

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.theroyalgazette.com

[Back](#)

Article published Sep 23, 2005

I came out far worse than when I came in



The Junior Training School in the 1960s was a place of abuse and misery that left some boys in a worse state than when they went in, one former member of the school told the *Royal Gazette* this week.

Pen & ink artist Eugene Stovell talked with the *Royal Gazette* after an article about the training school was featured in the Lifestyle section in August. The

previous article was about Arthur St. George Tucker, who started the training school on Nonsuch Island in the late 1920s.

Mr. Tucker believed that people who didn't like children shouldn't be in charge of them. He also thought that boys should be treated fairly and with honesty. He theorised that many boys misbehaved either out of desperation or because they had never had a better example to follow. Mr. Stovell, who was at the school between 1960 and 1963 said that after Mr. Tucker retired in the late 1950s, Mr. Tucker's progressive ideas were not continued.

Mr. Stovell was sent to the Junior Training School on Paget Island when he was 11 years old for truancy. "Some kids at the training school came from pretty bad homes where families were apart," said Mr. Stovell. "The social conditions amongst some of these fellows was pretty bad. My condition wasn't all that great either. I came to the Junior Training School after living in three different foster homes. My mother never use to come and see me and I hardly saw my father."

For a time his grandmother took care of him, but that didn't work out either.

"After playing around in her yard the yard got small," he said. "There was nothing more to do there, so I would run away. That is where I got into trouble. The police would bring me home sometimes three or four times a night. "I got tired of being in one place. I was adventurous and I would just go. I never liked the homes they put me in. I was very adventurous. I never stayed put. They thought the best place for me to stay put was at the Junior Training School, but I didn't stay put there either."

Mr. Stovell said during one escape attempt he swam away from Paget Island at midnight during rough winter weather.

"Quite a few of us swam away or ran away," said Mr. Stovell.

One of the possible reasons Mr. Stovell was a good swimmer was that the boys were hustled down to the water every morning at 5 a.m. no matter what the weather or time of year.

Mr. Stovell spent three years at the school which saw a succession of different men attempt to run the place.

"When I first went, John Packer was in charge," said Mr. Stovell. "I think he may have taken over from Mr. Tucker. Mr. Packer was a very stern, stiff sort of fellow. He had a rough edge and he was the sort of fellow that if you got on the wrong side of him you would get his foot in your you-know-what. But I liked Mr. Packer because he was a very fair fellow.

"He made sure we fellows got what it was we were due. He made sure we were properly fed and clothed and entertained when it was time to be entertained. We had three square meals a day plus a snack at night."

He said that during Mr. Packer's time discipline consisted of a cell, and a merit and demerit system.

"You won grades," he said. "There were three grades. If you did good you were promoted. If you did bad you were demoted."

Unfortunately, Mr. Packer left after Mr. Stovell's first six months at the school. After that the nature of the school changed dramatically for Mr. Stovell.

The next man in charge of the school had trouble keeping control of the students, and at times, Mr. Stovell said there wasn't even enough for the boys to eat.

"I don't think he was really cut out to run such a place," said Mr. Stovell. "Each person who came and took over brought new rules to the place. It seemed like government had no set rules for the Junior Training School. So whatever idiot came next brought his stupidity with him."

Under this man the situation became so bad, that some of the students would chase him.

After this man left, the situation in terms of food and clothing improved, but the merit system was replaced by harsh physical punishment. According to Mr. Stovell, boys were routinely tied down and flogged.

"Fellows would be tied down," said Mr. Stovell. "Thick sticks would be tied together. The fellows would be flogged until they squealed like pigs. You would think they were slaughtering a pig inside there. We would have to stand outside and listen."

Mr. Stovell said that although he only came into the school because of truancy, he was so disturbed by the violence against his fellow students that he often felt as though he himself would commit some act of violence against the people in charge.

"After listening to that a few times I became very angry," he said. "It builds up in you.

He said that the isolated boys' school created certain psychological conditions.

"In such situations there is a whole new type of economy that comes into play," said Mr. Stovell. "In an environment like that a pack of biscuits, or a picture of a popular entertainer would become valuable. Chocolates would be like a dollar. Fellows would barter whatever they had. That sort of thing went into play."

Mr. Stovell said he often felt as though nobody cared what happened to the boys at the school.

"It seemed like nobody paid much attention to you, or your complaints no matter what they were," he said. "There was a certain amount of brutality even amongst the fellows themselves. There were a lot of bullies that we had to deal with."

Most of the boys, ranging in age from 11 to 16 years old were there for truancy, or petty crimes such as stealing a pedal bike. More difficult boys were usually sent on to the Senior Training School. Mr. Stovell said that despite the military-like control over the students, the Junior Training School was never designed to be a prison.

However, he said there were some bright spots during his time at the school. The school on Paget Island often utilised Fort Cunningham, and Mr. Stovell developed an interest in military history, forts and canons.

Not all of the teachers and staff at the school were abusive. Mr. Stovell remembered some of them with great respect, particularly Gilbert Lambe.

"He was a very nice guy," said Mr. Stovell. "He was the kind of person that would sit down and have long talks with you. He wanted to know who you were and who your family were. He was a seaman and in charge of the boats."

Mr. Stovell said people often talk about reinstating something like the Junior Training School for today's troubled youth. He said if such a plan is undertaken, the school should include certain important dynamics.

"I think that a good education system should be put in place, especially in a place like a junior training school," he said. "There should also be counselling, because there was nobody to talk to when I was growing up.

"I left the Junior Training School angry. I didn't find fulfilment; I left there vexed. I was

worse than when I came. I didn't leave there happy. I felt I had just been warehoused there and then I had to come back and face the same situation. There was no change and no improvement in my situation."

He said what helped him to move on in life was his own personal determination.

"I just decided I was going to go ahead and do what I wanted to do without getting in anyone's way," he said. "I decided I would try and make things work. It has been a hard job, but I am still here. No matter what obstacles I might face, I will get by."

He said that for him, art has often been therapy, and has also helped him look at life from a different perspective.

"When it comes to art, art for me was not necessarily something I would do to show anyone. I would do these pieces of work because I felt it was my world to escape into," he said. "I still feel timid about showing my work to people, even though everyone who sees it likes it and wonders how I do certain things. It bothers me not if anybody buys it. I will take it home and put it on my wall if no one wants it. I do pen and inks, still lifes, cultural scenes."
