

# HOPE'S BOY:

## *A Memoir*

ANDREW BRIDGE

(Hyperion, 2008, 206 pp.)

REVIEW ESSAY BY MYRNA S. RAEDER\*

*Hope's Boy* is the heartrending memoir of Andrew Bridge, called Andy<sup>1</sup> in his youth, who spent eleven years in Los Angeles foster care, ultimately becoming a legal advocate for those who lack his remarkable resiliency, self confidence, intelligence, luck, and belief that his mother truly loved him. The book's cover shows a fair-haired child who would stand out in today's overwhelmingly minority Los Angeles foster care population. He begins his account in the early 1970s when he is only seven years old and taken into foster care on a North Hollywood street because of his mother's neglect, which stemmed from her mental breakdowns that ultimately led to her long-term institutionalization. A social

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<sup>1</sup> I refer to the author as Andy when discussing his memories as a youth, and as Bridge when discussing what he has written or events that occurred when he was an adult.

worker took him to MacLaren Hall, a place that reeks of a Dickens novel, and still haunts generations of foster children who had the misfortune of being housed there until its closure in 2003. During his stay Andy became mute and he suffered from nightmares and nervous habits long after he left. He was finally moved when the staff belatedly noticed that Andy had become totally withdrawn. By that time an untreated bleeding nose had also resulted in an infection that left his nostrils swollen and encrusted with blood. Andy survived this first abject failure of the system designed to keep him safe, but was not sent home.

Instead, his fate, which at first hearing might sound ideal, was to be placed at a foster home with a swimming pool. In reality, he suffered a decade of neglect by a system that left him there in limbo till he aged out at eighteen. Andy was never reunified with Hope, his mother who fought unsuccessfully for his return, or with his grandmother in Chicago. If he had any permanency plan, it did not appear to include adoption. He also had to withstand the intermittent rage and occasional assaultive behavior of a foster mother whose own children also left home on turning eighteen. Indeed, his foster mother's worst emotional abuse may have been her repeated threats that she had already or would call social services to take him back. A "failed placement" could have thrown Andy into a much more dangerous world, and interrupted his schooling, which he early recognized was his path to a better life.

Moreover, the foster home was the only address he knew his mother had during her long absence, and it was her love that sustained him through years of foster care indifference. Ultimately, Andy's remarkable ability to stay calm and comply with his foster mother's unreasonable demands permitted him to obtain the prize that eludes most foster children, an unbroken education that paved the way to his successful graduation from both Wesleyan College and Harvard Law School, as well as to a Fulbright Scholarship. Even his short stint at a large law firm resulted in the firm's arranging for his cost-free health care when he got Hodgkin's disease. With such a compelling narrative, told in a deceptively simple, but powerful manner, it is no wonder that the book appeared on the *Times* best seller list. Even upon rereading, I have not yet made it to the end with dry eyes.

# *THE MINING LAW OF 1872: Past, Politics, and Prospects*

GORDON MORRIS BAKKEN

(University of New Mexico Press, 2008, 237 pp.)

REVIEW BY STUART BANNER\*

Gordon Bakken has written more books than some entire history faculties. It would be an exaggeration, but only a slight one, to say that his output alone accounts for more than half the field of western legal history. He may be just as well known for his other contributions to the field, including a period as editor of this journal, and a longer stretch as editor of the University of Oklahoma Press's series on the Legal History of North America. *The Mining Law of 1872* is a characteristic Gordon Bakken book: no fancy theory, no speculation beyond the evidence, just a straightforward and thoroughly researched account of an interesting topic in western legal history.

The broad outlines of Bakken's narrative will be familiar to many readers. The government's unambiguous goal in the nineteenth century was to encourage mining. Minerals were in remote places, far from white settlements. They were often hard to find and expensive to remove from the ground. So the government in effect subsidized miners, by granting land and mineral rights at extremely low prices, in a series of statutes, the

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