



The Boys of the Dark: A Story of Betrayal and Redemption in the Deep South

Robin Gaby Fisher , Michael O'McCarthy , Robert W. Straley

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A story that garnered national attention, this is the harrowing tale of two men who suffered abuses at a reform school in Florida in the 1950s and 60s, and who banded together fifty years later to confront their attackers.

Michael O'McCarthy and Robert W. Straley were teens when they were termed incorrigible youth by authorities and ordered to attend the Florida School for Boys. They discovered in Marianna, the City of Southern Charm, an immaculately groomed campus that looked more like an idyllic university than a reform school. But hidden behind the gates of the Florida School for Boys was a hell unlike any they could have imagined. The school's guards and administrators acted as their jailers and tormentors. The boys allegedly bore witness to assault, rape, and possibly even murder.

For fifty years, both men---and countless others like them---carried their torment in silence. But a series of unlikely events brought O'McCarthy, now a successful rights activist, and Straley together, and they became determined to expose the Florida School for Boys for what they believed it to be: a youth prison with a century-long history of abuse. They embarked upon a campaign that would change their lives and inspire others.

Robin Gaby Fisher, a Pulitzer Prize--winning journalist and author of the *New York Times* bestselling *After the Fire*, collaborates with Straley and O'McCarthy to offer a riveting account of their harrowing ordeal. The book goes beyond the story of the two men to expose the truth about a century-old institution and a town that adopted a Nuremberg-like code of secrecy and a government that failed to address its own wrongdoing. What emerges is a tale of strength, resolve, and vindication in the face of the kinds of terror few can imagine.

The Boys of the Dark: A Story of Betrayal and Redemption in the Deep South Details

Date : Published August 17th 2010 by St. Martin's Press (first published August 1st 2010)

ISBN : 9780312595395

Author : Robin Gaby Fisher , Michael O'McCarthy , Robert W. Straley

Format : Hardcover 256 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Crime, True Crime, Mystery, North American Hi..., American History, Literature, 20th Century, Autobiography, Memoir

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From Reader Review The Boys of the Dark: A Story of Betrayal and Redemption in the Deep South for online ebook

Irene says

This book not only tells of the horrors concerning the Florida Boys Reform school, it also tells of the steps taken by the White House Boys to make these horrors known and seek validation. A very interesting read, as the public and the White House Boys are still waiting for all questions to be answered.

Robert says

I read this book with much interest because of my incarceration at what was called Florida School for Boys - Marianne later renamed Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys - Marianne. My first time was for ten months summer 1965 to spring 1966. I went "down" once to the White House during that time. The man who administered that punishment was Mr Tidwell. A man with one arm showed a lot of power in every swing with the leather strap. After leaving my return was approximately two months later. I stayed for fourteen months and went "down" three more times. This book shows a lot of the emotional scars many received and barely endured, but it lacks a lot relating to how boys not only had to endure the punishment given out by the staff, but how a lot of us had to survive the taunting, the beatings and abuse that we gave out amongst ourselves. It was not pretty. Not only was there a hierarchy involving the staff, but the boys had their own and not to follow it brought about other punishment unrelated to the staff. Some of those boys, now old men, carry with them scars only God can see.

Paula says

I liked it, I just wished there was more in-depth story, as opposed to info on getting research/tracking down for the story.

How people could treat others like that, much less growing boys like that is monstrous. Sad.

Dara says

Great read

This book was hard to put down. I had seen a documentary about the reform school and my interest was automatically sparked.

Shelly says

This book is based on true events. The brutality of the treatment in this reform school is appalling. The

victims (as adults) worked endlessly to expose the corruption and abuse. A very quick, easy read.

Julianne Maguire says

A great book that warns of the very dark implications of town/county economies that rely on one entity. Translation: If a citizenry is barely getting by, and there's only one employer in town, and that employer decides to act immorally, most will choose to preserve their own livelihood and look the other way.

Well written, but, because of its length (short) leaves as many questions unanswered as it explores. I believe that was probably the author's intention, though.

Andres says

A harrowing read about two men who decide to come forward with their hellish stories about the terrible abuse they experienced as children in a state run juvenile institution. The story can be a tough read but it is an interesting look at how victims of such abuse deal with these terrible memories as adults, and how an institution can get away with this abuse, even when it is a well known "secret" to nearby residents of the town.

The book ends on sort of a positive note, but the book as a whole feels a little deflated. Nothing grand happens to right the wrongs, and there's no feeling that accountability at these kinds of places is any better than before (even though nobody would get away with the degree of abuse recounted here).

Maybe because the story ends with a lukewarm resolution for those involved, it left me feeling as if the book itself could have done better?

Katrina says

This book is easy to read, but tells a true story that will give you nightmares!

The horrible injustices listed in this book are enough to make you think it's fiction. A haunting story, told in the manner of an investigative journalist, so it's easy to get read.

Basic story: what really happened to young men in the juvenile justice system in Florida from the 1950s on? Why did the Florida School for Boys have a secret room in a building? What happened to countless boys who are unaccounted for?

I think anyone from Florida should read this, and demand that their state government should make amends for the past, and investigate the answers to so many unanswered questions.

Paige Norman says

This was a very well written book; although hard to deal with the subject matter. It was sad in very many ways but the author didn't gloss over things or make them seem politically correct. I find it horrifying that the state and the local people just let this place exist for so many years and that so many boys/men were ruined

and abused -- sometimes murdered -- while others just looked the other way.

SouthWestZippy says

In 2006 the death of a 14-year-old boy in a Florida youth boot camp forced Robert W. Straley to confront emotions and memories he had bottled up for decades. Robert W. Straley then contacted Michael O'McCarthy, a fellow victim of the school and they went on to expose the truth about the school's guards and administrators on how they acted as their jailers and tormentors. After fifty years Michael O'McCarthy and Robert W. Straley no longer held their secrets about what all happened to them and others at the Florida School for Boys in Marianna. The book gives an eye opening and scary picture about the horrific things that went on at the school without going overboard with graphic details.

Laura McHale Holland says

This is an eye-opening page turner of the true travails of boys abused in a juvenile facility in Florida throughout much of the 20th century. It conveys how boys, some as young as five years old were routinely beaten and subjugated, how they are still haunted by the brutal treatment they endured, how the townspeople nearby knew of the abuse but did nothing to stop it, and how two of the survivors, in particular, came together to bring the shameful history of the facility to light, get the state of Florida to acknowledge what went on and bring the perpetrators to justice. Theirs is a journey worth following, upsetting as it is.

Cindy Dyson Eitelman says

I'd read the horror stories--the true horror stories--so I was kind of afraid to read the book. But they had it at the library so....

It's a brief history of the Dozier Reform School For Boys near Marianna, Florida, combined with the story of the two courageous men who exposed the torture and abuse that went on there.

If one believed a place could be evil, this would be the place. It was Florida's first reform school, built in the late 1890s. From 1900 until its final closure in the 1980s, it was a hellhole of pain and death--death by disease, by fire, savage beatings, occasional murder. The first report came in 1903--three years after it opened, it was pronounced a failure. Young boys were being kept in irons like common criminals. Which was humane treatment compared to what came later. The boys who survived would hide the scars and try not to think of the place; never speak of it. On top of their suppressed fear and rage was a secret shame--the shame of those powerless against irrational evil. They couldn't fight back, couldn't escape, couldn't help their friends. They couldn't even help themselves.

The two men of the narrative tell their stories briefly, then describe their attempts to come to terms with the nightmares, fits of rage, and hidden self-loathing. After years of silent suffering they want to remember it clearly, get past it, and try for once to live normal lives. And help the many others with the same hidden pain. And to get an admission from the sunshine state of Florida that something had been wrong, shamefully wrong, for so many years.

One note to the author--as much as I loved the story and admired your book, resist the urge to foreshadow. We know it's going to get bad--we read the cover. You don't need to hint about it.

Rachel says

Good read

Informative reading about torture and murders that took place at the Dozier School for Boys. The end left me hanging a bit and it's unfortunate that Michael O'McCarthy died soon after the story was revealed. I feel as though I need to read more books about this to find answers.

Megan Richardson says

I started this book after getting home from a friend's house at about 10:30 planning on reading a few pages and going to bed. I finished the book at 12:30. I couldn't put it down! The public was so up in arms about the torturing that happened at Abu Ghraib, but the same things have been happening in the United States. To Children! And nobody did anything about it for literally 100 years. This book was terrible, but amazing at the same time.

David Ward says

The Boys of the Dark: A Story of Betrayal and Redemption in the Deep South by Robin Gaby Fisher (St. Martin's Press 2010)(365.42) is a true story of the horrible conditions that existed in the twentieth century at the Florida School For Boys in Mariana, Florida. This was a reformatory which regularly featured beatings and torture of the boys/inmates even unto death. My rating: 6.5/10, finished 3/1/12.
