and Axel comes out empty-handed.

The three boys proceed to Cottage Four where this time, Carl lets Dowty make his own way to the front door.

A short scowling woman, thirty something, opens the door, invites Dowty in, looks to the sidewalk at Carl.

MRS. HASTINGS

I am Mrs. Hastings.

MRS. HASTINGS refuses Dowty's proffered hand.

DOWTY

(following Hastings to the basement)

I'm Dowty Ritter, ma'am.

The woman scowls and stops at a locker.

MRS. HASTINGS

Two right, nine left, eighteen right. Repeat it.

DOWTY

Two right, nine left, eighteen right.

MRS. HASTINGS

Well, open it.

Dowty opens the locker, stows his belongings next to a white towel and nightgown already hanging there.

Mrs. Hastings shows him the shower/washroom, several rows of long, low wooden benches in the middle of the room, and a toilet room with rows of toilets all open to each other.

No conversation.

She rushes him back up the stairs.

OUTSIDE again, Dowty runs to catch up with Carl and Axel, who are already on the move. They stop in front of the main building.

CARL

This is it guys. I'm dumping your asses in the dean's office.

DOWTY

What happens in the dean's office?

CARL

Well, an old fart named Wollenberg is gonna blow smoke up your butt, then put you to work in one of the sweatshops.

Dowty and Axel are silent as Carl takes them to a second floor outer office where an inmate, a big kid, sits reading a comic book.

DEAN'S BOY

(waving his comic book)

Have a seat guys.

The DEAN'S BOY and Carl visit quietly, occasionally looking at Dowty and Axel as if they are talking about them.

Dowty looks around the room. A door to the inner office stands half open. The lettering on the opaque glass reads: B.J. Wollenberg / Dean of Boys.

CARL waves goodbye and leaves.

The Dean's Boy reads his comic book.

DOWTY

Is that Captain Marvel you're reading?

DEAN'S BOY

Hell no. It's Batman.

DOWTY

Captain Marvel could whip Batman's butt.

DEAN'S BOY

Captain Marvel ain't a real guy.

DOWTY

And Batman sure as hell is, huh?

DEAN'S BOY

He could be.

DOWTY

If I was Captain Marvel-

DEAN'S BOY

You better shut up. No talking while you wait. Shit. You'll get your ass beat the first day you're here. And I'll tell ya what. Ain't no Captain Marvel gonna save your ass at this place.

Dowty and Axel sit in silence, Axel looking a little worried.

Finally, a voice from inside the inner office.

WOLLENBERG

You new boys come in here.

The Dean's Boy points toward the door, and Dowty and Axel enter the office.

A portly, fifty-something, gray-haired man sits behind an enormous desk. There are no chairs in the office, so Dowty and Axel stand.

WOLLENBERG

Welcome to the school boys. I'm Mr. Wollenberg, and you are?

DOWTY

Dowty Ritter.

AXEL

Axel Badner, sir.

WOLLENBERG

Mister Ritter, things will go better for you if you learn to say sir. Do you understand?

Dowty

Yes, sir. I understand.

Dowty looks at WOLLENBERG'S teeth. He seems to have extra teeth and his cuspids sit at odd angles. Spittle, dribbles off Wollenberg's lips.

Wollenberg picks up a hanky and wipes his lips. He wipes the desk in front of himself.

Wollenberg writes on index cards as he speaks to the boys.

WOLLENBERG

Ritter you are number 11300. Badner you are 11301. You will each receive fifteen merits per day while you reside with us. When you have six thousand merits you will be paroled. It's likely a good boy will reach six thousand in thirteen months and five days.

He looks at Dowty and Axel, who nod understanding.

WOLLENBERG

(continuing)

If you break our rules, merits will be deducted, a minimum deduction being two hundred fifty. The maximum deduction is your total balance at the

WOLLENBERG (CONTIN'D)

time of the infraction. You can never drop below zero. If you never accumulate six thousand, you will remain at Eldora until your twenty-first birthday.

Wollenberg wipes spittle from his lips and off the desk.

WOLLENBERG

(continuing)

Extra merits will be awarded for extraordinary conduct. An example of extraordinary conduct would be informing on someone that is planning to escape.

(beat)

Do you understand?

DOWTY and AXEL

(in unison)

Yes, sir.

WOLLENBERG

You will both attend school in the afternoon. Mr. Badner, you will work in our new shoe shop and you will like it, I'm sure. Mr. Ritter, you'll be working in the mending room for Mrs. Rinel. You will like her, and you will learn a trade.

Wollenberg wipes his lips and writes on the index cards.

WOLLENBERG

(continuing)

Alright then. I only have one more thing for you. Listen carefully. After lunch our assistant superintendent will instruct the afternoon classes to fall in. You two must join the ninth grade. Do you understand? Ninth grade.

DOWTY and AXEL

(in unison)

Yes, sir.

WOLLENBERG

Do either of you have questions?

DOWTY shakes his head no and looks at AXEL.

AXEL

No, sir.

WOLLENBERG

One more thing, boys. If you break the rules, you will be severely punished. This place is not Sioux City. Here, if you do something stupid, you get it good. We do not spare the rod and spoil the child here at Eldora. Some of our staff prefer belts. Others prefer paddles. Either way, they hurt, so I'd advise you to stay out of trouble. Do you understand?

Both boys nod yes.

WOLLENBERG

Well then, if everything is clear, then you are dismissed.

The boys turn to leave, but Mr. Wollenberg clenches his teeth and grunts out a sigh, almost spitting.

WOLLENBERG

Just a moment. This is a military school, and you must salute all staff members. So, salute me now!

Dowty and Axel give the best salutes they know how.

Wollenberg returns them a perfunctory wave.

Dowty and Axel leave the office, are met by the Dean's Boy in the outer office, and he leads them out of the building, descending the front steps.

DEAN'S BOY

What did you think of that old asshole?

DOWTY

(mimicking Wollenberg)

I think he's queer and likes to ask, 'Do you understand?' after every damn question he asks.

DEAN'S BOY

(with a broad smile)

What do you think his nickname is?

Dowty and Axel shrug and shake their heads.

DEAN'S BOY

(continuing)

Fangs. How does that strike ya?

DOWTY

Thats one hell of a nickname.

All three boys break into hearty laughter.

INT. TAILOR SHOP - DAY

The workshop sewing room, which looks something like an early 1900s sweat shop.

Several boys of varying ages, seated at treadle machines, placed in two rows of three, along the end of the room, stop their work to view the new boy, fourteen-year-old, Dowty.

Large windows and bare electric bulbs provide light for the sewing machine operators.

Across the room, two men supervise, and help in the work, as some boys work at tables cutting out pattern pieces.

Jackets, dress pants, and a large number of the gray school uniform shirts hang on rods which are mounted along the opposite wall.

Left of the fireplace, a quilting loom has a quilt stretched onto it. Several boys and a woman work at tying knots.

MRS. RINEL, the late thirties matron of the tailor shop, introduces Dowty to the boys, including SKINNY, now seated at a machine. She gives Dowty instructions as they walk from machine to machine, each boy nodding, none speaking.

MRS. RINEL

No visiting with your co-workers. If you have a problem, raise your hand. If you need to use the toilet, raise your hand.

They end the tour at an empty machine which Mrs. Rinel points at.

MRS. RINEL

This is your machine, Dowty. Sit down and watch.

Dowty sits in a nearby chair while Mrs. Rinel sits at the machine. She shows Dowty the parts of the machine and then demonstrates the sewing. She stands and lays a bundle of clothing on the sewing table.

MRS RINEL

These are pretty simple. See what you can do with them.

Mrs. Rinel walks away.

Dowty works at the sewing. Pretty soon his machine is buzzing along and he's grinning.

He stops suddenly as blood oozes onto the pants that are attached to his left forefinger with the sewing machine needle. He has sown through his finger.

DOWTY

Damn!

Dowty raises his free hand and waves frantically at Mrs. Rinel.

She quickly comes to his side, but decides the problem is not a big deal. She backs the needle out of his finger and applies a small bandage.

MRS. RINEL

Please be more careful, Dowty.

Dowty takes up his sewing again.

One of the boys (SMART ASS) sitting at a nearby machine snickers.

SMART ASS

(under his breath)

Dumb Ass.

SKINNY

(to the smart ass)

Mind your own business, Smart Ass.

(to DOWTY)

Don't pay him any attention. Futzing girl, just wants attention.

A loud whistle sounds.

Dowty and his co-workers head toward the door. Everyone pounds down the stairs and onto the sidewalk.

Axel and others from the shoe shop are already assembled.

The boys quickly get into formation, and the seasoned inmates, recognizing their inexperience, shove Axel and Dowty to the back. Carl, the squad leader, stands at the front of the formation.

CARL

Forward Harch!

The formation, in decent military form, march to the dining hall. Dowty and Axel follow as best they can.

INT. DINING HALL - LUNCH

The hall is huge, seating all of the five hundred inmates. Everyone seems to know where to sit, and the inmates silently march to their seats.

Dowty, however, is not sure where to go. He spots Mrs. Hastings, who beckons him to an empty seat.

DOWTY

Thank you.

MRS. HASTINGS

No speaking at lunch.

Several male employees pace the aisles between tables.

ASSISTANT SUPER

(voice elevated some)

Prayer.

A table monitor, seated at the head of Dowty's table recites a prayer. Other table monitors recite the same.

MONITOR

Come Lord Jesus,
Be our guest.
Let this food,
To us be blessed.

The monitor ladles mush onto tin plates, and the only noise in the huge hall is the clatter of silverware and tin cups that have been filled with milk from a pitcher.

Even Mrs. Hastings, as she inspects empty plates, does not speak, but gestures for the boys to pass the plates to the monitor.

The assistant superintendent, just as Wollenberg promised, walks to the center of the hall, calling for the different groups to exit.

ASSISTANT SUPER

Special Detail!

Dowty watches as filthy boys from different tables move toward the door and get into marching formation. Their heads are bowed, arms folded.

His attention is distracted by the super calling other groups.

ASSISTANT SUPER

Ninth Grade!

Dowty stands. He marches out with the ninth grade group.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - LATE AFTERNOON, EVENING

The boys are marching again. This time to the playground, a stretch of brown grass and concrete behind the cottages. Dowty, at the back, concentrates on staying in step.

CARL

Companee Halt!

Dowty misses the timing on the halt and crashes into the boy in front of him. Dowty helps the boy to his feet.

SMART ASS

Like I said, dumb ass.

Carl points to Dowty, Axel, and a couple other boys.

CARL

You dummies fall in over here.

The dummies move to the indicated spot.

CARL

At ease.

Dowty watches as squad leader Carl assembles the remainder of the group and calls orders (left flank, harch, right flank, to the rear, etc) which they obey in seamless unison. He ends with "Fall Out," and the boys salute Carl.

Some shake his hand or slap his shoulder, then wander off across the playground in all directions.

The squad leader now organizes the dummies into a small formation.

CARL

My name is Carl, and I am your Sergeant.
Everybody got that?

Silence. The leader points in the general direction of the now dispersing marching group.

CARL

(continuing)

Those guys are damn good, ain't they?

(beat)

Don't worry. With a little work, you guys will be just as good.

He begins calling marching orders and demonstrating correct forms.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - LATE AFTERNOON

Boys stand around visiting even though it is chilly.

AXEL

This place don't seem so bad.

DOWTY

Yeah. Just like home.

Dowty and Axel walk slowly toward their respective cottages. Dowty approaches Cottage Four, where three dirty, baldheaded boys stand near the back door.

Their heads are bowed, their arms folded across their chests, each holding a cap in a clenched hand.

Dowty spots Carl and Skinny.

DOWTY

(pointing at the dirty boys)

What the hell's going on with them?

CARL

They're on special detail for trying to escape.
That crud's from the coal pile.

Dowty rubs his head, as if questioning about their bald heads.

DOWTY

What happened to their hair?

CARL

The bald heads? If you try to run away, they
shave all your hair off. It's a peterbald.

DOWTY

You're kiddin' me.

CARL

No I ain't.

A couple boys walk by, greeting Carl with respect.

ONE BOY

Hey, Sarge.

DOWTY

How long you been here?

Carl and Dowty move further away from the peterbalds.

CARL

Since I was ten.

DOWTY

(to Skinny)

You?

SKINNY

Six months, and the whole time, I've been looking for a way out of this hellhole.

(beat)

Guess you know if you turn me in for what I just said, I'll get the shit beat outta me, and I'll be on Special Detail for thirty days with a peterbald.

He looks from Dowty to Carl.

DOWTY

Don't worry. I ain't gonna turn nobody in.

CARL

Me neither.

The three look at each other and relax a bit.

Carl nods toward a short, stocky man, the same man that originally escorted Dowty from the car he arrived in, better known as LIVERLIPS, who now stands beside the three peterbalds.

LIVERLIPS

(yelling)

Everybody inside!

Carl steers Dowty toward the basement door.

DOWTY

Who's that funny looking bastard?

CARL

That's Mr. Hastings, the cottage manager.
Liverlips. He's the meanest son of a bitch you
ever seen.

INT. COTTAGE FOUR BASEMENT - CONTINUING

Outside boys talk and occasionally laugh, but once INSIDE,
as Dowty goes to his locker, everything has gotten silent.
He spots Liverlips standing to one side, chewing a
toothpick.

LIVERLIPS

Okay gentlemen, get ready for bed.

His words work magic, and all the boys begin removing their
clothing.

Dowty, a towel wrapped around him, gets in line for a
shower.

Suddenly one of the peterbalds cuts the line in front of
Dowty.

Dowty looks like he'll challenge the boy, but Carl stops
him.

Dowty lowers his fist and backs off.

Jostling through the other inmates, the peterbald's towel
slips on his hips, and Dowty gets a glimpse of his butt,
black and blue.

Dowty, stepping out of the shower, follows the lead of
others. Those finished with their showers, dressed in the
white nightgowns, are seated on the long wooden benches in
the middle of the room.

Except for the nightgowns, they could be a baseball team
gathered in the locker room to hear the coach's motivating
speech.

Dowty puts his towel in the locker, dons his white
nightgown, and joins Carl on the benches.

Skinny sits nearby.

More and more boys move to the benches, and when the benches are full, the boy that pushed his way into line in front of Dowty walks to the front of the room. He peeks around the room, then bows his head and folds his arms.

The other two peterbalds join him at the front.

Liverlips and another male employee watch the proceedings. They start a quiet conversation, and Dowty takes the opportunity to talk to Carl.

DOWTY

Who's the guy with Liverlips?

CARL

That's Bugeye. He's the night man. Not quite the asshole as Liverlips.

LIVERLIPS

Dowty Ritter to the front.

Dowty pauses for a moment, surprised to hear his name called. After a second, he walks up to Liverlips.

Liverlips eyes Dowty up and down.

LIVERLIPS

Gentlemen, this is Dowty Ritter. He's an escape artist from Sioux City.

(looking to Dowty)

Ain't that right, Dowty?

DOWTY

(almost grinning)

Yeah.

Liverlips spins around and hits Dowty square in the mouth.

Dowty's knees buckle.

He feels light-headed, but he straightens up.

LIVERLIPS

(glowering)

We say sir here, asshole.

DOWTY

Yes, Sir.

Liverlips instantly hits Dowty with another punch to the jaw.

Dowty's knees buckle, but he remains standing. He challenges Liverlips with his eyes, but says nothing.

LIVERLIPS

(enjoying himself)

Goddamnit, Ritter, this ain't Sioux City. You ain't at no orphanage no more. You don't speak here until you're told to speak.

Dowty looks at Liverlips as if he might answer, might say piss on you or some such, but, again, he says nothing.

Liverlips returns the look, raising his hand slightly as if he might take another swing.

They look at each other a moment while Carl and Skinny watch.

LIVERLIPS

Get your ass back to your seat.

Dowty returns to his seat.

Liverlips opens a locker and pulls out a big leather strap, a cut-off section of a horse and buggy harness, two-and-a-half feet long, two inches wide, and a half-inch thick.

CARL

(whispering to Dowty)

Betsy.

Liverlips bends and unbends Betsy a few times, shakes the strap a few times, testing its suppleness. Then he nods at one of the peterbalds standing at the front.

The boy steps forward.

LIVERLIPS

Grab some bench.

The boy obediently bends over and grabs the front bench.

Liverlips draws his arm back as far as possible and swings with all his strength.

Dowty hears the swoosh of the strap, hears the slapping of leather against skin and puts his hand to his mouth, squelching the urge to throw up.

SERIES OF QUICK SHOTS

A) Swinging of the belt, time after time. The overwhelming sounds

B) the next peterbald boy stepping forward.

C) and the next. All the while the noise and the swinging belt.

D) finally Liverlips puts Betsy back in the locker.

E) Liverlips saying, "Up to bed, assholes."

END SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. BUNK ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUING

The whole second floor is a bunk room with four rows of beds, twelve beds in a row. All are covered with homemade quilts.

Carl shows Dowty where he sleeps. The quilt covers a blue and white tick mattress, spotted by previous owners.

BUGEYE makes a quick tour of the room and leaves.

He can be heard locking the door, and then Carl walks around the room, ending up at Dowty's bed.

CARL

Your jaw okay?

DOWTY

It's okay. When do they turn out the lights?

CARL
They don't.

He walks away.

Dowty lies in bed wide-eyed, the light-bulb burning above his head.

INT. BUNK ROOM - JUST BEFORE SUNRISE

BUGEYE
Everybody up!

Bugeye leaves and Dowty rolls over.

CARL
(coming over to Dowty)
Everybody up.

DOWTY
It's Saturday, ain't it?

CARL
Welcome to Eldora. Where we work every day but Sunday. If you're lucky, we'll get the afternoon off. If Liverlips is in a good mood, that is.

DOWTY
What if he's in a bad mood?

SKINNY
We march after work.

Dowty, purple, swollen cheek and puffy lip, drags himself out of bed. He looks at his sore finger. He starts to make the bed, but Carl stops him.

CARL
Tear it up. It's sheet day.

When all the boys are ready, Bugeye unlocks the door.

Carl leads the boys downstairs. They carry bed clothes and visit, even an occasional laugh, as they go down.

When they reach the basement, Liverlips assumes command from Bugeye, and the boys become a silent line.

Each boy drops his sheet into a bin and then heads toward the locker room, using the bathroom and getting dressed.

Liverlips scowls at Dowty as he drops his sheet into the bin and moves past him, beginning the morning routine.

Dowty studies his swollen, purple face in the mirror, and looks at Carl.

DOWTY

At this rate, I'll never make it to six thousand merits.

LIVERLIPS

Fall in!

The boys get into a line two wide. Carl shows Dowty where to fall in.

They begin marching, not up the stairs, but into a tunnel behind two huge doors that Liverlips opens for them. The tunnel is lit by electric lights and has wiring and duct work running throughout.

INT. DINING HALL - MORNING CONTINUING

Dowty marches with the Cottage Four boys, out of the tunnel and up the stairs to the dining hall, where boys are assembling for breakfast. Dowty passes Axel who is already seated, nodding at him as he marches to his own table.

Axel has a split, swollen lip.

Dowty, Skinny, and Carl take their seats at Mrs. Hastings table.

ASSISTANT SUPER

Prayer.

TABLE MONITOR

Come Lord Jesus, Be our guest.
Let this food, To us be blessed.

The rattling silver and boys eating oatmeal.

The assistant superintendent walks to the center of the hall.

ASSISTANT SUPER
Special Detail!

The three peterbalds from Cottage Four and others from other cottages form a line at the doors. Two inmate squad leaders and MR. RINEL lead them out.

ASSISTANT SUPER
The following boys will report to the Dean's office.

The two named boys line up.

ASSISTANT SUPER
Shoe shop.

Axel lines up with a dozen boys and marches out.

ASSISTANT SUPER
Tailor shop.

Dowty and the others working the tailor shop line up and March out. Dowty is already keeping better time.

The SUPER can still be heard calling group names.

INT. TAILOR SHOP - DAY - CONTINUING

As Dowty enters, some of the boys are whispering. He is surprised by this but notices that Mrs. Rinel is not disturbed, so he takes the opportunity.

DOWTY
Why'd those guys get called to the dean's?

SKINNY
Somebody reported catching them in bed naked together. They'll get thirty days Special Detail for sodomy. Lose all their merits.

DOWTY
What? You're kidding me.

SKINNY

Nope. Thirty for sodomy. Thirty if you try to escape. Twenty for tobacco.

Looking around, he pulls a plug out, from inside his shirt, holds it up a moment, then quickly puts it away.

SKINNY

(continuing)

Ten for stealing cooking oil to slick your hair back.

His hair is shiny with oil.

MRS. RINEL

Boys.

The whispering stops and the boys get busy with their work.

Mrs. Rinel walks up to Dowty, carrying a load of clothes. Drawing closer, she frowns.

MRS. RINEL

Dowty, what happened to your face? Did you get into a fight?

DOWTY

No, Ma'am, Liv - Mr. Hastings hit me.

Mrs. Rinel frowns, contemplating taking action, but shakes it off.

MRS. RINEL

(whispering)

Well, that's too bad.

(normal voice)

Here's the clothes you worked on yesterday. Would you wear these, Dowty?

Dowty, embarrassed, shakes his head no.

MRS. RINEL

Please rip out your mistakes and do them over.

(to Skinny)

Francis.

Skinny leaves his own machine and walks over to Dowty's.

MRS. RINEL

Francis, please take these things apart and redo them. Show Dowty the mistakes he's made.

She walks away, and Skinny, an adept seamster, begins showing Dowty how to make repairs.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DUSK

Chilly evening, but the boys stand around visiting, etc., some horseplay.

Carl, Dowty, and Skinny sit, resting from tossing a football around.

Carl knocks the football back and forth between his hands.

SKINNY

(to Dowty)

What are you in for?

DOWTY

I stole a car, but mostly I'm here cause I escaped from the home in Sioux City.

SKINNY

What'd you steal a car for?

DOWTY

Cause my first two or three escapes, I was on foot and didn't get very far before they caught me. What'd you do?

SKINNY

Stole a car.

The boys grin at each other.

SKINNY

(continuing)

From a tailor I was apprenticed to.

He kicks the dirt and looks across the yard, seeing Liverlips come out of the basement door.

Carl tries spinning the ball on its end on his hand.

SKINNY

Then I took it over to South Sioux and sold it to some guy.

DOWTY

(laughing)

The hell you say.

SKINNY

Yeah, and the bastard I sold it to cheated me. That Chrysler was worth twice what he gave me for it.

DOWTY

Why the shit did you sell that car? You could of drove off to California or up to Des Moines and enlisted in the goddamn army. You could be beating the shit out of some Natzi. Instead a sitting here waiting for your turn to get your butt busted.

SKINNY

Well, see, I owed that tailor a favor. You know what I mean? He'll never see that car again. A goddamn brand new Chrysler and it's on its way down the river. Loaded on a raft and headed to New Orleans while that bastard was at home yelling at his wife for loaning it to me.

All three laugh, thinking about it.

SKINNY

But that's not why that bastard hunted me down and put me in here.

CARL

What then?

SKINNY

The ladies? They like me. His wife took a liking to me. That's why she let me take the car. She was hoping I'd take her too.

Again, they laugh.

Carl slaps the football as he laughs.

Then Skinny sobers up and points to the fence, to a break of trees next to the field.

SKINNY

Nobody knows this, and I may be dumber than shit to tell you two, but I trust ya. I gotta get out of here. Everything I told you about the car is true.

(beat)

But I ain't told all of it. I come here so I wouldn't have to go to jail. Figured this shit hole would be better'n jail.

DOWTY

What do ya mean? Jail?

SKINNY

I'm twenty-two years old. I lied to the judge and told him I was seventeen so they'd send me here. There wasn't nobody to prove different. But I can't take it here no more.

LIVERLIPS

(holding up a pair of boxing gloves)

Anybody wanna box?

Dowty, Carl, and Skinny look over to Liverlips, but turn away and continue talking.

DOWTY

All of us want out. You got any plans?

Except for Dowty, Skinny, and Carl, all the boys move to where Liverlips is standing.

SKINNY

Plans?

Skinny looks at the boys crowding around Liverlips and then over to the fence. He nods toward the stand of trees.

SKINNY

(continuing)

Yeah. I plan to get outta here.

B.g. Smart Ass raises his hand to volunteer for a boxing match.

Skinny walks away from the crowd, along the fence. He starts to jog. He's got escape in mind.

Dowty joins him.

Carl watches, unsure of joining them.

Carl looks back to the crowd.

Bugeye moves away from the crowd, spotting Carl first then the two boys running down the fence.

Carl hesitates, looks at Bugeye.

Suddenly Carl turns to run after Dowty and Skinny.

CARL
(yelling)
Hey. Hey, Assholes. That's far enough.

Dowty and Skinny turn around.

CARL
Look here. I don't have the strength of Hercules. You expect me to throw this ball a mile?

Carl releases the football.

Dowty, spotting Bugeye, runs forward, catches the ball.

Bugeye appears next to Carl.

BUGEYE
Alright, boys, play closer to the cottage.

Dowty carries the ball as the three boys follow Bugeye back nearer to the cottage and the boys crowded around Liverlips.

SMART ASS
I'll fight the new kid.

Dowty thinks that Smart Ass means him, so he starts pushing his way through the crowd.

But Liverlips and a couple of the boys are challenging Axel to step up.

SKINNY

Chicken shit.

CARL

He's just a little kid.

Axel hesitates as Liverlips gives Carl a warning look and waves Axel into the "ring."

Carl shuts down any further protests.

Axel and Smart Ass don boxing gloves.

Smart Ass bounces around like he thinks he's a seasoned fighter while Axel seems unsure.

Smart Ass quickly moves in on Axel and gives him a sharp one-two to the face.

Axel is almost knocked down, but several of the boys, urged on by Liverlips, keep him standing and push him back into the fight.

Axel swings at Smart Ass, barely making contact as Smart Ass dances out of the way.

Smart Ass toys with Axel, little punches here and there, that Axel backs away from, letting Smart Ass dance him around the ring, marked by the boys standing around.

A light snow begins to fall.

Except the few trouble makers, the boys in the crowd are mostly silent, almost mesmerized by the dancing boys and the falling snow.

LIVERLIPS

Is this a fight or a goddamn dance?

Smart Ass pops Axel in the jaw, knocking him to the ground near Dowty.

With the help of two boys, at Liverlips's urging, Axel staggers to his feet, reeling.

Smart Ass pummels his face and body; Axel, shielding the blows.

DOWTY

That's enough!

The faces of several boys show they are in agreement.

Dowty steps in to separate the two fighters.

Liverlips blocks him.

LIVERLIPS

Let em be.

Smart Ass swings at Axel.

SKINNY

Chicken shit!

DOWTY

Stop the fight! He's had enough!

More boys, including the Dean's Boy, start yelling for ending the fight.

Others want it to continue.

Axel, worn out and staggering awaits his fate.

LIVERLIPS

That's enough. That's enough! Everybody inside!

The crowd of boys moves toward the door.

A few boys pat Dowty's arm, shake their heads, glad he stuck up for the underdog.

Axel falls to the ground.

Liverlips kicks at Axel and motions for Bugeye to get him up.

INT. DINING HALL - NEXT MORNING

Breakfast as usual.

As the Cottage Four boys March in, Mrs. Rinel pulls her husband to the side. She gestures toward Liverlips, touches her face like it might be sore, lowered voice but mad.

Dowty notices Axel's empty seat.

DOWTY
(whispering to Carl)
Is that new kid ok?

MRS. HASTINGS
No talking.

Dowty looks again at the empty spot.

INT. COTTAGE FOUR SITTING ROOM - SUNDAY AFTERNOON

White skies and cold weather. Rain spatters on the windows and the birdbath.

INSIDE. Dowty's face is darker in color, still swollen. He, Carl, and Skinny sit at a table playing monopoly.

Skinny, using a playing piece, the shoe, is trying to clean the grime out of his finger nails.

DOWTY
(moving the car around the board)
Put your damn shoe on the board, Skinny.

SKINNY
When it's my turn, I will.

CARL
How do we know where you are if you keep picking it up.

Skinny picks up the dice and rolls them. He marches the shoe to the corner square.

SKINNY

Shit. See. Now I gotta go to jail.

CARL

Least there ain't no Liverlips in that jail or no Betsy, that goddamn girl friend of his.

SKINNY

I need a get outta jail free card.

DOWTY

Hell, we all need that.

SKINNY

(whispering)

I'm glad you said that. I got a plan. I know how to get out of jail, free as a bird. Singing like one too.

DOWTY

(his voice also lowered)

Shut up, dumb ass. Some rat in here will tell Liverlips.

SKINNY

I'm just saying -

CARL

Shut up! I want to get out too.

SKINNY

I got a plan.

CARL

Yeah. But keep it quiet. I want to see my brother again before I'm an old man, but I don't want to work the coal pile all day long and get my ass beat every night for thirty days. You seen what happens.

SKINNY

What I'm talking about is becoming a band member.

DOWTY

What good would that do?

CARL

It's hard to get in. I tried once a long time ago.

SKINNY

(to Carl)

Yeah,

(to Dowty)

but if you get in, you get out of Liverlips' cottage and you getta go to county fairs. You know, away from here. County fairs? And other events too.

DOWTY

When are those try outs?

SKINNY

One week. Don't you guys ever listen to announcements?

Skinny holds up a copy of the school newsletter: *The Training School Echo*.

SKINNY

(turning pages)

It's in here. See, under the Band Notes. Lists the dates and the towns the band will visit.

DOWTY

(taking the *Echo*)

Let me see that. He's right, and, fellas, it is an idea.

(reading)

. . . Marshalltown, Cedar Falls, and the governor has invited the Eldora marching band to play at the capitol building in Des Moines this year.

(he looks at the other two)

Des Moines. We could join the army. Get so far from Eldora, Iowa, they wouldn't ever find us. And by the time they did, we'd be soldiers.

CARL

Heroes.

DOWTY

Fangs and Old Fart Liverlips, couldn't do nothing to us.

SKINNY

Marching band, here we come.

CARL

Can't just anybody get in. Toady won't let ya. He wants real musicians.

SKINNY

Well, I am a musician, my friend. You got ya some rhythm. I seen you marching. Only one we gotta worry about is this little shit.

Skinny punches Dowty.

SKINNY

(continuing)

Maybe you'll get lucky, and the band will need a water boy.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

A line of boys stands outside the chapel.

INSIDE, the line stretches along the back wall and down a side aisle to the front stage.

On stage, a band member plays the piano while a group of boys, following the lead of the CONDUCTOR (TOADY), clap their hands to the rhythm.

Dowty and Skinny stand just inside the doorway.

They watch as a squad leader leads a couple new kids past the chapel toward the cottages. One of them is a skinny kid, maybe thirteen, looks like a nice kid, scared as a rabbit. They all carry the usual load of state clothes, shiny black shoes, towels and bars of soap.

Skinny turns away and, leaning against the wall, starts to tap his toe, keeping time with the boys on stage. Then he and another kid start clapping, really enjoying themselves.

Skinny, keeping the rhythm, adds tap-dancing moves; even, kicking his feet high, slapping the soles of his shoes.

He shows Carl the moves, and Carl follows along pretty well for a while.

Skinny includes Dowty, who tries his best. Other boys in line join in clapping. They make room for Skinny as he really gets into the music.

Six or so boys closer to the stage do not join in the clapping.

One of them is Smart Ass, and he is mad. He stops one of his friends from joining the clapping.

SMART ASS
(motioning to his friends)
Let's get him. Let's shut him up.

Smart Ass and friends pass stealthily through the clapping line heading toward the back of the chapel.

They pass the Dean's Boy, his face in a Captain Marvel comic book.

The Dean's Boy tucks his comic book into his back pocket, scowls at Smart Ass, and grabs him from behind.

Smart Ass disappears in a cluster of boys.

The rest of the trouble makers stop their pursuit. They try to get back in line, but the boys close ranks and they are forced to the back.

The line near Skinny, Carl, and Dowty is making so much noise that the Conductor has turned away from the stage to watch, and Skinny keeps right on dancing.

The piano stops.

The line of boys breaks into applause when Skinny twirls around into the air, touching his heels together in one last click and lands with his arms outspread, grinning at Carl and Dowty.

CONDUCTOR

(turning to the boys on the stage)
Good, good. Thank you all for participating. It
will be a few days before I decide who will be
the new band members.

The boys leave the stage.

CONDUCTOR

(continuing)
Next!

He stops the nearest boys from getting on stage.

CONDUCTOR

You, Petersen, isn't it? You and your friends
come up with the next group.

Skinny heads to the front, pulling Carl along.

Dowty follows and passes Smart Ass who is held against the
wall by the big kid. Dowty grins at Smart Ass then hurries
to catch up with Skinny as the piano starts to play another
tune.

The conductor stops the piano player.

CONDUCTOR

So Mr. Petersen?

Skinny shakes his head yes.

CONDUCTOR

(continuing)
It seems you have some dancing skills. Do you
have any experience playing musical instruments?

SKINNY

Yes, Sir, I do. I play the harp. And a little
clarinet.

CONDUCTOR

The harp?

SKINNY

Yes, Sir, the harp.

Skinny puts his hands to his mouth, moving his hands across his face and making the noises of a harmonica.

SKINNY

(continuing)

Mine was confiscated, Sir, when I moved in here, or I'd show you. I know a number of tunes. I can make her sing like Nat Cole if you want.

CONDUCTOR

I like you Mr. Petersen. And your friends? Do they have experience too?

SKINNY

Yes, Sir. They do sir. Carl here is the drill sergeant. Tell him Carl. He's got rhythm. And the boys all love him, a born leader. Now Dowty he -

CONDUCTOR

Okay. Okay. I'll take all three of you. On a trial basis. If you do well, you're part of the band.

Dowty grins.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- A) Dowty and Carl marching with drums; Carl encouraging.
- B) Tailor shop, Dowty bouncing his feet, pushing the rhythm on his treadle.
- C) Mrs. Rinel smiling.
- D) Skinny grinning as he sews.
- E) Carl and Dowty marching, marching, playing drums.
- F) Dowty marching in the dark.
- G) Carl and Dowty on drums; Skinny on clarinet.
- H) The whole band marching. The three friends are members.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - WEEKS LATER

A warm spring day. The trees are green. Daffodils bloom near the bird fountain.

The band is suited up carrying their instruments, loading onto a bus.

The boys are loud, excited. Shouting about the train trip to Marshalltown, playing for a church and the Elks club.

Dowty steps onto the bus. Skinny pushing from behind.

DOWTY
Goodbye Eldora.

SKINNY
I could kiss the ground we're stepping off of.

He lifts his foot off the school grounds and onto the bus.

INT. BUS - MINUTES LATER - CONTINUING

The band is playing a song, crowded and loud in the bus, driving along.

A car comes up fast behind them.

BOY AT THE BACK
There's a car coming up fast. Like something's wrong.

ANOTHER BOY
Naw. It's nothing.

BOY 3
Maybe it's the mob.

BOY AT THE BACK
Whoever it is, is driving like a gangster.
(raising his voice)
I told ya. We're being chased!

Dowty stands and looks behind the bus. He can see the chimneys of the school and the car gaining on the bus.

SKINNY

It's Bugeye! Wonder what he wants, driving like a bat outta hell.

The car pulls to the side of the bus.

The bus slows down considerably.

Bugeye waves the bus over.

At a stop, the driver opens the door.

Bugeye, Rinel following, steps up.

CONDUCTOR

What do you mean by this, Mr. Finkle? Pulling us over.

BUGEYE

I got a message, Toady. Some of these band members are to get off this bus. Won't be no train ride for them today. They are to report immediately to the dean.

CONDUCTOR

Which boys you talking about?

BUGEYE

Dowty Ritter, Francis Petersen, and Carl Hoffman.

The bus erupts into noise.

The conductor signals, and gets, silence.

CONDUCTOR

Who has sent you?

BUGEYE

The dean sent me, Sir. I've got Rinel with me to help me take them back. They have to go back. They are to report immediately to the dean.

The conductor looks at Skinny, who shrugs his shoulders.

Dowty looks to Carl for answers.

Carl's face, ill and frightened, tells Dowty he can't help him.

The three boys stand.

EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - DAY - CONTINUING

The car is parked on the grounds, Bugeye leaning on an open door.

A squad leader, en route with several other boys, marches Dowty, Carl, and Skinny toward the dean's office.

Dowty breaks ranks and grabs Carl by the shoulder. The small group stops.

DOWTY

Carl, what the hell is happening?

CARL

I don't know. Get in line.

DOWTY

(shoving Carl)

I want to know what's happening.

SQUAD LEADER

Back in line. Fall in.

No one responds to his order. Instead, they look to Carl for leadership.

CARL

Get in line or somebody will beat your ass, and mine, every night for a month.

DOWTY

I think someone is going to beat my ass anyway.

SKINNY

Get in line, Dowty. We'll know soon enough.

After a moment Dowty gets back in line.

Carl signals for the squad leader to take the lead, and they march again.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE - DAY

The three boys sit on the bench in the outer office. The Dean's Boy stands nearby.

WOLLENBERG
(from inside his office)
Dowty Ritter.

Dowty enters the office, stands in front of Wollenberg.

WOLLENBERG
Close the door.

Dowty closes the door and turns and salutes Wollenberg, who gives his hand-at-his-head, parade wave back.

WOLLENBERG
Dowty, I'm not going to beat around the bush. It is my understanding that you and your two friends are planning an escape attempt.

DOWTY
No, sir, I never talked about escape with nobody.

WOLLENBERG
Dowty, you are a goddamn liar! Stand over there and bury your toes in the wall.

DOWTY
Can I ask you a question?
(beat)
Is Axel dead?

WOLLENBERG
Get on the wall.

Dowty moves to the wall indicated by Wollenberg and placing his toes against the wall, stands straight forward, staring at the wall.

WOLLENBERG
Carl.

Carl enters the office and stands in front of the dean, noting Dowty standing against the wall. He looks worried.

WOLLENBERG

Carl, I am, of course, very disappointed in you.
Aren't you close to six thousand merits?

Carl shakes his head yes.

WOLLENBERG

And you're a squad leader? Can I trust you to
tell me the truth.

CARL

(saluting)

Yes, sir.

Dowty squares his shoulders, waiting.

WOLLENBERG

It has come to my attention that you and your
friends are planning an escape.

CARL

No, sir. No. We have never talked about escape.

Wollenberg lowers his head, lets out a sigh.

WOLLENBERG

(pointing to another wall)

Bury your toes.

(then impatiently)

Francis Petersen.

Skinny enters the office.

WOLLENBERG

Now, Francis, you're a little older than these
two dumb shits standing on the wall.

SKINNY

Yes, Sir.

WOLLENBERG

How old are you?

SKINNY
(faltering)
Seventeen, Sir.

Wollenberg studies Skinny's face.

Skinny looks nervous.

WOLLENBERG
Old enough to know better. You haven't been in
trouble since you've been here.

Skinny nods his head, acknowledges the fact. Salutes
Wollenberg.

SKINNY
Yes, Sir. I mean no, Sir. No. No trouble.

A moment of silence as Skinny looks to Dowty and then to
Carl, both staring straight ahead at the walls.

WOLLENBERG
But you know what happens to boys who try to
escape?

Skinny nods his head again, salutes again.

WOLLENBERG
Do you want to join your asshole friends or do
you want to tell me the truth about your band
trip?

SKINNY
The truth, Sir.

WOLLENBERG
Well now, that's good. Good boy.

SKINNY
Yes, Sir.

WOLLENBERG
Ok, Francis. You know these boys.

Skinny again looks at both of the other boys.

SKINNY

I work with Dowty, Sir. Carl is the Cottage Four sergeant.

WOLLENBERG

Have either of these gentlemen spoken to you about a plan to escape?

Skinny looks down at his own feet and then up at Wollenberg.

SKINNY

No, Sir. Nothing. We have no plans to escape, Sir.

Without saying anything, Wollenberg takes out a notebook.

WOLLENBERG

(under his breath)

Little son of a bitch.

(to the boys standing on the wall)

Turn around, please.

Dowty and Carl turn away from the walls and join Skinny in front of Wollenberg's desk.

WOLLENBERG

(as he writes)

You dummies are sentenced to fifteen to thirty days on Special Detail, depending on your behavior. And you will suffer the loss of all your merits.

Carl is visibly shaken by the announcement.

Wollenberg claps his hands as the squad leader enters his office to escort the three out.

WOLLENBERG

(to squad leader)

Take these three numbskulls to the barber shop for haircuts, then to Special Detail.

SQUAD LEADER

(saluting)

Yes, Sir.

SQUAD LEADER (CONTIN'D)
(to the three boys)
You three follow me.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY - CONTINUING

The three get peterbald haircuts, their hair falling to the floor in three piles.

EXT. COAL PILE - DAY - CONTINUING

The three newest peterbalds march toward the powerhouse.

They pass the band practice grounds.

Silent and empty.

The squad leader leads them to the coal pile and up to RINEL.

Two squad leaders, working with Rinel, are in command of a couple dozen boys, filthy and tired, carrying shovels full of coal from the pile outside into the powerhouse.

SQUAD LEADER
(saluting Rinel)
Mr. Wollenberg sent these boys, Sir.

RINEL
Which of you is Ritter?

DOWTY
Me, sir.

RINEL
(to Dowty)
You work for Mrs. Rinel in the mending room.

DOWTY
Yes, Sir.

RINEL
She's my wife, you little peckerhead. Shame on you for trying to take off. She likes you, and this is how you repay her.

DOWTY

I didn't try to take off, Sir.

Rinel steps close to Dowty, shakes his fist in his face.

RINEL

Shut your mouth, Boy!

Rinel looks like he might hit Dowty, but moves on to business instead.

RINEL

These are the rules, guys. You don't talk. You keep your heads bowed at all times. And your goddamn arms better be folded when you're standing unless somebody tells you different. If you need something, raise your hand. Don't do nothing without permission. I mean don't even fart. Unless I give you permission to.

(to the nearest squad leader)

Get each of these peckerheads a shovel.

The squad leader gets them shovels and puts them to work carrying coal, trip after trip, never ending.

Dowty passes one of the other boys who runs with his shovel while all the others walk. Dowty looks questioningly at Carl.

CARL

Double time.

(checking Rinel's location)

Probably broke some damn rule.

RINEL

Break time.

The boys line up.

The running boy, using the time to rest, leans against the building, almost immediately falling asleep and misses his turn in the bathroom.

Later, the same boy holds himself, has to go, but cannot stop. Afraid to ask permission, he pees his pants. He continues running.

EXT. POWERHOUSE - DAY - CONTINUING

Finally, the noon whistle blows for lunch.

As the boys line up and march by, Rinell notices the boy with the pissy smell. He pulls him out of the line as the others continue marching.

RINELL

Pisshead!

Dowty looks back to see Rinell beating the boy about his shoulders and head.

EXT. DINING HALL - DAY - CONTINUING

No washing up, the boys march to the dining hall. They wait outside, heads bowed, arms folded until all the other boys are inside, then they file in.

INT. DINING HALL - DAY - CONTINUING

Lunch is finished.

ASSISTANT SUPER

Special Detail.

Dowty, Skinny, and Carl line up with the other special detail workers and march out of the dining hall, five hundred eyes watching them, among them Smart Ass and the other boys at their table.

Dowty keeps perfect time, although he is tired and marches in the peterbald posture, head bowed, arms folded.

INT. COTTAGE FOUR BASEMENT - NIGHT - CONTINUING

The boys are showered and seated on the long benches.

Dowty, moves forward and takes the peterbald stance with the four other boys on Special Detail.

All is silent a moment.

Liverlips works Betsy.

LIVERLIPS

(looking at Carl)

You dummies ain't any different than anybody else. You get ten licks every goddamn night you're on Special Detail.

(turning to Dowty)

You first, Ritter.

Dowty takes a step forward.

LIVERLIPS

(continuing)

Grab the bench.

Dowty grabs the bench in front of him.

Skinny looks mad.

Carl steels himself for what he knows is coming.

Liverlips lifts his arm for the swing.

CU, DOWTY, with traces of coal dust around his eyes, waiting, feels the first blow, jerks, but makes no noise. He closes his eyes when the second blow hits.

INT. BUNK ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Dowty goes over to Carl.

DOWTY

What the hell happened? Did you rat us out?

CARL

No. What the shit. I'm on detail too.

Carl sees the new Cottage Four sergeant making rounds of the room.

CARL

(continuing)

Maybe Bugeye figured it out?

(beat)

But we can't talk in here.

DOWTY

Hell, we can't talk anywhere. Not while we're on Detail. Are they going to kill us?

The sergeant gets closer and Carl rolls away from Dowty, pulling the covers around himself.

DOWTY

Like they did Axel.

CARL

(covering his head)

Get away from me.

DOWTY

He's dead, ain't he? And we're going to die too, ain't we?

Carl doesn't answer.

Dowty, seeing the sergeant, walks to his own bed, sore, limping, and dirty. He rolls into bed and stares at the bare bulb burning dimly in the ceiling socket.

He listens to the noises of Carl trying unsuccessfully to control the convulsive sobbing that racks his body.

EXT. CORN FIELD - DAY

The boys are pulling weeds from corn that stands about three feet tall.

The Dean's Boy works his way over to the row near where Dowty, dirty from working the coal pile, is working. He trades places with the kid working the nearby row and continues pulling weeds as he talks.

DEAN'S BOY

If you gotta be on Detail, this is the best time.

DOWTY

I guess.

DEAN'S BOY

This beats the coal pile don't it?

DOWTY

Yeah.

They each continue to work the rows of corn.

DEAN'S BOY

You ain't never gonna be a band member.

DOWTY

I am a band member.

The Dean's Boy pulls a few weeds.

DEAN'S BOY

When your off detail, you're staying in Four
with Liverlips.

The Dean's Boy looks at Carl and Skinny working their rows
of corn not too far away from Dowty.

DEAN'S BOY

Ain't none of you gonna be band members. Don't
matter how much rhythm you got.

DOWTY

(stopping)

How do you know?

DEAN'S BOY

I overheard Liverlips talking to the band
conductor in the barbershop this afternoon. He
told him you was a born escape artist and can't
be trusted. Can't trust you, nor your friends.

The dean's boy turns away, pauses, turns back.

DEAN'S BOY

(blurting)

I gotta tell you something else.

DOWTY

What is it?

DEAN'S BOY

I do some of the posting in Four's books. Well,
this afternoon I saw something real interesting.

DOWTY

Yeah, what was that?

DEAN'S BOY

The day you guys went on Special Detail?
Johnny got fifteen hundred extra merits.

Dowty pauses a moment in his work. Standing up, he spots Johnny (Smart Ass) slowly working a row of corn.

DOWTY

You sure about that?

DEAN'S BOY

Real sure. He got fifteen hundred extra.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Inside the chapel, from a platform at the front, Wollenberg addresses an assembly of boys.

A group of young men, in dress uniform and on show for visiting trustees, are seated on the stage where several rows of seats run perpendicular to the podium.

The audience seating is curved around the curved shape of the stage, staff at the edges, boys in the middle. Same arrangement in the overhead balcony at the back.

The boys are seated youngest at the front going to oldest at the back. The balcony holds young men, those reaching twenty-one, the age to be discharged.

WOLLENBERG

A loving man. One who is truthful. A man who is valued by his friends, and is self-respecting. . .

(Continuing as V.O.)

. . .that kind of man grows from a youth well led by a loving man. Right now, the men of the Iowa State Training school are the best friends you boys have.

Liverlips and Mr. Rinel sit near the boys from their cottages.

Dowty and Skinny sit together in a middle row, Carl just down from them.

WOLLENBERG

(continuing)

This is not a prison, but a compulsory educational institute, where we hope that by Christian example and precept, you boys will be influenced for honorable ways of life.

The trustees sit in the balcony, smug and satisfied that the school runs like a hard working machine.

WOLLENBERG

(continuing)

This school proudly labors with the community and the board of trustees, not to punish criminals, but in the prevention of crime.

INSERT - SMART ASS

sitting tall and straight with the honorees on stage, in dress uniform.

BACK TO SCENE

WOLLENBERG

(continuing)

We give back to society these young men,
(nods toward boys on stage)
who because of their manly conduct,
(continuing as V.O.)
and training in a course of labor adapted to their capacity and natural bent of mind, having completed moral, intellectual, and industrial education,

Smart Ass lifts his chin, acknowledging he's a man.

He looks toward Mrs. Hastings.

She smiles back, an affectedly demure smile that reaches to her eyes.

Smart Ass grins, looking at Skinny then Dowty then Carl; he winks.

WOLLENBERG

(continuing)

having learned a better way of life, are now sent out into society to become the best of citizens. Possessed of better education and morals than when first taken into the institution.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - AFTERNOON

The Cottage Four boys are marching with dummy rifles on the playground. The corn behind them has gotten chest high.

B.g. The marching band can be heard practicing.

SERGEANT

At ease, gentlemen. Time off till supper.

The boys disperse into various groups. Skinny and Dowty sit on the grass, wiping sweat off their brows. Their hair has grown out. Carl leans against the fence a bit away from them.

Dowty walks over to Carl.

Skinny follows behind.

DOWTY

We gotta get Smart Ass for squealing on us. And we gotta get him before he gets out.

CARL

All I gotta do is get outta here. I ain't never gonna do Detail. Never again.

SKINNY

No shit.

DOWTY

Yeah. No more Detail for none of us. Right after we get Smart Ass.

SKINNY

Count me in.

DOWTY

What about you, Carl?

No answer.

DOWTY

You lost all your merits because a him.

No answer.

DOWTY

What are you in for, anyway?

CARL

I don't know.

Dowty and Skinny look dumbfounded.

DOWTY and SKINNY

(in unison)

You don't know?

DOWTY

What the hell? You've been here five years.

Carl thinks about the day he arrived at Eldora.

CARL

One night, the coppers come to our door.

FLASHBACK - SMALL RUNDOWN HOUSE

CARL

(CONTINUES as V.O.)

No court and no hearing. They come,
and they took me away. Brought me here. They
didn't give a damn if I committed a crime or not.
They just took Papa's word for it.

A man stands in the doorway, silhouetted against the light from the home. The man is older, sixty-one, with white hair, lean and tall. Dressed in dark slacks and a white A-shirt, his outline fills the doorway.

Two blonde boys hide behind the father.

The older, ten-year-old CARL is brave enough to peer around his father's shoulder, his hands gripping the man's arm.

The younger, eight-year-old HENRY cowers back, a frightened look on his face, knowing the arrival of cops at the door can only mean trouble.

Two police officers approach the dwelling, swinging bobby sticks like they're scepters in the hands of kings. They confront the father and sons.

MR. HOFFMAN

A boy should pay for his wrong doing.

The ten-year-old Carl looks at his brother, questioningly. Then surmising that Henry committed the crime, he jumps out from behind his father.

CARL

(afraid for his brother)

You ain't taking my brother nowhere!

The young officer grins, raises his stick.

COP

You a big cheese, eh, boy? We'll send your little ass to Eldora. Let them beat the shit outta you. Straighten you up.

The father steps in front of Carl.

The rescue, however, is temporary as the next moment the father pushes Carl into the hands of the officers.

MR. HOFFMAN

This is the boy you want.

(to Carl)

Go with them Carl. It's likely they'll only question you.

CARL

(fighting going)

I didn't do nothing. I don't know nothing.

(growing fiercer)

Papa?

MR. HOFFMAN

Go the hell with them, boy.

Finally, Carl is dragged away from the home.

CARL'S POINT OF VIEW - MR. HOFFMAN

He looks back at his father, standing on the porch, angry, pointing for him to go, to go with the police.

BACK TO SCENE

The police begin to place Carl in a black 1930's police car.

One officer places his hand on Carl's head in order to push him into the car.

Time slows as Carl struggles and shakes his head loose, his hair swinging away from his face as he juggles his head.

CARL
(slow motion, barely audible)
Henry! Henry!

CARL'S POINT OF VIEW - HENRY

The father moves aside and looks behind himself at the brother.

Carl redirects his attention to his brother, still standing inside the doorway.

Henry stares at Carl, a funny look on his face. A faraway look of relief, a semi-blank stare with a hint of gladness behind it.

BACK TO SCENE

CARL
I haven't seen Papa or Henry since.

DOWTY
Shit.

SKINNY
Damn.

CARL

I wrote to my father, but I never heard from him,
so I went to Mr. Hastings for help.

SKINNY

Dumb ass move.

DOWTY

What happened?

CARL

Liverlips told me to grow up. Punched the shit
outta me and called me a baby.

(beat)

A couple days later, that, that -

DOWTY

That what?

CARL

Mrs. Hastings.

SKINNY

That whore.

CARL

Accused me of stealing a half-dollar from her
dresser.

SKINNY

Stealing. Twenty days Special Detail. And you
lost all your merits.

Carl nods his head.

DOWTY

Why don't your brother write or come to see you?

CARL

I don't know. He can't, I guess. But that's why I
gotta get outta here. That's why I don't care a
damn about Smart Ass. I don't care if he ever
pays. A person can't never get outta here
following the rules. I gotta break outta here.

INT. TAILOR SHOP - MORNING, A COUPLE DAYS LATER

The boys march in, followed by Mrs. Rinel. They begin preparing for the day, a casual, amiable atmosphere as before.

Skinny leads Carl over to the rows of clothing hanging on the walls. He indicates a few darker suit jackets.

SKINNY
(looking out for Mrs. Rinel)
Right here. Look at these.

Dowty fingers a jacket.

SKINNY
Don't you recognize it?

DOWTY
No. Should I?

SKINNY
Never seen one before?
(not waiting for an answer)
This is what Johnny wore in chapel. His release coat. Made by my own damn two hands, and that smart ass gets to wear it outta here.
(beat)
I been thinking. This is what we need-

MRS. RINEL
Boys.

Dowty and Skinny move toward their sewing machines, but Skinny keeps talking.

SKINNY
A release coat is what we need. Me, you, and Carl. If we can get outta here wearing one of these, the cops'll leave us alone. We'll look like we belong on the outside.

He looks at Mrs. Rinel and stops talking, moves to his machine and picks up release coat material, sewing away.

But Dowty moves to the window.

MRS. RINEL

Boys.

Dowty does not respond. He stares out the third-story window, past the trees lining the street in front of the building, past the bird bath near the band practice field, far out to the small area surrounded by the wrought iron fence.

MRS. RINEL

Dowty you have to get to work.

Dowty does not hear her.

He turns as if going to his machine, but walks past it toward the door.

SKINNY

What the shit, Dowty?

Other boys stop work.

MRS. RINEL

Dowty.

Mrs. Rinel looks to the men across the room, finishing a cup of coffee, but looking their way.

SKINNY

(standing)

Come on, Dowty. You're gonna ruin everything.

Dowty pays no attention. He is focused only on getting out the door.

Mrs. Rinel intercepts Dowty and leads him back to the window.

The man turns back to his coffee.

Skinny sits back down.

SKINNY

Get to work, assholes.

The boys pick up their work and get back to it.

Mrs. Rinel and Dowty stand at the window.

DOWTY

He's there ain't he? In that cemetery.

MRS. RINEL

Who?

DOWTY

Axel. That kid that came here with me.

MRS. RINEL

Axel Badner? Yes, he's buried there. He was in the hospital. He had influenza. The nurse did everything she could, but he died. It wasn't her fault.

DOWTY

No. It wasn't.

Dowty stands looking out the window, Mrs. Rinel at his side.

FLASHBACK

Axel shielding himself,

The pummeling by Smart ass,

Axel falling to the ground.

BACK TO SCENE

EXT. PLAYGROUND. - LATE AFTERNOON

Liverlips and Bugeye stand by the door watching the boys, smoking, enjoying the warm weather.

A few peterbalds are lined up at the door, heads bowed, arms folded, waiting, and watching as the others play or stand around talking.

One of the peterbalds is the Dean's Boy.

Dowty, Carl, and Skinny leave a group of boys playing catch. They stand under a tree.

DOWTY

(looking at the Dean's Boy)
Sons-a-bitches. They get everybody?

CARL

They're bastards.

DOWTY

That kid probably wishes he was Captain Marvel
right about now.

SKINNY

Why? What could he do?

DOWTY

First he'd get us outta here, then-

SKINNY

Do you want to play at it, or do you really want
to get out of here?

CARL

Shit, Skinny, you know we all want out.

SKINNY

Okay. Then listen. Next week Bugeye will be gone
for two weeks vacation to Boston.

DOWTY

Like he needs a vacation. We do all the work
while he watches. Hell, we'll be stuck here
waving goodbye to him as he drives off to the
train station.

SKINNY

Yeah. But he'll be gone. Liverlips won't have any
help. He'll call for a boxing match anyway. You
know he will.

CARL

He can't watch everything, not with Bugeye gone.

SKINNY

We'll slip inside and down to the tunnel.

CARL

The tunnels run all the way under the school grounds.

A ball bounces over to their spot, and Skinny throws it back to the boys playing catch.

SKINNY

You're right kid. And we can come up by the greenhouse, slip over the fence, and we'll be gone before anyone notices.

CARL

What makes you think we can make it past the town people? They're always looking for escapees. They get a reward, you know.

DOWTY

Probably pee themselves if they ever saw one.

SKINNY

I got our release coats hid in the tunnel. We'll walk around in plain sight. The good people of Eldora will give us some god-awful stares, but they won't nab us or turn us in. And we won't stay around to enjoy their company for long.

DOWTY

What about Smart Ass? We just gonna let him go scot-free?

SKINNY

Shit, Dowty. We got bigger fish to fry. That dumb ass will be our cover. I got inside information.

(grinning)

When we disappear, Wollenberg will find a note incriminating – telling him, how our good friend Johnny helped us escape.

Liverlips puts out his cigarette.

Carl, Dowty, and Skinny join the boys playing ball. Shouting and laughing, punching each other, they seem as carefree as boys on the outside.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - EVENING A FEW DAYS LATER

Boys playing or talking here and there.

LIVERLIPS
(holding boxing gloves)
Anybody wanna fight?

Skinny, Carl, and Dowty look at each other then at Liverlips.

Skinny hides a grin; he's excited, everything going according to the plan.

The three follow the flow of boys, gathering around Liverlips.

LIVERLIPS
Who's it gonna be?

Smart Ass steps forward.

LIVERLIPS
Well, look at this boys. Johnny's graduating tomorrow. Any of you little peckerheads got any guts? This little smart ass wants to kick one more butt before leaving us.

Dowty, Carl, and Skinny look at each other. Skinny grins. Dowty is agitated.

SMART ASS
I'll fight the new kid.

The "bully crowd," Smart Ass's friends, push the skinny New Kid forward.

Dowty stiffens up, balls his hands into fists.

Skinny lays a hand on Dowty's arm, shakes his head, no. Motions toward the basement door.

SKINNY
The tunnel.

Liverlips jerks the New Kid by the arm, slaps him in the head.

LIVERLIPS

Okay, Little Shit, you gonna show these peckerheads how to take a beating?

Dowty moves closer to the front of the crowd. Skinny steps in front of him on one side, Carl on the other, halting his advancement.

SKINNY

No, Dowty. Don't do this. Let it go.

NEW KID

(backing out of the ring)

No. I don't want to.

LIVERLIPS

Get your ass in the ring. You're gonna help Johnny give us one last show.

The New Kid pulls away, cowers, is afraid.

Dowty pushes Carl aside and steps out of the crowd into the ring.

DOWTY

Let him go. I'll give you the show you want.

Liverlips takes his hand off the New Kid, pushes him out of the ring.

The kid stumbles, is helped up by Skinny who has followed Dowty to the front.

LIVERLIPS

The peckerhead escape artist. Wanna get your butt kicked, huh? Okay. Let's see you two fight.

Smart Ass smiles, confident, watching Dowty don his gloves.

Smart Ass and Dowty face off, gloves touching.

LIVERLIPS

(to Dowty)

Win or lose, Johnny keeps the fifteen hundred points and he graduates tomorrow.

Liverlips throws their hands down.

LIVERLIPS

Okay, box!

Smart Ass charges immediately, throwing punches quick and hard, in a frenzy to hit Dowty and end the fight before it's begun.

The boys all push closer, shrinking and tightening the ring. Carl lets the other boys crowd past him.

Smart Ass swings and misses a few times.

Dowty skipping out of his reach.

Dowty lands a blow, making Smart Ass mad.

Smart Ass rushes Dowty, his head down and his arms flailing. Swinging wide and hard and fast, he lands a blow to the side of Dowty's head.

SKINNY

Chicken shit! You fight like a girl.

Dowty reels, stumbles, shakes his head, and continues bobbing.

The Dean's Boy yells in favor of Dowty.

Other boys join him, cheering for Dowty to kick Johnny's ass.

Carl pushes his way to the front, behind Skinny, pulling Skinny toward the back.

CARL

Come on.

Skinny shakes Carl off.

CARL

Skinny, come on. We gotta go. Dowty's made his choice. We gotta make ours.

Skinny looks at the fight, at Liverlips, at Dowty.

Dowty nods to Skinny and Carl.

Skinny and Carl move out of the front row, letting the crowd fill in as they back away.

Smart Ass lands a right that glances off Dowty's chin as he backs away from it.

Skinny and Carl do not see the hit.

They are carefully opening the back door.

Dowty and Smart Ass continue fighting, mostly smart Ass landing a few good hits.

DOWTY/FLASHBACK OF FATHER

We INTERCUT between Dowty in the present fight and his memory of the father the night at the theatre.

Dowty's face hit. He shakes his head to clear it, to remain in the fight.

Dowty's FATHER in his signature pose, holding his left hand to his face.

Dowty takes on the pose. Focuses on Smart Ass.

B.g. Silent. Dean's Boy yelling.

The New Kid yelling.

Boys swinging their fists, all yelling.

Liverlips filled with hate.

FATHER

Wait for it. Wait for it.

Dowty dancing away from a hard swing. Jabbing, jabbing at Smart Ass.

FATHER
(punching)
Bam!

Dowty lands a round-house left.

An eruption of noise.

Smart Ass flies back, staggers, falls to the ground.

INT. TUNNELS - NIGHT

Skinny and Carl steal down the steps of Cottage Four, through the locker room, and to the doorway leading to the tunnel.

Skinny hesitates.

CARL
(pushing the door open, whispering)
Let's go.

Skinny motions as if he is unwilling.

CARL
What?

SKINNY
It doesn't feel right. Feels like we're deserting Dowty. It won't go right without him along.

CARL
Dowty would want us to go. We ain't got time for this.

Skinny gives in and the two open the door. The tunnel stretches ahead of them.

Skinny regains his bravado and they forge ahead, going slowly and quietly, led by an occasional bare bulb.

Skinny turns left at the first junction.

CARL

Hey. This way to the greenhouse.

SKINNY

(pointing in the opposite direction)
This way to the release coats. The guys in
laundry hid em under the stairs.

CARL

We don't have time to go all the way down there.
Let's go without em.

SKINNY

We can get out at the laundry too. Wouldn't be
anybody over there.

CARL

The greenhouse would be safer. Shit!

They go in Skinny's direction toward the release coats.

Arriving at the stash, Carl and Skinny quickly don the
release coats and black shoes.

They proceed forward.

CARL

This way.

But as they head down the tunnel, lights come on, and they
hear a group approaching, marching, boys talking.

SKINNY

Shit.

Nowhere to hide, they run to the nearest staircase.

SKINNY

Come on. We gotta go.

Carl follows.

They tiptoe up the stairs and carefully open the door.

An empty locker room.

They stand at the door, leaning into a slight crack, listening as the group approaches, getting closer.

Getting closer.

Passes.

Carl and Skinny go back into the tunnel.

They come out in the kitchen. The lights are off inside. The windows are dark too. Dark outside.

They slink across the room, and Skinny opens the outside door.

The two boys can hear the celebration of the fight.

Suddenly the kitchen lights come on and men are yelling.

Skinny bolts out the door.

Carl right behind him.

Carl makes it down the kitchen steps, and partially across the yard, out of the flood light, but is pursued by a guard. His release coat is grabbed from behind.

He wrenches out of the coat.

Skinny has gotten a lead. He dashes behind the chapel, spots the corn field not too far off and runs.

Carl is tackled to the ground.

Another guard runs out of the kitchen, gun in hand.

CARL
(fighting the guard)
He's got a gun, Skinny! Run!

The first guard punches Carl in the face.

The second runs after Skinny.

Skinny hurtles over the fence, rolls into the corn field.

The guard makes the corner and fires his gun at the corn.

All is still, but when the guard jumps the fence, searching the field, he does not find Skinny.

He comes back to Carl and the first guard, shaking his head no. Skinny has escaped.

INT. COTTAGE FOUR BASEMENT - THAT NIGHT

White-robed boys fill the benches.

The peterbalds, including the Dean's Boy, in peterbald posture are lined up at the front.

Dowty, black eye and bloody lip sits on a bench.

Carl beside him.

Liverlips stands at the front of the room flexing Betsy.

LIVERLIPS

Hoffman. Ritter. To the front.

Not surprised, they step forward.

LIVERLIPS

You peckerhead escape artists ain't ya? Thought you'd get away, huh? Nobody escapes on my watch. Nobody.

DOWTY

Skinny did.

Liverlips punches Dowty in the jaw.

LIVERLIPS

You shut up, you little shit!

(striking again and again)

He'll be caught. And he'll join your asses on Detail!

Dowty is knocked to the floor.

Liverlips hits Carl in the back of the head.

LIVERLIPS

One big happy peterbald family. Nobody escapes on my watch, nobody.

Liverlips lays into Carl with Betsy.

EXT. COAL PILE - THE NEXT EVENING

Two squad leaders watch boys carrying shovels of coal.

Carl, worn out, shaved head, showing signs of the previous evenings beating, staggers, limping along, carrying coal.

Dowty works right behind him.

DOWTY

At least Skinny made it.

A WHISTLE sounds.

RINEL

Quitting time!

Boys move slowly, stacking their shovels and then heading away from the coal pile.

Carl sinks to the ground, sitting where he stopped, holding his shovel, exhausted, unable to move.

Dowty puts Carl's shovel up, nods at the squad leader holding the shed door, and heads back toward Carl.

RINEL

(to Carl)

Little shit! Detail is supposed to teach you not to escape.

(he picks up a board)

I got just the thing for boys like you, don't learn the first time.

Rinel drags Carl toward the powerhouse.

DOWTY

(trying to stop him)

No! He can't take no more.

RINEL
This is none of your damn business.

DOWTY
You'll kill him.

RINEL
Sergeant!

The two squad leaders step forward..

RINEL
(continuing)
Escort Mr. Ritter outta here.

Dowty is no match for the squad leaders who have not spent the day hauling coal.

Rinel, carrying his board, marches Carl into the powerhouse.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - EVENING

Carl in bed.

Mrs. Rinel sits beside his bed, reading, watching.

Mrs. Rinel at the nurses station. She shakes her head, no, motions for the nurse to follow her.

Two orderlies and the nurse follow Mrs. Rinel back into Carl's room, finding him already shrouded by Mrs. Rinel.

A squad leader waits in the hallway. He stares at the covered body carried out of the room, and, standing at attention, salutes Carl.

INT. BUNK ROOM - NIGHT

Boys, foremost the squad leader, solemn, most of them whispering, spread the news. Carl is dead. Killed by Liverlips and Rinel.

Dowty weeps.

INT. DINING HALL - MORNING

The inmates are seated and silent, sullen.
Male staff members slowly pace the aisles.

SUPERINTENDENT

Prayer.

MONITOR

(standing)

Come Lord Jesus,
be our guest.
Let this food
to us be blessed.

He remains standing.

A long moment of silence.

Only a few CLINKS of noise from staff silverware.

Mrs. Hastings's table has two empty chairs.

Mrs. Hastings pauses, raising her spoon to her mouth -

Dowty looks at her and then at the monitor.

The Monitor suddenly picks up the side of the table and
turns it over.

Crashing tinware, shattering crockery.

Mrs. Hastings is stunned, oatmeal and water all over her.

Dishes and silverware all over the floor -

Another table is turned.

And another.

The dining hall breaks into a cacophony of noise and
action.

Mrs. Hastings is knocked out of her chair. She screams.

Liverlips heads to her defense.

Dowty sits in his chair, momentarily stunned by the events.

The Dean's Boy tackles Liverlips, punching his face and body.

Liverlips fights back, but other boys dog-pile onto him, kicking and hitting. Furious.

Dowty rushes to the scene, pulling boys off Liverlips.

DOWTY

He's not worth it. Now's your chance to get outta here. Leave him alone!

Dowty checks to see if Liverlips is alive.

Mr. Rinel is attacked.

Boys attack other staff members.

Mrs. Rinel screams.

Dowty leaves Liverlips, helps Mrs. Rinel to hide behind a fallen table.

Mrs. Rinel

Don't do this, Dowty. It will only lead to trouble.

Dowty

Probably. You stay here.

He makes as if to go.

Mrs. Rinel

Carl's gone. This won't help.

The New Kid interrupts.

NEW KID

We got a goddamn riot!

Dowty looks at Mrs. Rinel.

NEW KID

I'm getting outta here. You going, Dowty?

DOWTY

You go. I'm gonna stay.

The boy turns away, jumping into the commotion, heading for the exit.

Dowty guards Mrs. Rinel as boys continue to attack staff and tear up the dining hall.

One staff member runs out of the dining hall, chased by a few boys.

Realizing they can, more boys begin streaming out of the dining hall, out the door, out of the building.

Another staff member manages to reach the kitchen phone.

STAFF MEMBER

Emergency. Governor's office. Riot at Eldora! We need the Guard. Call the National Guard.

Boys continue running out.

Mrs. Rinel and Dowty stay put.

Rinel and Liverlips are left lying on the floor.

And still boys running. Out of the dining hall. Out of the building.

Boys running across the grounds and climbing the fences.

Boys running through corn fields.

Boys running down the highway and out of sight.

Some boys, though, are gathering in small groups, not running, waiting to see what happens.

Eventually quiet reigns once again in the dining hall.

EXT. ELDORA INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

A line of military vehicles approaches.

They turn into the Industrial School and a boy directs them to the administration building.

Wollenberg comes to the lawn.

LIEUTENANT MORGAN

Mr. Wollenberg? Lieutenant Morgan, Sir. This is Lieutenant Neubauer. We are under orders to take over this institution.

Wollenberg looks at Neubauer.

WOLLENBERG

Neubauer? That name sounds familiar.

NEUBAUER

Yes, Sir. I went to school here, Sir. About five years ago.

WOLLENBERG

This is my school, Neubauer. I'll be damned if I'll give you control.

(to Morgan)

I'm not giving control to a little shit criminal.

LIEUTENANT MORGAN

I am in control here Wollenberg because you lost control of this institution. I say who's in charge. My men—all of my men— will work to restrain the inmates and secure operations.

WOLLENBERG

I didn't call for any help. We don't need your help.

LIEUTENANT MORGAN

Somebody called. We were called because you let a bunch of unruly goddamn boys take command.

WOLLENBERG

The governor will hear about this.

LIEUTENANT NEUBAUER

The governor has heard about this. Stay out of our way. The governor has called for an investigation.

The employee that called the guard has come up.

LIEUTENANT MORGAN

Where did the riot start.

STAFF MEMBER

The dining hall.

LIEUTENANT NEUBAUER

Come on. I know where the dining hall is.

The staff member follows Morgan and Neubauer to the dining hall.

STAFF MEMBER

Most of the boys are gone.

LIEUTENANT MORGAN

Move out. Cover the grounds. Round up what boys are still here. This entire establishment is on lock down. You will patrol all sections of this school until given further notice.

(to two of his men)

Johnson, Baker, use your manpower to search the neighboring towns and cornfields. Bring those boys back. Scour the whole goddamn state. We will get all those little bastards back here.

Guard members round up boys.

The line of National Guard trucks drives away.

INT. DINING HALL - CONTINUING

Dowty is taken into custody.

INT. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - NEXT DAY -CONTINUING

Lieutenant Morgan meets with his men.

LIEUTENANT MORGAN

The baddest of these boys will be taken to the Animosa reformatory. They will be held in segregated custody until they have been reformed. Then they will be returned to Eldora.

LIEUTENANT NEUBAUER

Yes, Sir.

The men set out to obey orders.

SERIES OF SHOTS

A) Smart Ass, along with other boys, heavily guarded, is loaded onto a prison bus. Smart Ass weeping as he steps up onto the bus.

B) Boys are unloaded from National Guard trucks. The New Kid, the Dean's Boy, and other familiar faces step off trucks and are escorted to the cottages.

One of the last boys off one of the buses is Skinny.

C) A number of guardsmen patrol all walkways.

D) Dean Wollenberg is led away by local police.

E) Mrs. Rinel hugs Skinny, hugs Dowty, gets into a car, carrying a small suitcase.

F) Liverlips in court. He sits at the defense table.

JUDGE

Because of your egregious crimes against minor children in your care, I sentence you to a minimum of ten years hard labor at the Iowa State correctional facility.

JUDGE'S POV

he looks at Mr. Rinel.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

FADE TO:

Hospital grounds.

SUPERIMPOSE:

the words 6 MONTHS LATER.

The front entrance of a hospital with the words DES MOINES
GENERAL HOSPITAL over the doorway.

At a nurses' station two young men, DOWTY and SKINNY are
inquiring about a patient.

NURSE
(looking in a binder)
You want to see Mr. Hoffman?

SKINNY
Yes, Ma'am. We're here to see Carl Hoffman's
father.

NURSE
Our records show that Mr. Hoffman only had two
sons, and one of them is dead.

Dowty and Skinny look at each other. Dowty begins to speak.

NURSE
You can't be sons. How are you related to Mr.
Hoffman?

SKINNY
We were friends with his son that died.

NURSE
You are friends of. .
(reading her paperwork)
Henry Hoffman?

DOWTY
No, Ma'am. We knew his son Carl.

NURSE
What kind of monkey business are you boys up to?
Wasting my time playing games. You get on outta
here.

SKINNY
Ma'am?

NURSE
Carl Hoffman is not dead . He's in his father's
room visiting with him. How do you explain that?

DOWTY

He can't be. Carl's dead. I was there when he died.

NURSE

Okay. You boys wait right there. We will get to the bottom of this. If you're wasting my time . . .

DOWTY

No Ma'am.

SKINNY

Yes, Ma'am. We'll wait.

The nurse walks away.

Skinny looks in her binder.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUING

A man lies in a bed.

His eyes are closed and he appears almost dead.

A boy sits beside the bed.

MR. HOFFMAN

I had to send you to Eldora.

Unnoticed, Dowty and Skinny walk into the room.

MR. HOFFMAN

(continuing as V.O.)

I know you was a good boy. You were innocent. But that's just it. I needed Henry.

FLASHBACK

Mr. Hoffman and Henry both in a store.

Mr. Hoffman paying, fights with the store clerk, squabbling over the price of a carton of cigarettes and the price he's been charged.

Henry sneaks out of the store with a bag of goods.

Mr. Hoffman slams his fist onto the counter.

MR. HOFFMAN

And you can be sure I won't be giving my business to crooks like you.

He storms out of the store.

Once in the car, he celebrates with Henry as they look over the goods they've made off with.

Mr. Hoffman playfully slaps the back of Henry's head.

END OF FLASHBACK

MR. HOFFMAN

He was a good boy too, Henry was. Now he's dead. Died doing the last thing I asked him to do. We was chased by the cops, and Henry was killed. I'm dying. Me and Henry are both dead, and you're alive. It's fitting.

Carl looks away. No words.

He sees his friends and they move to stand close to him as he waits for the end.

EXT. HOSPITAL GROUNDS - CONTINUING

The boys are leaving the hospital but also hanging around, talking.

DOWTY

Talk about surprising the shit outta someone.

SKINNY

You was dead. The guys saw the sheet being pulled over your head. How the hell did you pull that off?

CARL

I don't know all of it.

(continuing as V.O.)

I wanted to die that day. . .

FLASHBACK

Carl sitting on the coal pile too weary to move.

Rinel half dragging him into the powerhouse.

Dowty fighting the guards, trying to follow Carl.

INSIDE the powerhouse, Mr. Rinel is greeted by his wife.

MRS. RINEL

You are not going to touch that boy, again. I am going to get him out of here, and you are going to help. If you don't, I go to the authorities. Either way I am leaving you.

Mr. Rinel lets go of Carl.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - FLASHBACK CONTINUES

Carl in bed, eyes open.

MRS. RINEL

Trust me, Carl.

She pulls the sheet up over his head and exits the room.

END OF FLASHBACK

CARL

I was in the hospital for a while and then I stayed with a friend of Mrs. Rinel's until I was recovered. Then I had to find my dad and my brother.

SKINNY

You found 'em.

CARL

I heard about the riot at Eldora. The paper said they rounded everybody up, sent some of 'em to prison. How the hell did you two get out?

SKINNY

You're gonna love this one, Carl.

DOWTY (V.O.)

We wasn't in lock down no more. Except for the new superintendent, things were just the way they'd always been. They'd replaced the assholes with more assholes, and . . .

FLASHBACK

A line of Eldora inmates marches, carrying dummy rifles, and keeping perfect time.

An army bus drives by, stops at the administration building.

Lieutenant Neubauer steps off and enters the building.

EXT. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - CONTINUING

About fifty of the older boys are being loaded onto the bus. Dowty is behind Skinny in the line.

Lieutenant Neubauer watches as a school employee loads the boys.

Skinny gets on the bus.

When Dowty gets close to the door, he is stopped by the guard.

GUARD

You're too young to get on this bus.

Dowty protests, and Lieutenant Neubauer intervenes.

LIEUTENANT NEUBAUER

What's the problem here?

GUARD

This one tried to sneak on.

LIEUTENANT NEUBAUER

What's your name, son.

DOWTY

Dowty Ritter, Sir.

He salutes Neubauer.

LIEUTENANT NEUBAUER

Ritter, do you know what you're getting into here. This bus is taking these men to Des Moines to be enlisted in the armed forces.

DOWTY

Yes, Sir. That's exactly what I want, Sir.

Lieutenant Neubauer studies Dowty for a moment, and then motions for him to get on.

Dowty, plays the part, a man marching onto the bus. He marches to the seat next to Skinny who is grinning ear to ear.

INT. BUS - CONTINUING

Neubauer drives the bus through Des Moines. Boys point out various sights, talk about joining the army.

A building comes into sight. The DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE BUILDING.

Neubauer pulls up in front of the newspaper building.

SKINNY

What the hell? This ain't the army.

Boys question the stop. Why are we here? What are we doing? Some stand up. The bus grows loud.

LIEUTENANT NEUBAUER

You want your questions answered?

A resounding yes.

LIEUTENANT NEUBAUER

Listen up, then!

Quiet.

LIEUTENANT NEUBAUER

You got on this bus because you were willing to join the army in order to leave Eldora behind.

LIEUTENANT NEUBAUER

(CONTIN'D)

I lived at Eldora. I understand what you boys
have gone through.

(beat)

I am going to open this door, and when I do, you
are free. Free from Eldora. Free to do whatever
you want.

A moment's silence.

Neubauer opens the door, and the boys flood off the bus.

Skinny stops at the driver's seat, Dowty just stepping
down.

SKINNY

Thank you, Sir.

LIEUTENANT NEUBAUER

Just get off the bus, son. I can't stay here for
very long.

Skinny nods, and he and Dowty exit the bus.

END OF FLASHBACK

SKINNY

And here we are.

The three friends walk away from the hospital.

Father V.O.

Wait for it. Wait for it.

Dowty begins playing around, slapping the other two,
throwing light punches.

FATHER V.O.

Bam!

Dowty swings a fake round-house left at Carl.

Sudden Black Screen.

THE END

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Thesis Summary of "Eldora" by Julie Campbell

Eldora, an account of escape, is a screenplay based on the stories my father told me about his experiences living in a correctional facility as a young boy. The seriousness of the material lends itself to a film drama. The characters, the setting, and the life experiences are all intended to be realistic, to show what life was like in an industrial school in the 1940s. The story is focused on three boys, one who was wrongly placed in the school, intent on escaping an abusive, sometimes life-threatening situation forced upon them by the laws of the time. The boys (and the plot) are driven by the desire to escape,

The Shawshank Redemption, a prison escape drama directed by Frank Darabont, starring Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman, also a story of escape, is similar to *Eldora*. The main character Andy Dufresne has been wrongly sentenced to life in prison for a murder he did not commit. While the majority of the film tells of the ups and downs of Andy's daily life in prison, the audience understands that his major goal is to escape. The dénouement reveals how much of his time was spent planning and hoping for escape as we see the results of twenty years spent tunneling through the wall of his cell. The boys of *Eldora* lack Dufresne's finesse, acting quickly and taking present chances, but their desire for escape is just as great.

While Barry Levinson's *Sleepers* is a movie more about revenge, the first act of the film is set in a school for boys where the four main characters have been incarcerated for stealing a hot dog cart as part of a prank. The boys suffer sexual abuse at the hands of four guards and spend the majority of the movie as adults getting revenge. Their time at the school has some lighter moments; for instance, the football

game in which they beat the guards' team, but they are put in solitary confinement and lose their boyhood innocence and joy. It is their time spent in the institution that captures the heart of the viewer and adds a sense of justice to the revenge they attain as adults.

My primary goal in writing *Eldora* is to tell my father's story. During a trip to Eldora, Iowa, in June of 2012, to research my father's stay at the school, I discovered histories of numerous boys. Some told in one-liners in the original leather-bound school log books, others told in newspaper clippings and other forms. Eldora was opened in the late 1800s and from then until the 1960's, boys were numerous and often placed in such homes at the will of parents and lawmen, sometimes without due process. The three main characters of *Eldora* are based on different facets of my father's story and his personality and skills, but the stories of all Eldora inmates has been given voice through this very personal story.

The biggest challenge I faced while writing *Eldora* was to take the actual facts and fit them to a fictional time-frame that enabled a wise use of story conflict, rising action, and resolution that might compel a movie-going audience to believe they'd seen a "true" story.

The use of three characters that each tell a part of my father's story worked to resolve most of the issues I faced. My father was in the school for the majority of his young life, being released when he was 18-years-old. I wanted the time of the fictional story to be much less than that, so I used Dowty, a new inmate who escapes within six months, to resolve the time issue. However, wanting to be true to my dad's story, I gave Dowty a friend named Carl, a boy whose been at the school for six years, who has experienced a life-time of school life.

To better delineate personality types, I gave each of the three main characters parts, such as the funny one, the serious one, and the new kid. But each also has a bit of my father in his make-up. The character Skinny, the savvy, humorous one, has my dad's musical and dancing skills (people cleared dance floors to watch my mother and father dance). Dowty takes us step by step through the actual experiences my dad had at Eldora, and Carl's tale of being wrongly placed at the school, living there for years, mirrors my father's story. The different personalities allow for conflict and camaraderie.

I wanted the voices in *Eldora* to sound real. I can still hear my father's voice, his choice of words, but I found that bits and pieces of other stories I had located during my visit at Eldora helpful in telling the story. The school is still operational, and the secretary very generously supplied me with printed copies of the official school history from the school web site. The original log books contain newspaper articles that former secretaries glued into the book onto the pages of the boys involved. I read and adapted portions of one former inmate's self-published story. I found my father's name in the school's newsletter, the *Echo*, and so on and so on. For instance, the heading of one newspaper article that was about a guard who claimed mistreatment of boys helped me to better understand and retell my father's story about receiving swats while he was at the school.

Eldora is significant because it is based on a true story. It reveals a critical time in American history that deals with the treatment of minors placed in the care of adults who abused their power. As said earlier, it gives voice to the stories of many boys who suffered under a system that failed them. It is important to the genre of prison escape

dramas because it tries to truthfully retell history that involves young men and boys (as young as 10) treated as criminals who often were not criminals.

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

AUTHOR: Julie Campbell

TITLE: Eldora

DIRECTOR OF THESIS : James Daro

PAGES: 96

Fourteen-year-old Dowty Ritter, an orphan, escapes the confines of the Sioux City, Iowa, orphanage he has lived in since his father's death three years earlier. Heading for Des Moines, with hopes of joining the army, Dowty is stopped by the law, his plans are thwarted, and he, instead, ends up in the boys' correctional facility in Eldora, Iowa.

At Eldora, Dowty makes friends and enemies, and finds out that the pseudo-military school is far more penal than its name, The Iowa Industrial School, implies. From the beginning of his stay at Eldora, Dowty experiences problems with the headmaster of Cottage Four, a cantankerous bully that abuses the power he holds over the boys in his care. Dowty works in sweat-shop type conditions, and faces daily beatings after he and his friends are turned in for a possible escape plan.

The camaraderie of friendship makes life at Eldora bearable, especially because Dowty and his closest friends, Carl Hoffman (a long-time resident) and Skinny Petersen (a twenty-two-year-old at Eldora in order to avoid jail time) share a supreme desire to escape the abuse at the school. One boy dies, others suffer extreme harm; a derailed escape ends in a riot that results in the overthrow of the existing administration, and through everything, Dowty tries to remember and remain true to his father's teachings.



My dad's sewing machine.



←The Eldora shop where my dad learned to be a tailor.

My dad with my mom and some of his daughters. I am on the far right. ↓



