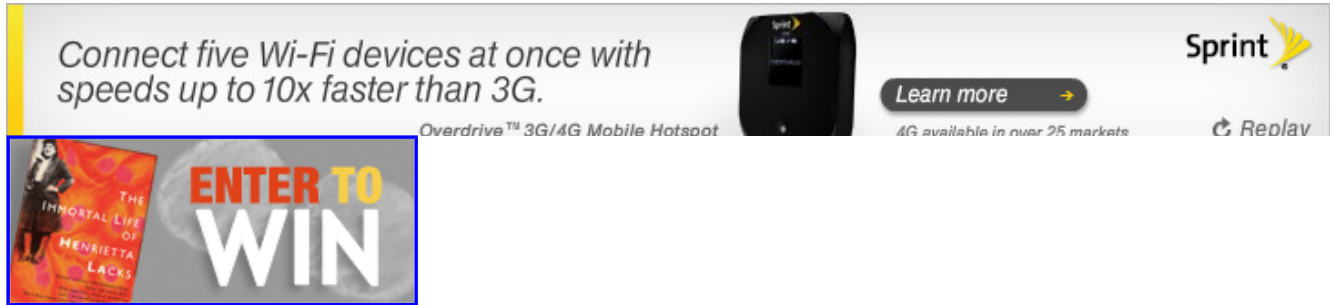


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[PZ Myers](#) is a biologist and associate professor at the [University of Minnesota, Morris](#).



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I have only a small flickering light to guide me in the darkness of a thick forest. Up comes a theologian and blows it out.

[Denis Diderot]

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Shepherd's Hill Farm is a hell-hole

Category: [Religion](#)

Posted on: February 27, 2010 9:39 AM, by [PZ Myers](#)

Got problem kids? Man, when they hit those teenage years they *all* get rebellious and willful, and start thinking independently, and often start doing things their parents would rather they didn't. This is one of the tough responsibilities of being a parent — you have to be willing to let your children grow into independent human beings.

But let's say you never got that memo, and you think your job is to raise children who are just like you: insecure, a little bit angry, shackled tightly into a fearful belief system that says all human beings are evil. Independent thinking is the last thing you want in your obedient little repressed child-slave! Well, there's help for you: [Shepherd's Hill Farm](#), an accredited Christian boot camp that will stomp his wild soul right back down into the mud of conformity and obedience.

It's way out in the middle of nowhere, so there will be no place for the wayward teen to escape to...and no one to hear them scream.

Shepherd's Hill Farm is a *counseling center*, so they will also take care of the mental health of your child. Trace Embry, the director, [knows absolutely nothing about mental health and even gives dangerous advice against all the evidence](#), but you don't have to worry — he's a very vocal Christian. God will forgive him.

We have [testimonials from inmates residents of the camp](#) about the other benefits of attending. Does your child have special medical needs, like seizures? They will take his medicine away, but their staff is well-trained in being able to simultaneously wrestle a child to the ground and pray for him. Is your child a bit on the hefty side? He will get 'special meals' — a can of beans, a bit of vegetable, and a piece of bread — until they reach that ascetic ideal. Your child will be 'brainwashed in the blood of the lamb,' so it's all OK — even the beatings serve to transfigure hooligans into robots for Jesus.

Don't worry that your child might fall behind in his classes. They teach science at Shepherd's Hill Farm!

In their "science" classes we were indoctrinated with the christian story. We were forced to watch Kent Hovind videos, as if he and all his "theorys" have not already been debunked.

He won't fall behind: he'll be *propelled* backwards, as if they'd strapped a rocket to his ass and aimed him right at the dark ages.

For all of this — the cans of beans, the non-existent medical care, the anti-education, the beatings — what do you think you should pay? Nothing? They should pay you? Wrong! You will cough up almost \$60,000 a year for the privilege of tossing your child into the hands of a dumb redneck psychopath with a farm in the wilderness. It's a *Christian* wilderness, though. That's the added value you're paying for, and I'm sure it's worth every penny...if you're one of those parents who can't abide children with personalities or ideas of their own.

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Posted by: [hje](#)  | [February 27, 2010 9:50 AM](#)

#1

Is this a followup to the post on bloodsuckers?

- Posted by: [Zeno](#)  | [February 27, 2010 9:53 AM](#) #2
- I guess Catholic school wasn't so bad after all, now that I think back on [it](#).
- Posted by: [Eileen](#)  | [February 27, 2010 9:53 AM](#) #3
- I'm lovin the (rather ironic) link on the Shepherd's Hill page - [license2parent.org](#). If there's anyone who should be tested before providing basic childcare, it's a religious fundamentalist.
- Posted by: [Aquaria](#)  | [February 27, 2010 10:02 AM](#) #4
- The Missouri Synod Lutheran school I attended is looking downright permissive--maybe even a hotbed of atheism.
- I remember the pastor exchanging some of those complicated handshakes with kids as we left the required weekly indoctrination meetings--er, "chapel." I've no idea why he bothered with trying to understand us, rather than backhanding us with a Bible. What was he thinking?
- Posted by: [robertdw](#)  | [February 27, 2010 10:03 AM](#) #5
- The absolute worst part of this, to me at least, is that the parents who send their kids there really do care about their children and are trying to do what they think is right.
- The fact that anyone can think that putting your children through that sort of abuse is the right thing to do is just terrifying. But it is a logical extension of a belief in a temporary life followed by eternal salvation or damnation. An excellent example how religious beliefs can distort the most positive of emotions into something foul.
- Posted by: [MikeMa](#)  | [February 27, 2010 10:03 AM](#) #6
- A belief system that requires beatings and vile mistreatment to gain or maintain adherents. What a petty little god they have.
- Posted by: [Rev. BigDumbChimp](#)  | [February 27, 2010 10:05 AM](#) #7
- Spare the rod, spoil the child.
- Posted by: [Walton](#)  | [February 27, 2010 10:08 AM](#) #8
- This is truly awful.
- Just more reason why we should fight the pernicious notion that parents "own" their children and have some sort of "right" to control, dominate and abuse them, or send them to abusive places like this. Children are not property; they are free individuals, and their rights and choices ought to be respected and defended - where necessary, by the courts.
- Posted by: [jennyxyzy](#)  | [February 27, 2010 10:12 AM](#) #9
- Good grief!
- Now, I know Shepherd's Hill Farm is a relatively fringe example, but I can't help wishing that some of those Christians that no doubt dismiss the owner of the Farm as not being a True Christian, would picket the Farm to protect the children, instead of, oh, I don't know, picketing abortion clinics, for example!
- Posted by: [Rawnaeris](#)  | [February 27, 2010 10:21 AM](#) #10
- Damn, this place makes the Jesus Camps I went to for one week every summer look like an absolute vacation.

Brainwashing is a favorite of xtian groups though. Took me three years to realize I'd been brainwashed at one of those camps. That's when I became an atheist.

Posted by: Noni Mausea  | [February 27, 2010 10:28 AM](#)

#11

\$60,000 a year? Doesn't that rather limit their client base? That rules out the lowest three quintiles, maybe four, unless people can somehow get a bank loan, or sell their house... or use up the kid's college savings.

But the \$60k isn't all.

"How much does it cost to send my child to SHF? \$58,900 per resident/per year (**plus the varying costs of medical and special psychological services**). This includes all lodging, education, food, entertainment, and hands-on therapeutic discipleship for one full year. SHF currently employs nearly two staff members for each student on campus. This is to adequately minister to the student needs of each student with the highest degree of efficiency."

Wait a minute, hold on ... the "varying costs of medical and special psychological services?" As administered by who? will your family insurance cover it? and is there any limit to those costs? Yikes.

I bet they want to be paid upfront too.

Noni

Posted by: Noni Mausea  | [February 27, 2010 10:32 AM](#)

#12

PS I had a look at the farmsite, and must say it doesn't look like a "hell hole." It looks like Dick and Jane and Susan's grandparent's farm, frankly. And only 85 miles to Atlanta, easy walking distance.

Noni

Posted by: Aquaria  | [February 27, 2010 10:39 AM](#)

#13

That rules out the lowest three quintiles, maybe four, unless people can somehow get a bank loan, or sell their house... or use up the kid's college savings.

The kid quoted near the end of PZ's post said that his dad borrowed against a life insurance policy. He did' his family was left with next to nothing.

Posted by: Aquaria  | [February 27, 2010 10:42 AM](#)

#14

Died, even, not did.

#12:

If you read the actual testimonials, the parts shown to the public, in person and online do not represent where the children live. The children are forced to build huts for themselves with axes and handsaws. The homes are tucked into the back of the property.

If you'd followed any of the other links, you'd know that.

Posted by: Pacal  | [February 27, 2010 10:45 AM](#)

#15

No. 12:

only 85 miles to Atlanta, easy walking distance.

Walk 50 miles and tell me it's "easy walking distance"

Posted by: Noni Mause  | [February 27, 2010 10:52 AM](#)

#16

Pacal, I guess I needed to include a /sarcasm notation after this.

Having said that, an 85 mile walk in the mild climate of Georgia is a toddle, when facing the alternative. With such motivation, I could do 30 miles the first day, and I am a confirmed net-potato.

Less, of course, if I felt I needed to travel by night.

Noni

Posted by: Legion  | [February 27, 2010 10:56 AM](#)

#17

This. From the web site:

Because **we believe Holy Scripture to be the final authority for truth**, life, and family living, our philosophy is to heed God's mandate and principles for child-rearing revealed within.

Plus this...

...no staff member will force-feed his or her faith on any resident. And, nobody at SHF will discriminate against a resident who chooses not to have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

= contradiction.

Posted by: raven  | [February 27, 2010 11:00 AM](#)

#18

A matter of time until one or more of the kids end up dead. These xian camps for "troubled" kids routinely end up killing them.

Some of the kids who end up in these camps are "troubled" whatever that means. Some of them are just too intelligent, gay, or have realized that their parents and their parent's toxic religious cult are seriously screwed up.

The Mormons are famous for their network of camps for their wayward kids. They call it the Mormon Gulag.

Protecting the Rights of Teens There is a network of experts and families forming around the GULAG that is ... **Children at the camp were afraid to tell the police how the staff tortured and ... Those who don't will end up dead like Nicholas Contreraz, or imprisoned like ...** In search of a Mormon School for "Troubled Teenagers" I found a lot of ...

Posted by: PenguinFactory  | [February 27, 2010 11:13 AM](#)

#19

This place's name is a combination of "Silent Hill" and "Shepherd's Glen", so anyone who plays survival horror games will know it's bad news.

Posted by: raven  | [February 27, 2010 11:18 AM](#)

#20

BOOT CAMP FOR KIDS: Torturing Teens for Fun and Profit -- Cruelty ...House Passes Legislation to Stop Child Abuse in Teen Boot Camps and other Residential ... Christian discipline? 2 arrested in alleged dragging of girl behind van at boot camp, Tightening up on the stranglers-- 142 youths dead in one decade ... The slow, painful, pointless death of Nicholaus Contreraz, age 16, ...

One source says 142 kids have died in these camps in a decade.

Posted by: ckitching  | [February 27, 2010 11:19 AM](#)

#21

Sounds like the perfect place to work if you're a sadistic sociopath who likes to brutalize the weak and powerless. I'm sure they claim they can beat, um, cure "The Gay" out of children, too.

It's a wonder that Trace hasn't been killed by one of his 'students' by now if even half of those stories are true.

Posted by: Draken  | [February 27, 2010 11:34 AM](#)

#22

[Trace Embry] would also say "Besides who would believe you, a troubled drug addict teen or me, an owner of a successful program and an ex cop and preacher?"

I'd go for the drug addict anytime.

Posted by: [onethird-man](#)  | [February 27, 2010 11:38 AM](#)

#23

Wow:

Our ability to think and reason is rooted in the spiritual nature of our being. As teens understand the spiritual origins of our nation and the world, they are challenged to choose and think for themselves about the reality of the inevitable issues of life such as origin, meaning, morality, and destiny, in light of truth as it relates to facts, and not just theory. As the teens acknowledge the validity of being created with a purpose, in the image of an almighty and loving God, as opposed to a happenstance evolution from a lower life form, expectations for themselves can only increase.

...from the last part of the wilderness program. The gist? "We know they are thinking for themselves when they totally agree with us and do not argue."

Posted by: vertalio  | [February 27, 2010 11:41 AM](#)

#24

Makes me hanker for a little place in the woods, oh about a half-mile from Shepherd's Hill, with a nice garden and a Maypole and a still.

Think I'd get visitors?

Talk about souls ripe for the FSM's harvest...

Posted by: tnkrbl  | [February 27, 2010 11:52 AM](#)

#25

I do have a child with a severe and persistent mental illness. Wilderness camps and "scared straight" programs are not an effective form of treatment. It's a model that simply does not work. At best, kids will learn how to function in an institution. When they get home, they generally fall apart again. Kids need their families and families need their kids. That being said, I do understand the desperation that comes with enduring years of intense stress and turmoil. The mental healthcare system is notoriously difficult to navigate and parents need better access to resources.

Posted by: [Jordan](#)  | [February 27, 2010 11:58 AM](#)

#26

I'm sure the girls that have to endure the Hephzibah House would find Shepherd Hills quite a treat.

Posted by: RickR  | [February 27, 2010 12:48 PM](#)

#27

This includes all lodging, education, food, entertainment, and **hands-on therapeutic discipleship**

I think I just threw up in my mouth a little bit.

Posted by: Haruhiist  | [February 27, 2010 12:53 PM](#)

#28

I'm sorry, but WTF?

Does your child have special medical needs, like seizures? They will take his medicine away, but their staff is well-trained in being able to simultaneously wrestle a child to the ground and pray for him.

Ok, so why aren't there complaints about this with the government? Or, if there are, why is the government not doing anything? Wouldn't this fall under medical neglect or something?

Combined with all the other stuff, why are institutions like this legal? It boggles the mind almost as much as the thought that parents would willingly send their child there...

Posted by: Athena  | [February 27, 2010 1:18 PM](#)

#29

It sounds like Christ's concentration camp (CCC). What is really maddening is that fundies haven't a clue as to the normal developmental stages of children. I also wonder about their pathological need for control.

Posted by: raven  | [February 27, 2010 1:25 PM](#)

#30

Ok, so why aren't there complaints about this with the government? Or, if there are, why is the government not doing anything? Wouldn't this fall under medical neglect or something?

That is silly. The government is waiting for a few kids to get killed. It is inevitable. There seems to be something in the bible about not learning from history until you have repeated the mistakes a few hundred times.

Posted by: timrowledge  | [February 27, 2010 1:51 PM](#)

#31

Well we all know what shepherds do, right? Raise a herd of dumb animals in order to make a profit when they are sent to slaughter.

Really, could you think of a worse metaphor to use as an image of your god?

Posted by: Molly, NYC  | [February 27, 2010 2:02 PM](#)

#32

I keep seeing ads for these places in rather tony shelter mags. (*Sunset* used to have quite a lot of them.) Took me years to figure out why.

It's that the kind of control-freak parents who really mind that their kids don't go with their parent's chosen lifestyles read these magazines. For those parents' purposes, these kids are banished because for reasons akin to banishing an old sofa because it doesn't go with the curtains.

Posted by: immichaelyoung  | [February 27, 2010 2:13 PM](#)

#33

A little internet sleuthing reveals that Sheperd's Hill Farm is located in [Franklin County, Georgia](#). Franklin County has a [branch office](#) of the state Division of Family and Children Services, which is the agency which investigates claims of child abuse.

I point this out so that if someone has direct particular evidence of abuse, they can urge an investigation to the agency with the power to conduct one.

Posted by: [Brownian, OM](#)  | [February 27, 2010 2:17 PM](#)

#34

My folks considered sending me to a [private religious school](#) with corporal punishment (but with snowshoeing! Yay.) when I stopped doing homework (meh!) and stole a bottle of potassium permanganate from the school (stupid and bad!) in Grade 8.

Good thing for me my folks were kind of cheap and virtue ain't free.

Posted by: [emote_control](#)  | [February 27, 2010 3:01 PM](#)

#35

If Dan Savage's Youth Pastor Watch is any indication, there's probably some sexual abuse going on there too. Sex offenders flock to youth ministries like moths to lamp posts.

Posted by: [jcmartz.myopenid.com](#)  | [February 27, 2010 3:21 PM](#)

#36

I wonder if they perform exorcisms, too.

Posted by: [Keanus](#)  | [February 27, 2010 3:40 PM](#)

#37

"Schools" like this are apparently ubiquitous, with the common thread being some form of fundamentalist Christianity. I Googled Embry and came up with any number of critical (and that's being nice about them) testimonials about SHF's practices. One [site](#), whose veracity I can't vouch for, but which appears credible, at least on this, lists dozens of such "schools" or "camps". If all valid, they do indeed form a gulag comparable to anything the Soviets ran.

Posted by: [deadwildroses.wordpress.com](#)  | [February 27, 2010 3:53 PM](#)

#38

Up here in Canada, specifically Winnipeg Manitoba, we seem to be [starting our own little patch of hell](#), minus the rural setting.

A mendacious christian organization has bamboozled two levels of government into putting public funding into a rec centre that will be used for spreading jebus's word to at-risk First Nations children. It is quite reprehensible, but not to the standards set by the SHF christian gulag.

Posted by: [Knockgoats](#)  | [February 27, 2010 4:02 PM](#)

#39

Well we all know what shepherds do, right? Raise a herd of dumb animals in order to make a profit when they are sent to slaughter. - timrowledge

But, to be fair, they usually fleece them repeatedly before slaughter!

Posted by: [ckitching](#)  | [February 27, 2010 6:03 PM](#)

#40

deadwildroses, PZ [wrote about that](#) a couple days ago.

Posted by: [SmartLX](#)  | [February 27, 2010 6:24 PM](#)

#41

Old news, but related: in Australia, Gloria Jean's Coffee has very quietly withdrawn its financial support of Mercy Ministries, the exorcism camp for "wayward" (including lesbian) teenage girls. MM hasn't shut down, but it's practically underground now.

So my reason for boycotting GJ isn't there anymore, but I still try to avoid them because they continue to support anti-condom missionaries in Africa.

Posted by: [DLC](#)  | [February 27, 2010 8:07 PM](#)

#42

Some kids do need some tough love.
A bit of discipline, some structure.

Of course, I don't mean this lunacy.

Even if reported by kids with sour grapes, this shepherd's hill facility seems like a disaster waiting to happen.

Posted by: Rorschach  | [February 27, 2010 8:28 PM](#)

#43

Everytime I think I've heard about every bit of madness out of the USA by now, PZ comes up with something else that makes my mouth go agape.

How can this Guantanamo for kids even be legal ? Withholding medical treatment ? Is there no overseeing authority in that state that regulates who gets to play "teacher" with children ? I find this all very unbelievable. Try this anywhere in the first world, you be shut down after a day, and off to jail you go.

Posted by: [Gyeong Hwa Pak, Pikachu para lang sa iyo.](#)  | [February 27, 2010 8:42 PM](#)

#44

This place's name is a combination of "Silent Hill" and "Shepherd's Glen", so anyone who plays survival horror games will know it's bad news.

Silent Hill was founded by a religious cult that fused Christianity with a pagan religion. (Most Christian sects nowadays have pagan elements in them.) According to SH4, children were punished for not adhering to the cult rule. (Say, there was a baby that died because of that.) In SH5, people were "recruited" through torture and children were sacrificed to their God. SH6 is not about a cult, but one can draw a comparison of how God is an idealization of a person imagination and need of a savior in much of the same Harry was to Cheryl.

/horror nerd

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