

Hope, Optimism, and Alley Rats

My friends (all four of them) know that I was born and raised in a small, Norman Rockwellesque hamlet deep in the heart of Texas. We had a town square adorned with the county courthouse, across from which my dad owned and operated a small haberdashery. Moreover, we had a tiny neighborhood grocery near my street where my friends and I would go to buy cold Nehi orange sodas on hot summer days. Oh, and tack on the local “haunted house,” inhabited by the mysterious Mrs. Hardy.

Reflecting on my old hometown recently, I began pondering the adult outcomes of the boys in my neighborhood. There were eight of us in all—dubbed the “Alley Rats,” so named due to the fact that an alley ran adjacent to our modest middle class homes. And it was on this alley that we so often played. And pondered optimistic dreams. Each of us thought there was no way he couldn’t succeed.

Paul Taylor is a successful home builder. David Stricklin earned a Ph.D. in history and taught college. Jerome Cribbs became an airline pilot. Yale Swatzell hit lights-out as a building contractor. Brad Wooldridge ended up a biologist. I was led into psychology and neuroscience after an otherwise less than stellar career at the local TruValue Hardware store. And oh yes, two Alley Rats, Mike Pritchard and Burton Baker, “made” ...uh... lawyers. Well, six out of eight success stories ain’t bad...

Thinking back on the outcomes of my fellow Alley Rats, I decided to do an informal survey related to adoptive parents of kiddoes with whom I once worked. Having had the privilege of performing comprehensive evaluations on these *youts*, as “My Cousin Vinny” would say—many dating back to the early 90s, I now have the luxury of finding out how they are faring, now that many are in their early to mid twenties.

To my surprise, most of these very troubled and tempestuous youngsters are doing very well! And most never received bona fide attachment therapy (much less, high-quality attachment therapy), optimal medications, EMDR, neurofeedback, sensory integration training, etc. Nevertheless, the polled majority grew into solid citizens.

So what appears to have been a common denominator for these erstwhile complex and mayhem-laced youngsters? Well, they had been placed into solid families blessed with adoptive parents who, despite repeated maddening frustrations, refused to cave. Rather, they elected to persevere. Usually in the face of multiple naysayers around them.

Hmm.... What do the above outcomes have to say to us today? For me, it is a message of hope and optimism. Why? Because now we DO have so many cutting-edge modalities and technologies available to help the hurt children among us. Treatment options that, for the most part, did not exist 12-15 years ago. Interventions that allow us to heal young brains. Pair these with dedicated, never-say-die adoptive parents, and the future looks bright.

**Unbridled optimism born out of an Alley Rat worldview? Perhaps.
Just please don't give any credit to the two lawyers in the group.**