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Announcer ([00:03](#)):

C13Originals.

Ron Cook ([00:06](#)):

Somebody in the engineering department designed a building and there was a beam. Well, the beam was right here at this level. So if you walked, you smack your head, if you're not looking. So Chuck saw that and he says, "That's the stupidest thing I ever saw. Why don't think cut a piece out of the beam? It's not going to ruin the structure of the building." And then he says, "I think anybody that had anything to do with that stupid thing there should have their head shaved." So the whole construction department ended up with baldheads. Then Chuck said, "I think that anybody who lives in a community where that kind of stupidity goes on should have a bald head." And he shaved his head too. All the man shaved their heads, except for one, me.

Sari Crawford ([01:01](#)):

This is Ron Cook. Ron held the title of president in Synanon just below Chuck in the hierarchy.

Ron Cook ([01:09](#)):

And I said, "If everybody shaves their head, somebody needs to keep their hair in order to show the contrast. And it isn't just a bunch of crazy people shaving their heads."

Ron Cook ([01:21](#)):

And so my wife and I are having lunch with Chuck and Betty. And Betty Dederich is saying, "I don't think it's fair. All these years, the men always get to make the demonstrations and the women never get to do it or participate and we get left out." And there's a whole women's movement going on. And Betty was talking about it, my wife adored Betty, and she's just kind of looking and nodding. A little later, Chuck Junior comes rushing into my office and says, "Listen to The Wire. The women are going to shave their heads." And I said, "Oh my God, we can't do that. We're going to look like a kooky cult."

Sari Crawford ([02:04](#)):

The Wire was Synanon internal broadcasting network. It allowed for instant communication between facilities. It was a radio station basically. And sometimes there would be a Synanon game broadcast live for the whole community. This time Chuck was speaking on The Wire, as he often did.

Mike Gimbel ([02:25](#)):

This woman got caught stealing a camera. And so Chuck, he's going to address this girl who stole the camera.

Chuck Dederich ([02:32](#)):

I want to use what you just did-

Sari Crawford ([02:35](#)):

Mike Gimbel worked his way up from high school heroin addict to the director of Synanon's bootcamp. And he remembers hearing Chuck on The Wire that day.

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Mike Gimbel ([02:45](#)):

And he says, "Hey, if you were a man, we'd already have you in a pot sink with your head shaved. Now, if you really believe in women's lib, go shave your head and get in the pot sink." And she got up and she walked out and they shaved her head.

Ron Cook ([03:01](#)):

So I ran into the game. I was going to say something and there was my wife sitting in the chair and somebody was about to remove her hair. And I said, "Before you turn yourself into an ugly pig, I want to talk about this in a Synanon game." They stopped. I turned around and walked out. I'm halfway back to where the game was. And I looked behind me and all the women are walking with their heads hanging low, including the founder's wife, Betty. So I knew I was in fucking trouble. So we walk in, we sit down and I got into my protest to the women shaving their heads and Chuck bellows out. He says, "Ron, that's the problem with you. You're always getting in the way of change." And the girls went, "Yay." Ran out, shaved their head. And this was broadcast through the whole Synanon community.

Mike Gimbel ([04:05](#)):

Within two hours. Every woman in Synanon shaved their head, even Betty. Even though a lot of the women didn't want to do it, that peer pressure was there. It showed the power of the group to get people to do things. Chuck, he really knew what he was doing because he called the special game, put it on The Wire. Everybody was listening and he was given a message out to everybody. It was pretty amazing, that power.

Sari Crawford ([04:45](#)):

Chuck used that power to move Synanon in any direction he wanted, sometimes on a whim. And usually what was good for Chuck was good for everybody else. Like when his doctor told him he should quit smoking, everyone in Synanon had to give up smoking too. And when Betty was diagnosed with diabetes, it was sugar.

Mike Gimbel ([05:07](#)):

And he said, maybe we should all do it. Maybe everybody should just give it up. And within a day or two, it became law. He would do that a lot. It was another way for Chuck to test the loyalty. Because every time he would do something, any kind of change, people would leave. That was a big part of his plan anyway. Those that left made everyone else stronger towards Synanon and he knew how to sell what he wanted to do to the masses. Little did we know what was in store.

Sari Crawford ([05:49](#)):

My name is Sari Crawford and this is The Sunshine Place. Here again is Ron Cook, who was the president of Synanon.

Ron Cook ([06:12](#)):

Shortly after I got involved with Synanon, we had bought a lot of properties. On the first of the month, every month, there was a \$50,000 mortgage payment that had to be made. One day, on the 31st of the month, we had no money. We were going to be in default on all these properties. I really didn't know what to do. On the first day of the month, opened up the mail and in the mail was a deposit receipt from

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the San Francisco facility for \$50,000, exactly the amount we were short. A wealthy woman made a donation. And I said, "We didn't know that money was coming. If that money had not come, then we would've been in trouble." Chuck says, "Ron, did we default on our payments?" And I said, "No, sir, we did not." And he says, "In the future, can you stop wasting time talking about things that never happened?" That was my introduction to the financial management of Synanon.

Sari Crawford ([07:26](#)):

Ron Cook came to Synanon as a life-styler. He was an accountant and his skillset made him very valuable to Chuck. Synanon had millions of dollars in assets, like real estate and donated goods and services.

Ron Cook ([07:40](#)):

People would come in and whatever they have, they would give. Yeah, I got this old car. Great, give your car. I got a thousand dollars. Okay, we want the thousand dollars. Some of them contributed a lot through the years. Some of them just stole and left. And all of the people felt like they were contributor. Well, a lot of them weren't putting in enough money to support themselves if they had lived out of Synanon in an apartment and had to buy food and provide medical. We had doctors who would donate their services. And then other people chime in and they say, "Well, what happened to all the money?"

Sari Crawford ([08:17](#)):

Mike Gimbel.

Mike Gimbel ([08:21](#)):

I got called to a meeting with Ron Cook, the at the time president, and he offered me this position of being the dog robber for all the board of directors. It was an old military job. The person who took care of the generals in the Army was called a dog robber.

Sari Crawford ([08:43](#)):

So Mike became a dog robber, which was like being an executive assistant for Ron Cook and the board of directors.

Mike Gimbel ([08:50](#)):

And it was kind of like making sure that their houses were taken care of, their cars were taken of, whatever they wanted, whatever they needed. The old man lived up on the hill in this beautiful home, in this big giant mansion. But Ron Cook and Chuck Junior and Chuck's brother and Jady, his daughter, they had their own homes at the home place. They always stayed wherever the founder was.

Mike Gimbel ([09:17](#)):

There was no question that they had lived a different lifestyle than everybody else, but they would intermingle with everyone and be close to the people as much as possible. He would come down often to the main dining room, but he had his own table in the corner. And every once in a while he would invite people to eat with him there. Usually the big shots would sit there with him and eat.

Ron Cook ([09:45](#)):

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He had a special table and there was always some young waitress that would wait on his table only. He had servants, maids, cooks. He drove an expensive car. He lived very lavishly.

Chuck Dederich ([10:00](#)):

A lot of guys could do this from an old Ford Roadster, I need a Cadillac.

Ron Cook ([10:06](#)):

Chuck used to say Synanon is not the Salvation Army. I run Synanon like Gulf Oil.

Sari Crawford ([10:15](#)):

When Chuck was a young man, he worked for Gulf Oil in a management position, so he had an understanding of corporate structure.

Ron Cook ([10:24](#)):

So he took what he knew from a big business and started applying it to Synanon very early on. And he said, "As chairman of the board and founder of Synanon, why should I live in a building, sitting on a soapbox when somebody who does the same job as I do, gets paid millions of dollars every year to do that. That's not the American way."

Sari Crawford ([10:54](#)):

Chuck started paying himself a salary of a hundred thousand dollars a year and gave himself a pre-retirement bonus of a half a million dollars. He also started paying salaries to the board of directors and other high ranking people in Synanon. Here's Robert Navarro, who spoke in an earlier episode about how the influx of life-stylers caught the attention of the IRS.

Robert Navarro ([11:19](#)):

The board started paying itself really well. There were tensions about that, who got the money, how much money. It was a lot of dough for Synanon's purposes. The rest of us were getting walking around money.

Chuck Dederich ([11:35](#)):

The asshole that doing all the work, of course, doesn't get any of the pay. That's the way it is all over the world. I'm glad that the world is filled with such assholes, it leaves more for me. The world can't support all the assholes the way I want to be supported. Not many people know how to live like I do. They don't. They don't know how to be rich. It takes a long time.

Sari Crawford ([12:01](#)):

Chuck never had much success as a family man, but he'd become a very successful businessman. And it seemed like he was trying to consolidate his efforts. He had been estranged from his children early in their lives, but now they both lived with him in Synanon and followed him into the family business, and it was expanding. Synanon bought some land near Fresno, close to Sequoia National Park and Yosemite. At the foot of the Sierra Nevada mountains in a place called Badger. Chuck and his family moved there in 1974 and Badger became the new home place. Mike Gimbel.

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Mike Gimbel ([12:40](#)):

And Synanon just went in there and just started building. Badger had an old airfield. We refurbished the airfield and helped build the Synanon air force. They've gone out and bought half a dozen planes, Cessna's. And Ron Cook and a couple of them got their pilots license. Then Badger became very accessible. You could go from Badger now to Santa Monica. I could go to Badger to San Francisco and it made everything much more mobile. Now, between their motorcycles and their airplanes and all these facilities, they were moving around a lot. And then Chuck had his place, his home place was gorgeous and that's where the best of everything was. And everything was for him and the rest of us, even Ron Cook and some of the other board members lived down the road a little bit in these trailers. But believe me, people would fly in and drive right over to the home place.

Mike Gimbel ([13:51](#)):

It was a place people could go and have vacation. And that's why he kept his brother Bill and his son, Chuck Junior and Jady over there with him, to be close. They had everything really organized. The place was growing. They were buying more land. They hooked The Wire up.

Wire Jingle ([14:17](#)):

(singing)

Mike Gimbel ([14:18](#)):

Every table at every facility was wired to the radio station. It might be live, it might be a tape, but it was 24/7 Chuck Dederich on The Wire. He was able to reach out to everyone at a moment's notice.

Mike Gimbel ([14:44](#)):

I was expected to audio tape all their meetings and all their big Synanon games. Dederich was really big about taping everything and keeping records with everything. Literally we'd have to just sit there and I'd have a room to the side, everything was set up, so I wouldn't be seen. And I would listen. Chuck talking about changes or talking about things that were going to happen, hearing about how much money they made this month or lots of different things. At that point, everything was very exciting to hear that because I knew within hours or a day would end up reverberating throughout the whole foundation. And the next thing you know, it would become the gospel.

Mike Gimbel ([15:39](#)):

And he really had this thing about the children. And we were taking in more kids than ever, problem kids, the punks from the punk squad. And so Chuck would get on his high horse and start talking about, we've got throwaways, we've got runaways, we've got young kids on drugs, the violence. And that's selfish, because we're not taking care of those kids. Why do we have to have kids anyway?

Sari Crawford ([16:16](#)):

To Chuck, the world was full of children that needed help and Synanon could help them. That's what the punk squad was for. And taking in the punks helped with the IRS. Raising the children of Synanon members was expensive. Chuck was in his sixties now. He was on his third marriage. His kids were grown and he was a grandfather. He was done having kids, so now everyone else in Synanon would be done having kids too.

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Chuck Dederich ([16:51](#)):

I think children are a very bad investment. We have not cashed in on any children born into Synanon.

Gary Williams ([17:10](#)):

Rashan, that's my child was born in Synanon in 1975. I was about 28 when he was born. Three years previously, I was at dope fiend in Rikers Island.

Sari Crawford ([17:26](#)):

This is Gary Williams. He came to Synanon as a heroin addict from Harlem. After meeting his wife and getting married, he was presented with an opportunity, to be part of the last generation of parents to have children in Synanon.

Gary Williams ([17:41](#)):

I was part of a group called the breeders. It was a proposition that was given to us that this is going to be the last group of children that were born in Synanon and raised in Synanon. If you want, you can be part of this breeder program. And that's what we did. Anybody that had a child in Synanon at that point, the child went into the hatchery.

Sari Crawford ([18:10](#)):

The hatchery was another one of those uniquely Synanon terms. It was an experimental nursery where a group of newborn Synanon babies lived together with their mothers apart from the rest of the community. Elena Broslovsky, who spoken in earlier episode about the trip, gave birth in Synanon and raised her son in the hatchery along with three other new moms, not long before Chuck declared Synanon to be childless.

Elena Broslovsky ([18:39](#)):

We had an entire house. The men stayed in their housing and the women set up for the hatchery. The woman who was closest to giving birth had what was called a nesting room. In the main room where the kitchen and the living room was, we had cribs and toys and all kinds of things set up, changing tables, everything a new mother would need. And then this woman's baby was born first. It was a beautiful girl. We were all excited. I'd never had a child. I had not been around infants before and so my job became one of helping the other mothers while I was still pregnant. And we shared the responsibilities of nursing each other's children.

Elena Broslovsky ([19:29](#)):

I did not mind being woken up in the middle of the night to nurse the children. I absolutely loved it. I remember sitting in a rocking chair, taking a baby and feeling this strong and beautiful connection while I was able to feed, from my body, this growing child. And our eyes locked and connected, looking deep into her soul before she could talk. And the oxytocin flowed, I guess, because I'm still close to that baby today who is in her forties and I view her as my daughter. I couldn't be closer to her than if blood rather than breast milk flowed between us.

Elena Broslovsky ([20:20](#)):

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Then it was time for my baby to be born. And because my baby was the youngest, I had the nesting room. I had this beautiful bed for me and my child. And this room looked out over Tomales Bay. I'm looking out at this sparkling water. It smelled amazing of pine trees. I had a beautiful, healthy child. It was like heaven for me.

Sari Crawford ([20:58](#)):

After six months, all children left the hatchery and their biological parents and were placed into the care of the Synanon school. Parents could visit anytime they wanted, but visiting too much was discouraged. Chuck had a term for that too. It made you a head sucker.

Chuck Dederich ([21:16](#)):

Our worst problem might be very well removed. That is the parent. The worst thing that can happen to a child is that it has to have a parent, literally.

Sari Crawford ([21:30](#)):

Here's Cory Becker, whose daughter Zoe was one of the last three children ever born in Synanon.

Cory Becker ([21:37](#)):

Literally weeks after my daughter was born, Chuck decided that Synanon would be childless. So I didn't have as pure an experience as Elena, because I had that hanging over my head. That was the last hatchery in Synanon. I used to joke that I felt like I was walking around Synanon with a cigarette or a bottle of booze. I was a walking enemy of the state because I had this newborn baby. So all the magic of it kind of disappeared. I had an experience that caused me stress because it was in the sense putting me at odds with Synanon.

Sari Crawford ([22:19](#)):

But when Zoe was six months old and ready to leave the hatchery, Cory had the chance to get back in the good graces of the community. She was asked to join the sales team, which meant she'd be on the road most of the time away from her daughter.

Cory Becker ([22:33](#)):

Putting her in the school was one of the most painful experiences of my life. Synanon needs money. And if you can string a sentence together, let's get you out on the sales team, bringing money in. And I was a good soldier. I'm making this sacrifice for Synanon because I'm a true believer. And I know that Synanon is going to take care of my child better than I could. In a sense, I gave my child up for adoption at birth to Synanon.

Sari Crawford ([23:09](#)):

Ron Cook mentioned earlier that money was always tight, but that changed when Synanon developed a sales division called ADGAP, which stood for advertising gifts and premiums

Ron Cook ([23:21](#)):

Synanon advertising gifts became bigger and bigger. It was a major source of our revenue.

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Sari Crawford ([23:26](#)):

That's where Cory was assigned to work. Her husband, Jeff, who had been working for the punk squad was reassigned to ADGAP too.

Jeff Becker ([23:34](#)):

We sold brand merchandise, like a company would buy pens with their name on it. Baseball caps, jacket, shirts, coffee cups, all that kind of material. Our sales people were always really respected as being some of the best sales people in the industry. But an added incentive is by buying from Synanon, you were supporting this program and people like me who had their life saved literally.

Sari Crawford ([23:59](#)):

ADGAP salespeople were trained to tell their stories as part of the pitch. Jeff was a heroin addict from Philadelphia and the mere fact that he was able to tell a story at all was miraculous.

Jeff Becker ([24:10](#)):

I was also a one man crime wave. I stole every day of my life to support my habit. I was arrested again. They took me down to the police station. As soon as they put me in the cell, I took off my blue jeans and I hung myself. I just remember waking up on the floor of the cell being pissed it didn't work. I had crapped myself, that's how close I was.

Sari Crawford ([24:33](#)):

Imagine hearing that from the guy selling you office supplies, but it worked.

Jeff Becker ([24:39](#)):

And they would be impressed with my story. And I did have a tagline that always caught their attention. Was that before Synanon they went from Penn State to the state pen. They like that. It's a good line, admit it.

Sari Crawford ([24:51](#)):

As sales became a bigger priority in Synanon it came at the expense of the school.

Cory Becker ([24:57](#)):

I know it was an economic decision to not have children in Synanon. They started pulling out the best and the brightest of what we call demonstrators. The people that were really, really good with kids and started putting them on the sales team. And other people came in. There were a few people that were a little damaged themselves and they were given free reign. The care for the children devolved, and I didn't catch it. And I just feel terrible about it. Zoe had some horrible, miserable experiences that no kid should have to have.

Zoe ([25:45](#)):

My earliest memories of Synanon were actually really idyllic.

Sari Crawford ([25:53](#)):

This is Zoe.

Zoe ([25:55](#)):

We had a demonstrator at night who would come in and tell us bedtime stories. And when I got sick, I would be in bed and somebody would come and take care of me. There was a creek near where we lived in the Bay area in Marin County, where we got to turn over rocks, collect frogs. It was charming. And even now thinking back on it, it's so lovely and so pure, and it got ruined so early.

Zoe ([26:35](#)):

When I was six years old, we moved to a different property. We all got on a bus and moved to Badger, which was up in the foothills. All of the kids of various age groups were all kind of packed in there together. We had a uniform, a polo shirt with a pocket in it, and it had to be tucked into whatever crappy beige pants we had. We had to march in line.

Zoe ([27:08](#)):

So what they had started to do was incorporate all the things for the punk squad into day to day life for all the kids. The intention behind it is, these people should always be in trouble for something. I was in trouble for everything. Every single day of my life in Synanon from the ages of six to 10 years old, I was in trouble in the morning because I wet the bed every single day. And since I wet the bed every day, I was supposed to wash my sheets every night. So I typically tried to hide them because I didn't want to deal with it. And they'd find the sheets stuck in a closet and I'd get spanked. It varied from pulling your pants down so that you're naked from the waist down and spanking your bare ass with a paddle to allowing you to keep your pants on, but always in front of all of the kids. I got hit a lot too, but whatever, it hurt in the moment and then we're done. In many ways, that's much easier to deal with than the psychological and mental abuse.

Sari Crawford ([28:25](#)):

Zoe was forced to wear a sign around her neck with messages written on it.

Zoe ([28:30](#)):

The signs would say things like, "I'm a liar. Ask me what I'm lying about." When I had to wear my signs, I would have to eat dinner at a table by myself. And if anybody tried to join me, I'd have to leave. I couldn't be seen eating with anybody else. If it was a bigger punishment, you would sit on the bench, which would indicate that you had done something so bad they were thinking about kicking you out of Synanon so that then you could endure communal humiliation where everybody who walked past you had the right to tell you what they thought about your behavior.

Zoe ([29:16](#)):

We lived in dorm rooms and then they ran out of space so they moved us to a place that we called Depot Flats and had us all living in tents. And I don't mean nice tents, I mean tents where we would wake up in the middle of the night because it had been raining and there was water sitting on our face. And for a bed wetter, I'm here to tell you that was pure hell. There was no out. There was nowhere to go. It went from this experiment in raising children to who was it, fucking Emerson. Emerson's essays about

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self-reliance. Somebody took that to mean that we shouldn't be taking care of kids, they should be taking care of themselves.

Zoe ([30:10](#)):

It was Chuck. He was always the boogeyman. The founder, the founder wants this to happen. Or the founder is going to say something over The Wire. And then this gravely, funky voice would come over The Wire. We half expected him to come down on a cloud or something. It always felt weird. But for the kids, having each other is got to be the only thing that kept us sane. We relied on each other. Because we were in a group of kids all going through the same thing, there was this bonding that I just don't think happens outside of incredibly stressful, horrible long term situations. Brothers and sisters who grew up in abusive households tend to be closer throughout their life. At the root of it is just this really heartbreaking neglect and abuse that occurred to us for most of our childhood. It was just lonely. It's just such a lonely childhood where I felt alone.

Mike Gimbel ([31:41](#)):

When I was working at the home place, I'd met Chuck's chef. Her and I became very close, very good friends, because she was a dope fiend too. Her name was Stephanie.

Sari Crawford ([31:55](#)):

This is Mike Gimbel again.

Mike Gimbel ([31:58](#)):

And then Chuck said to us, "The two of you are really good role models and you two should get married." Three days later, we were married. They wanted us to get married, we got married. Everything in Synanon was done to the extreme.

Sari Crawford ([32:15](#)):

Chuck's policy on childlessness was no different.

Chuck Dederich ([32:19](#)):

There's no profit in this community in raising children. If people want to have children, they probably shouldn't join Synanon.

Sari Crawford ([32:28](#)):

Everyone in Synanon had stopped having children of their own and they did it voluntarily, but that wasn't good enough for Chuck.

Mike Gimbel ([32:37](#)):

He started talking about every male in Synanon should get a vasectomy to prove that we're dedicated to taking care of the children of the world and we're not going to have our own children. Within a day or two, we had all these doctors who were volunteering to give vasectomies to all the men in Synanon.

Sari Crawford ([33:08](#)):

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Here's Gary Williams, who was part of the last generation of parents in Synanon known as the breeders.

Gary Williams ([33:15](#)):

I was one of the first ones to get the vasectomy. And the thing that sold me was, women had to get birth control and put all these chemicals in their body and all the men needed to do was get sniped. So that's exactly what I did, but it was only for people that were in Synanon five years. At the time, I was in Synanon a little bit over three years and they made an exception to me.

Sari Crawford ([33:49](#)):

The five year prerequisite was more of a suggestion than a rule. Here's Andre James, who was in his mid twenties when he got his vasectomy.

Andre James ([34:00](#)):

The doctor didn't even want to do it. "Andre, you're too young. Why are you doing this?" I said, "No, I know what I'm doing." I saw myself moving up the ranks into the upper management of Synanon at some point. If I did it, it would raise my prestige in the organization. It was strategic as well as being kind of a personal challenge to say, am I halfway committed or am I really committed? It's like the thing that happens when guys go into the military. They know they got to be a hundred percent committed because their lives might be on the line. Social pressure is a bitch. Social pressure will make you feel you have to do something when no one has said you have to do it.

Andre James ([34:45](#)):

We had The Wire. It went from just being in every public room to in every bedroom. You were being basically propagandized, being fed the party line on a 24/7 basis. I would turn it off because, see, I had worked for Chuck. It was like working with the Wizard of Oz. He took me behind the curtain and said, "Look, it's a show." He would drive up on his motorcycle to the Monday night game and then he'd come in. I'd bring him his cup of coffee and he'd listen. And then he would start an indictment on one of his managers and tell him that he was going to fire him and they were useless. Why did they just go back to the streets and use drugs again? He just would take you apart and show you everything you've done wrong in your life because he knew so much about the people that were there.

Andre James ([35:50](#)):

And then I would go out to bring him something as he's leaving, because he wouldn't stay in the whole game. He say, "Hey Andre, what do you think? How did I deal with that? Huh? It's pretty good." He's laughing. He said, "I'm going to go back and listen and see what they do." I'm thinking, oh my God, it's a game to him.

Phil Ritter ([36:16](#)):

There were 12 of us, I think. Yeah. Yeah. 12 of us. Yeah. They called us the breeders.

Sari Crawford ([36:24](#)):

This is Phil and Lynn Ritter. They were in the breeders too. Here's how Lynn felt about Chuck's policy on childlessness.

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Lynn Ritter ([36:32](#)):

He mostly thought about himself. He didn't like anything that wasn't him, is the way I looked at it. And babies are crowd stealers. That's what they do. Well, he didn't know shit about that stuff. He didn't know anything about children.

Sari Crawford ([36:49](#)):

Chuck compared the act of giving birth to quote "crapping a football". Lynn thinks his motivations were selfish, but Chuck pitched it as women's liberation. He said-

Chuck Dederich ([37:03](#)):

The big slavery of women in modern life is that they are tied to that one child for 18 years. What Synanon has done for women is to release them from that kind of bondage.

Sari Crawford ([37:18](#)):

Mike Gimbel said that everything in Synanon was done to the extreme. When Chuck gave up smoking, everybody else did too. Same with sugar. And when all the men shaved their heads, Chuck said, "What about the women?" And now all the men in Synanon were having vasectomies. So what about the women?

Phil Ritter ([37:45](#)):

At the time that the policy decision came down, the women that were pregnant, there were five. One may have left, but I think all four of the others had abortions, including a woman who was almost at term.

Lynn Ritter ([38:03](#)):

Yeah, it was horrible.

Phil Ritter ([38:05](#)):

She ended up having to have one of those horrible abortions that you have when you're eight months along. One of the women, she had been your roommate, you had been best buddies for a long time. And we tried to talk them out of having the abortion.

Lynn Ritter ([38:22](#)):

It happened quickly. The mothers were swiftd away and it was very little spoken of because it was just ... It was an earthquake. We all should have spoken up and we didn't. And you don't get away with that stuff in life, you pay for it.

Sari Crawford ([38:46](#)):

Chuck said this about the abortions.

Chuck Dederich ([38:50](#)):

Like squeezing a boil, nothing more.

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Sari Crawford ([38:55](#)):

Here's Mike Gimbel.

Mike Gimbel ([38:57](#)):

I didn't know about abortions. And I went and I got my vasectomy and I came back and couple days later my wife told me she was pregnant. I went with her to have an abortion. And then for probably close to six months to a year, she was having problems with her uterus every couple of months and needed to go in the hospital several times. We were just so brainwashed at that point.

Phil Ritter ([39:42](#)):

These were people of substance at Synanon who felt that they were obliged to have this abortion if they wanted to stay around. And I feel more guilty than anything else I ever did in Synanon not speaking up about that near-term abortion. I should have started screaming to the skies about that one.

Sari Crawford ([40:10](#)):

It was too late for Phil Ritter or anyone else to stop the abortions, but the vasectomies continued.

Phil Ritter ([40:18](#)):

Most men got the procedure. There weren't that many that decided they didn't want it.

Sari Crawford ([40:28](#)):

My dad was no exception. He used to write the year end report in Synanon. In 1977, he wrote, "80 vasectomies were performed this year with the promise of more to follow. Sharpen up those scalpels." In total, nearly 200 men ended up having the procedure, but it wasn't everyone. Chuck didn't. Phil Ritter decided it was time to speak up.

Phil Ritter ([41:03](#)):

It was mostly older guys that were volunteering to do it. And I really didn't have that much of a problem with the pressure that was being put on the older guys, because they were old enough to deal with it. Some of them already had kids, but I really had a problem with the 18 year olds. I knew that they were not old enough to make that kind of decision. And so I decided to take a position in the game that I thought it was wrong for Synanon to do it. I thought it was wrong for Synanon to put pressure on people to do it. And I wasn't going to do it.

Sari Crawford ([41:43](#)):

Phil's opposition to Chuck's edict didn't go over well with the rest of the community. He ended up losing his housing over it.

Lynn Ritter ([41:51](#)):

Phil lost privileges, I didn't. And there was pressure on me to just leave him. And I was getting gamed a lot and we separated after a while. I didn't want to be in that much trouble. I was not thinking much that made any sense in those days. I was a mess. And I guess this is how a cult works.

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Phil Ritter ([42:24](#)):

Well, it got down to the last three or 400 young men, mostly who wanted to stay in Synanon and had not yet had their vasectomies. And they decided to bring it to a head on one weekend and all the doctors were just going to perform factory vasectomies one after another. And I went nuts, got on my motorcycle, rode my motorcycle over to the Marin County Sheriff's office and got interviewed by the sheriff. He said, "Let me get this straight. Synanon has a bunch of drug addicts over there who are all over 18 and they want to voluntarily sterilize themselves. And you want me to send sheriffs over there to stop them? Is that what you're asking me to do?" And then he called Synanon and basically said, "I've got one of your crazies over here." They told the sheriff to tell me that I was not welcome back and that there might be a problem if I tried to come back.

Sari Crawford ([43:43](#)):

Phil Ritter was pushed out of the community. Soon a message would be sent to him and everyone else in Synanon. If you go against Chuck, you might pay with your life.

Sari Crawford ([44:05](#)):

Next time on The Sunshine Place-

Celena Wittman ([44:08](#)):

We had a demonstrator. She made an announcement to our classroom that she had been chosen to go on a date with Chuck. I remember thinking, what, because Chuck looked like he could be her grandfather.

Sari Crawford ([44:23](#)):

Chuck finds a new partner and he instructs everyone else to find a new partner too.

Phil Ritter ([44:29](#)):

Literally over the loud speakers. Chuck had said, all marriages, all relationships are over. Everyone is to find a new partner. And he's having everybody change partners.

Lynn Ritter ([44:47](#)):

Everybody was dismantled. People were matching you. You should be with him and he should be with you. And this one should be with you.

Phil Ritter ([44:55](#)):

Chuck was making Synanon more important than your primary relationship. And that's what Dederich was all about at that point. He's like, loyalty, loyalty to the organization first. If I get them to do this, then I can get them to do anything.

Sari Crawford ([45:10](#)):

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