

Good Intentions in Maine Leave a Girl Dead and a Mother in Prison

By VIRGINIA HEFFERNAN

The cases of failed foster care that make headlines are chiefly stories of caseworkers who, overburdened and inattentive, overlook child abuse. In 2001, however, Maine's Department of Human Services was grossly overattentive when, for scattershot reasons, the department took a beautiful, furious 5-year-old girl named Logan Marr from her mother and consigned her to the custody of Sally Schofield, one of its former caseworkers.

Logan moved into Ms. Schofield's house in Chelsea, Maine, and her foster mother was later convicted of manslaughter. Logan had been bound and gagged with duct tape and left in Ms. Schofield's basement, where she had suffocated. Ms. Schofield was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Tonight, "Failure to Protect," the first part of "Frontline's" two-part examination of the life of Logan and the bureaucracy that contributed to her death, will be broadcast on PBS. This evening's program is both an activist documentary and a harrowing murder mystery. In addition to foreboding home videos of Logan,

Virginia Heffernan is the television critic for Slate.

whose vivacity on camera is almost otherworldly, the program includes detailed interviews with both Sally Schofield and Christy Marr, Logan's birth mother. These are women with heavy hearts, each perplexed in her own way about how motherhood could come to this.

Logan was born in 1996 to Christy Marr, a teenager with a scapegrace boyfriend and a close if contentious relationship with her own mother. Having quarreled with her daughter over how Logan ought to be raised, Ms. Marr's mother made a rash call to the Department of Human Services, which sent a caseworker to examine Ms. Marr's apartment and her relationship with Logan. The woman concluded that Ms. Marr's boyfriend ("who had admitted using drugs," the voiceover reports) and her mother's troubled husband, a convicted sex offender, might be a danger to Logan.

In the next few years Ms. Marr struggled to keep the men at bay — along with her mother, who soon switched from Human Services informer to someone it deemed a rogue acquaintance. With little money, companionship or child care, however, Ms. Marr had a hard time rebuffing her boyfriend, her mother and her stepfather. Exasperated, two caseworkers came to Ms. Marr's house and picked up her daughter,



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Sally Schofield in court during her sentencing for manslaughter in the death of a 5-year-old girl for whom she was providing a foster home.

and the state took custody of Logan.

In the meantime, Sally Schofield, a distinguished Human Services caseworker, longed to adopt a baby girl.

With two sons, Ms. Schofield prided herself on her talents as a mother. She admitted coming across as a know-it-all in preadoption classes. When she was asked in an assessment what she would do with an uncontrollable child, Ms. Schofield told her interviewer, departmental notes say, that "she couldn't imagine a situation in which a child of theirs would be that far out of control." No one questioned the answer.

Someone should have. When Logan landed in the care of Ms. Schofield, she had indeed become that far out of control. She punched, she shrieked, she pounded her head into the wall. She wailed: "Do you think Mommy will get me back?" ("Maybe because she wanted to go home," Christy Marr now surmises.) Ms. Schofield grew frustrated, having been told, in the enigmatic language of social services, that the child "had no behavior." On visits to her birth mother, Logan complained about her new home. One Christmas Ms. Marr caught Logan's worries on videotape.

Logan says, "Mommy, just so you know ... um, you know Sally, my birth mom?"

Ms. Marr answers: "No, I'm your birth mom. You mean your foster mom?"

"She did this ... to me, and I cried, and it hurts me." Here Logan press-

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FRONTLINE**Failure to Protect: The Taking of Logan Marr**

*On most PBS stations tonight
(check local listings)*

Rachel Dretzin and Barak Goodman, producers; written by Mr. Goodman; David Fanning, executive producer for Frontline. Produced by WGBH, Boston. A Frontline co-production with 10/20 Productions.

es her cheeks together to suggest rough-handling.

An unidentified caseworker, who is present, signals to Ms. Marr that she should not probe further, so as not to undermine Ms. Schofield's authority. Obediently Ms. Marr says to her own daughter, "Well, why don't you sit down and we'll have a good Christmas, and let's not think about that right now." By the end of January 2001, Logan was dead.

In an effort to avoid accusations of prurient interest and sensationalism, PBS treats Logan's death as symptomatic of larger failings by child-welfare agencies. The second part of the documentary (to be shown next Thursday), "The Caseworker Files," abandons the specifics of Logan's mistreatment in favor of a behind-the-scenes look at the operations of the Department of Human Services. Where "The Taking of Logan Marr"

is a dramatic cautionary tale, "The Caseworker Files" is a stiff, disorganized polemic.

This episode tracks an eclectic group of cases, most of which leave one rooting for family unity over state intervention. Matthew, 10, is the son of a drunk whom he loves to distraction. Human Services seizes Matthew on suspicion that he has been hit; the boy is uninjured but spends 10 days detained in a hospital, screaming for his father. In Matthew's words: "They're being cruel! I hate everybody in the world!"

Another case concerns Shirley, an apparently undernourished but eloquent mother of three sons and a daughter. Her daughter, not altogether consistently, has accused Shirley's occasional boyfriend of abusing her sexually. Shirley doubts the charge, and although both the boyfriend and the daughter are now out of the house, Shirley has to go through an arduous course of parenting classes and therapy on pain of losing her children. Shirley's sharply logical interrogation of her overseers about their intentions — they stutter in reply — is the best scene in "The Caseworker Files."

Do children need more attention from the state or less? The answer may vary depending on the place. On "Failure to Protect," we see what happens when PBS goes to Maine.