

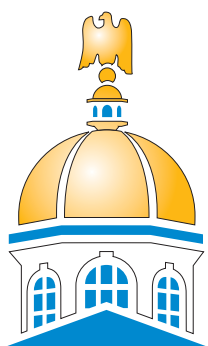
Concord girls win inaugural hockey game

Give the gift of a book this season



Top lawmakers knew of waterboarding

SUNDAY



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Top: In April, Rich St. Pierre shoots Brian a look from the front seat while Brian and Elijah fight in the back seat. Brian had been suspended from school that day. **Above:** At Brian's graduation from SUWS of the Carolinas, Rich and Brian (left) sit with graduate Jordan Clayborn of Kansas and his parents, Tabitha and Mike.

Surviving together

Time and distance help Rich and Brian repair a tumultuous relationship

Thirteen-year-old Brian Thone ran down a grassy hill at the edge of a North Carolina forest to where his stepdad, Rich St. Pierre, stood waiting for him.

"Dad!" he called and threw a bear hug around Rich. "Oh, I missed you so much."

It was Labor Day, and 75 days had passed since they'd seen each other. Brian had kept a careful count during his weeks at a therapeutic wilderness program. He fired off questions about his siblings and his home in Concord. Rich stooped to look him in the eye, gripping his shoulder.

"I'm really proud of you," he said. Brian grew quiet and smiled.

So much of this was new. Brian hadn't heard such reassurance in

A FAMILY'S STORY

For a multimedia presentation, see cmonitor.com/rememberme. The site documents the past two years of the St. Pierres' lives through photos and interviews.

a long time, particularly from Rich. And Rich had never before been "Dad" to Brian except in the flowery letters that Brian had written home, filled with promises of being a better kid.

Almost seven months had passed since Brian's mother, Carolynne St. Pierre, had died at home after a three-year battle with an aggressive liver cancer.

Even before her death, the two had argued often. After her death, in the struggle to redefine their family without a mother, Rich and Brian could barely get through the day without a fight.

Brian was kicked out of class regularly and bucked Rich's role as caregiver. Rich talked about sending Brian to live with other family members.

Now here they were, spending a night together in the woods as part of Brian's graduation from the program, with no distractions. No cell phones. No siblings. No baseball practice or television or business obligations. Brian had to take responsibility for Rich, starting a fire, setting up camp, preparing a fireside dinner and keeping him

See **TOGETHER - A5**

CAMPAIGN 2008

Democrats' plans have sizable costs

Estimates called 'very, very squishy'

By SARAH LIEBOWITZ
Monitor staff

John Edwards's plan to extend health care to every American could cost as much as \$120 billion annually. Hillary Clinton wants the federal government to invest \$10 billion in universal preschool. Barack Obama would spend \$150 billion over the next decade on climate-friendly energy supplies and for the creation of new jobs.

On the campaign trail, Democratic presidential candidates have been proposing big-ticket programs. At the same time, they're pushing to ease the tax burden on middle-income earners. While candidates have stressed the importance of fiscal discipline, it's unclear whether their proposed revenue sources would keep pace with their spending plans.

"The take-home message is, 'No one knows,'" said Stephen Slivinski, director of budget studies at the Cato Institute. "There's really no way to price these things out unless there are specific details. And candidates don't like to talk about details."

Spending proposals range from

HOW MUCH will that cost? We outline the costs of the Democrats' proposals. **A10**

the relatively small - Bill Richardson wants to spend \$25 million annually on a national job bank, to find employment for those seeking work - to more expensive items, such as Edwards's plan to direct \$2 billion annually to expand family medical leave programs.

It seems that every subject has a relevant spending plan. There are proposals to help homeowners avoid foreclosure, to create more housing for seniors and to eliminate the alternative minimum tax. Edwards would commit the government to paying for more than 2 million students, while Chris Dodd would spend \$25 billion to modernize existing schools and build new ones.

The costliest programs, budget

See **DEMOCRATS - A10**

NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND

FairPoint official: Conditions okay

Deal with Verizon has met stiff opposition

By KATE DAVIDSON
Monitor staff

FairPoint Communications, the small, North Carolina company that wants to take over Verizon's landline phone service in northern New England, would agree to all of the conditions proposed by the staff at the state Public Utilities Commission to make the deal happen, company Vice President Walter Leach told the *Concord Monitor*. But those conditions hinge on whether Verizon would agree to lower its \$2.72 billion price by at

least \$200 million, Leach said.

"Clearly the deal will rest on what will Verizon accept in order to go forward, because we're willing to accept most of everything we've seen," Leach said.

Critics of the sale have said Verizon's asking price is too high and would force FairPoint to take on more debt than it can handle. But Leach defended the company's financial viability and cited reports from Wall Street analysts that say the deal is solid.

Verizon spokeswoman Jill Wurm said the company will not budge on the price.

"We're not open to negotiation,"

See **FAIRPOINT - A10**

PLAINFIELD

Elaine Brown offers details of her arrest

By MARGOT SANGER-KATZ
Monitor staff

Elaine Brown performed dental work on the undercover U.S. marshal who arrested her, and was eating pizza and drinking beer with him and her husband, Ed, when she was suddenly tackled, Tasered and handcuffed, she said in a letter recently posted on the internet.

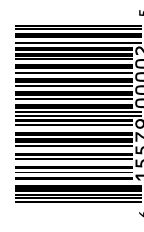
The arrest, in October, ended a nearly nine-month standoff between federal officials and the Browns, who vowed to die before surrendering to serve prison sentences for tax crimes. The Browns contend that no law required them to pay taxes on

OPRAH WINFREY campaigned for Barack Obama in Iowa yesterday. She's set for a New Hampshire visit today. **Story, A2**



FRIGID
Colder, with clouds later. High 28, low 18. Lindsay Raymond, 8, of Northfield draws the day. **B6**

Books **D4**
Business **F1**
Classified **G2**
Editorial **D2**
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“He means a lot to me – like, a lot.
I just haven’t really shown it before.”

Brian Thone



Top: Rich and Brian sit in the grass during Rich’s visit to Brian’s therapeutic wilderness program. “There was a lot more peace in his eyes,” Rich said about seeing Brian after his summer at SUWS.
Above: During his graduation ceremony, Brian prepares to fall backward while Rich and field instructor Steve Austin ready themselves to catch him.



Above: During skills demonstrations, Brian and Jordan Clayborn start a fire.

Right: Sitting on a swing outside his new boarding school, Brian cries while saying goodbye to Rich. Brian told Rich he didn’t want him to leave.



Photos by Preston Gannaway

TOGETHER

Continued from A1

company in the dark. Rich had to trust him.

'It makes all of us sick'

In many ways Brian is a typical preteen – funny and charming, an athlete who excels on the football and baseball fields and is interested in girls and video games. He and his sister, Melissa, 15, have had limited contact with their biological father, Carolynne's first husband. Brian had been going to regular supervised visits with him. When those visits became less consistent several years ago, about the time that Carolynne was diagnosed with cholangiocarcinoma in April 2004, Brian began acting out.

As his mother's illness progressed, Brian lashed out at teachers and coaches. He was diagnosed with depression, once barricading himself in a Beaver Meadow School closet. Lots of people cut Brian slack, knowing the family was focused on his mother, Rich said. As Carolynne grew sicker and Rich took over primary parenting roles, the tension between him and Brian grew.

The *Monitor* has followed their family through Carolynne's illness and death, at her and Rich's invitation, since March 2006.

On April 17, 2006, Carolynne wrote messages to each of her children in a journal. She told Brian that she knew he was going through a lot for a young boy and that Rich has "a good heart" and wants to help.

"Brian please don't be so angry," she wrote. "Please let people love you and care for you and be kind to people in return."

Carolynne spent the weeks before she died at the family's Second Street home. Melissa largely kept her distance. Brian pushed closer, often sitting with his mother in the evenings when she was in and out of consciousness, holding her hand and whispering in her ear.

"We're kind of all the same," he said, one month before she died. "This disease that my mom has, in my opinion, I think it makes all of us sick. It's a disease that just spreads. You're sad. You're not specifically sick, as in fevers and stuff, but emotionally."

At the burial in February, each family member placed a pink rose on Carolynne's casket before it was lowered into the grave. When it was Brian's turn, he bent over and leaned in with his hands cupped, whispering to her one last time.

In the months that followed, Carolynne's whole family grieved. But much of their energy was focused on helping Brian.

"He needs help more immediately than everyone else," said his aunt, Laura Cummins, Carolynne's younger sister. "If he fails, our family would fail."

Last year, Brian had 20 infractions with the principal at Rundlett Middle School and was suspended for three days, once for verbally threatening a teacher. He would tell his sister that he was acting the role of class clown and brought the habit home with him, getting into arguments with Rich. He wanted the attention at school and got it. He became the "bad boy," Melissa said.

Brian went infrequently to counseling. Rich said making appointments was hard while trying to manage the whole family's schedule and his business. At home, he said taking care of the daily needs of then-4-year-old Elijah, the son he had with Carolynne about a year-and-a-half before she was diagnosed, had to be his priority. That left little time to focus individually on Melissa and Brian.

One morning in mid-April, after Rich had woken up at 2 unable to sleep, Elijah and Brian fought in the backseat as Rich drove them to day care and school. His anxiety grew until he had to stop the car and walk around to calm down.

"I just can't take it," he said later that day, exasperated. "It gets really hard when him and Elijah – it's just too much. I can't do it."

Rich talked with Carolynne's sisters about having Brian live with relatives for a while or looking for a

local family who could take him.

By the end of April, Rich had settled on sending Brian to a therapeutic wilderness summer program in Old Fort, N.C., called SUWS of the Carolinas. Brian was angry and anxious about leaving home. He had a hard time spending even one night away from home at a friend's house because he often had anxiety attacks.

"I think I'll come back better, but it's going to be really, really hard," he said. "I've gotta plunge through."

Dad or guardian?

When Brian left on June 21, neither he nor the family was sure where he would go at the end of the summer. The next day he wrote home: "I will come home so happy, loving and volunteering that I will be the best family member you guys could have."

SUWS field therapist Jesse Quam said that Brian, like many of the boys there, was well-behaved in his first weeks, "hoping it so." Later, he would act out, showing more raw emotion, Quam said.

In the letters that followed, Brian asked often where he would be going in the fall. Rich relished the extra time he had in the house, though issues with Elijah and the added grief of Rich's sister's sudden death in June weighed on him. He was skeptical about Brian returning.

"Even if he's super well-behaved, the logistics of running three kids is just beyond me," he said in mid-July.

About a month later, Brian wrote to ask Rich how much he loved him. Rich responded by saying it was a hard question to answer because they had had so few positive interactions in recent years. He said he cared about him and that any future relationship would be based on respect.

"I feel like your guardian, not much more," Rich wrote.

In the meantime, the boy who couldn't stay a night away from home used his new survival skills to spend a night alone in the woods. He progressed in the program to the highest level, called Eagle with Honors. He learned to start a fire, to build a campsite and to talk about how he was feeling. He turned 13.

Forty days into his stay, Brian wrote in his journal that Rich had been looking at boarding schools and that he would try to think positive.

"I found out that life is so much better when it's positive," he wrote.

On what would have been his mother's 45th birthday, Aug. 22, Brian was emotional, Quam said. He spent a lot of time talking with counselors. The other boys wrote him cards, and the counselors brought the group brownies, as they do when one of the boys has a birthday.

"The group really supported him," Quam said. "It was very tender."

Toward the end of the summer, counselors advised Rich to send Brian to a therapeutic boarding school called Cherokee Creek Boys School in Westminster, S.C., without a break at home. He had made progress, they said, but there was more work to do. Quam called it the "golden opportunity" for Brian to get on track for good.

The wilderness program cost about \$35,000, Rich said. The boarding school would be \$65,000 or so plus the cost of therapy. The family debated the options: Was it healthy for Brian to be away from his family for so long? Should he try living with other family members instead? What money would be left to help Elijah or Melissa or Rich if they collapsed from the weight of Carolynne's loss?

Ultimately, Rich took out a loan to pay for half of the school costs, and Sara Matters, Carolynne's older sister, and her husband contributed the rest from their retirement savings.

Quam said that Brian "took the gloves off" toward the end of the summer, returning to old arguments and showing his stubborn side. He said it may have been prompted by the six-month anniversary of his mother's death plus the news that he wasn't going home.

When Rich booked a flight to North Carolina to transfer him to the new school, he had done very little of the online parenting programs or



A FAMILY'S STORY

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the reading that SUWS staff had recommended. Family members worried about how he and Brian would interact. What if Brian had changed and Rich remained rigid? Sara said that would be the "ultimate rejection" for Brian.

"When I think too hard about that, I get very panicked," she said.

A transition

The afternoon Rich arrived, Brian's group performed a skills demonstration for him and the parents of another boy who was leaving the program. Brian demonstrated the most advanced skill, called bow drilling, a method that American Indians used to start fires.

His lip beaded with sweat and his face turned red as he struggled to saw a bow back and forth, its string wrapped around a stick that drilled into a second piece of wood. His eyes darted in Rich's direction between efforts.

"I like your perseverance, Brian," Rich said. "You're sticking with it."

Later, Rich and Brian set up in the lean-to where they would spend the night. Brian built a fire, and they separated his belongings into the things he would take with him to school and those he'd leave behind. Brian talked about how badly he wanted to go home.

"Rundlett has all my friends and fun and sports teams," he said.

Rich promised that his time at school would pass quickly.

"Too bad Mom's not here," Brian said, twisting a tinder bundle in his hands.

"She's in here," Rich said, patting Brian's chest. "She'd be really happy to see you."

At dusk, Brian cooked lentils over a stove and made tea with water from the nearby creek. Throughout the night he called Rich "Dad."

"I really haven't had a loving dad until Rich," he said, when Rich was out of earshot. "He means a lot to me – like, a lot. I just haven't really shown it before."

Brian said he thinks Rich wants to be his dad, too. He said Rich always thought he was "angling for something" when he hugged him before.

Now, he said, "I think he feels like it's an actual real hug. And it's not that he feels it – it is."

Rich would say later that he was comfortable with his new name.

"It's different for us," he said.

When it was dark, Brian read excerpts from his journal by headlamp. They played campfire games, and Brian reminisced about spending time with Rich in the New Hampton home he had owned until Carolynne's medical bills required him to sell it. He asked about things at home. "I'm craving mall," he said.

Brian asked what his biological father thought about boarding school and told Rich that he didn't

want to communicate with his father while he was away.

The next morning Brian lugged his gear, weighing almost as much as him, out of the woods. In a graduation ceremony, Rich led Brian on a walk around the SUWS grounds blindfolded. He walked Brian to the edge of a deck, where a counselor asked Brian to fall backward to where Rich waited to catch him.

"I'm going to fall," Brian announced unwaveringly. "Three, two, one."

"I've got you, laddie," Rich said.

'He's changing'

On the way to Cherokee Creek, the two stopped for brunch and then for ice cream, to visit a barber and to buy new basketball shoes. Rich walked with his hand on Brian's shoulder. They made phone calls in the car to family. Longtime babysitter Charity Ross told Brian that Melissa had been missing him.

"That's weird," he said to Rich after hanging up, smiling widely.

As the hours passed, Brian asked questions: Would you rather ride an ostrich or a horse? Would you rather give money to kids dying in a hospital or to people starving in Africa? And then, as they approached the school, "Do you think I'm going to have fun?"

The resident dog, a rescued stray named Sky, met Brian at the foot of the stairs leading up to the rustic school building. A group of boys stood just behind her, dressed for soccer practice. They greeted him by name and offered their hands to shake.

One boy led Brian to his bunkhouse. As Brian began unpacking his things, he started to cry. The boy and two counselors sat with him on the floor beside his bunk. He told Brian that his own mother had died and that Brian was the sixth student that he's known at the school who'd lost a parent.

After Rich filled out paperwork and Brian toured the cozy, wooded campus, he and Brian sat for a while on a swing outside to say their good-byes. Brian said he didn't want Rich to leave. He didn't want to be away from him again, he said, sobbing into Rich's shoulder.

Rich told him it would be no more than a year and that the school

would be a good place for him. He said the family needed more time to heal.

"But I want to be there to help you through it," Brian said.

"The best thing that you can do right now is to get strong in yourself," Rich said. "So when your time comes and you're called upon, you can help people."

Rich walked him inside and left for a weary drive to the airport. Later, he would say that Brian had surprised him, that he was less angry and more genuine in his emotions. He had proven that weekend that he had earned another chance at coming home.

"I want to see him get to the other side of this," Rich said. "I'm behind him."

Last month, Rich returned again to Cherokee Creek for a four-day visit. He said Brian is growing taller and calmer still. He acts up in class-

es and has had other behavioral issues, but his grades are good and he's making progress emotionally, Rich said.

Rich attended parenting seminars there and said he found support in the other adults, many of whom also had unconventional families. He said he's learning ways to change the atmosphere and be more flexible when Brian returns home.

Aunt Sara, who visited Cherokee Creek with Rich, said Brian seemed sadder, but in a way that showed he is coping with the loss in his life. She said she was encouraged by the growing relationship between Brian and Rich.

"He's changing," Rich said. "My lovely wife would be just tickled."

The first afternoon of the visit, Brian and Rich walked around campus. They sat together in the dirt. Brian asked him what he was to him. Rich told him: "You're my son."

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