

Contraband communications

by John S. Adams

Missoula Independent

January 19, 2006

Children at Spring Creek Lodge Academy near Thompson Falls live highly supervised lives. They're sent to the secluded backwoods boarding school from all over the country for "behavior modification," isolated from the opposite sex and warned not to exchange phone numbers or e-mail addresses. Possession of a friend's contact info is considered a major infraction; punishable by extra months tacked on to the time it takes to graduate the program.

"You come here alone, you leave here alone. That's what they always told us," recalls Scott Stewart, a 2001 graduate of Spring Creek. "They think if you meet up with these people outside of the program your 'non-working' lifestyles start coming back."

Stewart says students used coded Bible passages and tiny notes stuffed into the tubes of Bic pens to exchange contraband information at Spring Creek.

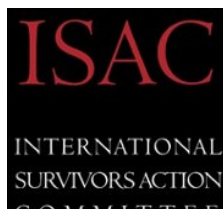
Now it's getting much easier for those same students to get in touch on the outside, thanks to the increasing popularity of Internet blog sites and forums.

Online communities like MySpace.com and Fornits Home for Wayward Web Fora (www.fornits.com/wwf) now give former students of Spring Creek and other programs in the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools (WWASPS) a place to meet and share their thoughts and past experiences.

"I would say about 95 percent of the discussions are people talking about the trials and tribulations they had there," says Stewart, a student at DeVry University in Dallas, Texas, and a member of the "Spring Creekers" group at MySpace.com.

MySpace is host to groups with names like "Spring Creek Peeps," "Spring Creek's Worst Enemies," "Anti-WWASPS" and "End Institution-alized Child Abuse," to name a few. "Spring Creekers" alone boasts 323 new members since it began in March, 2005, but that's nothing compared to the 788 who have joined the "End Institution-alized Child Abuse" group since it was started just five months ago.

"I have found friends I thought I would never hear from again," says Stewart. "It's real inspiring. It's great to touch base with some of your old family members, people you've grown close to."



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