

FROM TRUST TO CAPTIVITY

Testimonial of
Charles-Henri and Christine de VEDRINES

Together with 9 other members of our family, my husband and I were the victims of a narcissistic pervert and manipulative con artist from 2000 to 2009, whilst for three of us this actually lasted from 1997 to 2009.

Thierry Tilly and his accomplice Jacques Gonzalez did their best to destroy 11 members of the same family covering three generations, from my at that time 87 year-old mother to my youngest daughter aged 15 years (aka *Les Reclus de Monflanquin*).

We are often asked how 11 people covering three generations could be manipulated over a period of 10 years

Our family was an “ordinary”, close-knit one, with the usual dose of friction between its members though without any deep-going consequences. The family was socially well integrated and each one of us seemed to have found his or her place in life, whatever his or her level of education or personal history. We led a pleasant, peaceful life and got on well together. This family feeling seemed to be perceived in the same way by all its members. All of us subconsciously carried within us the family history, marked by the memory of the religious intimidation¹, the French Revolution and the two World Wars. Even so, this did not stop our generation from living in the 21st century, well integrated into the modern world.

My parents-in-law had made their will based on fairness and ensuring the family's continuance, with my husband, the youngest child of the family, inheriting the family home. On the surface, everyone agreed to the arrangement, but in reality this created a certain amount of more or less latent jealousy. The death of my father-in-law and then of my sister-in-law Anne (my husband's older sister) had a very destabilising effect on the family.

This was around the time that Thierry Tilly got to know my sister-in-law Ghislaine MARCHAND and her family through a Paris lawyer, Vincent DAVID.

This prominent lawyer with his offices on the Avenue Montaigne had taken over the "*Femme Secrétaire*" school on the Rue de Lille in Paris. His connection to

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1. *Dragonnades* were a French government policy instituted by Louis XIV in 1681 to intimidate Huguenot families into either leaving France or re-converting to Catholicism. This involved the billeting of ill-disciplined dragoons in Protestant households with implied permission to abuse the inhabitants and destroy or steal their possessions. The soldiers employed in this role were satirized as "missionary dragoons".

the school had been as a student's parent, as had been the case with my sister-in-law, Ghislaine MARCHAND.

The testimonials of staff members and a number of the school's students clearly reveal how Thierry Tilly gradually made himself indispensable for the school's day-to-day functioning, ending up by becoming the school's manager. This was done through manipulating Ghislaine and her son François, who was on a work-linked training course at the school.

The Marchand marriage was on the rocks, Jean was unemployed and being helped by Tilly in the context of his business work, the children were struggling with their studies and Ghislaine, as she would tell the Court, was weighed down by overburdening responsibilities amid family disorder.

Seemingly heaven-sent, Tilly became Ghislaine's confidant, and thus he got to know every member of our family before even meeting them. The MARCHAND family was already captive of Tilly without us even knowing of his existence.

For three years, he was to run the school and rule over the family's day-to-day life.

So when he first met us in 2000, he already knew everything about us and knew exactly how to approach us to be credible in our eyes. This credibility was to be boosted by Vincent DAVID's moral support. Furthermore, Tilly presented himself as a top French army officer who had now become an asset manager and defender of our moral values.

This was how he managed to get a "**foot in the door**", enabling him to get inside our family.

Of course, our family was not without its emotional flaws, and the circumstances were favourable for the potting of such perverse individuals as Tilly and Gonzalez.

Despite all this, how could a family, consisting of normal people, and not mentally ill, let itself be manipulated for such a long time without reacting?

This is what we need to understand to be able to learn from this family drama.

It should be stressed at this juncture that taking control of an individual or group takes place gradually and in an insidious manner, beginning with the **seduction** phase which can be short or long depending on the individuals and the circumstances.

This is followed by **entrapment**, i.e. the phase in which the manipulator entraps his victim on the basis of the latter's detected strengths and weaknesses. This can happen very quickly. At this stage the trap is as good as closed.

The next stage is that of **paranoia** and the **cutting of external contacts**. The victim loses contact with reality, with emotions taking over from intelligence. The victim is now completely dependent, with the manipulator controlling everything. This leads to the **destruction** of the victim without his knowledge, with only an outside trigger or appropriate assistance able to save him.

Dr Daniel ZAGURY's report on our family is very illuminating at this point.

On account of all the media attention, Dr ZAGURY had expected to meet a family of slightly degenerate 'weirdos' living in the nostalgic past. After having interviewed all family members, he was able to confirm that our family was not in any way ill, and that we were "just normal people and even displayed a large variety of different profiles." Though each member is different, we had all lived through the same catastrophe.

This observation was important, as it helped understand that 85% of the population may, at some stage in their lives, be manipulated. People who have been manipulated are not ill, not mad, not borderline cases and not occultism fans.

We have not been subjected to any dark forces, we have simply responded to phenomena obeying the laws of the human psyche.

These are the mechanisms used by cults, con-men and rogue therapists.

Even if disputed by certain people, the psychoanalytic approach seems to be the best way of understanding the mechanisms used by the manipulator. What he practices on his victims is "**transference abuse**", a method transferring them back into their early childhood, when they are dependent on the love of their parents, rash, childish and irrational.

According to Dr Daniel ZAGURY, Tilly established a relationship characterised by childishness and irrationality with the members of our family, **well knowing** that he was the agent of powers outside their control. Being subject to him became a 'must'.

He was able to transpose us into a state of infantile regression, making us give up our free will. This was often just a matter of a few minutes for some of us, and especially my 86 year-old mother-in-law who had been unknowingly conditioned by her daughter Ghislaine for three years.

Under the influence of Tilly, we lost our sense of judgement and put our intelligence "to fallow".

However unbelievable it might be, anything that this heaven-sent man said was taken for true. And each event helped back up this assumption and strengthen this conviction.

To understand how things were, it should be stated here that the same methods are to be seen both in psychoanalytical treatment and in "abuse of transference"

cases, yet for **totally** different purposes: while the aim of psychoanalysis is to restore freedom and independence of thought, the goal of any abuse of transference is to enslave and exploit the victim.

85% of the population is vulnerable to this and is capable of such transference, while a mere 15% is able to resist this type of approach.

According to the experts, Tilly was “someone who used stealth to achieve his goals, but who had no psychiatric deficiencies”. He was a hoaxer specialised in scams, a cold-hearted monster whose emotions were permanently under control and who was unable to feel the slightest empathy. A hyperthymesiatic, he had a hypnotic stare and the ability to melt into a crowd like a phantom. He could be caring, attentive, though his speech differed depending on whom he was talking to.

Having identified a person's strengths and weaknesses, he would exploit these, inducing a feeling of inferiority with those he chose to manipulate. He took charge of the game by filling any space by saying something, a method that eventually made his explanations seem logical, as the presiding judge noted in court. Though often in the seduction phase, he was always looking for ways to destabilise whoever he was talking to in a permanent effort to gain control over that person.

Tilly used different methods to achieve this abuse of transference:

– **the search for faults and weaknesses:** Over a period of 3 years and exploiting information confided to him by my sister-in-law Ghislaine, he had all the time in the world to get to know each of us, with all our strengths and weaknesses, and to understand how the family ‘ticked’. It would seem that he also came and observed us while we were at Bordeaux and Monflanquin. My son Amaury said “he used to speak to me with my own words”. My mother-in-law was glad of the help he said he wanted to provide to her children and grandchildren.

My husband had a telephone conversation with Tilly which was enough to convince him. In it Tilly reported things that only a well-informed person could know, thus making himself credible. Philippe was repositioned as the eldest child and taken into Tilly's confidence on account of his “military background”, whilst Ghislaine was assigned a key role in the family's affairs. On the other hand, Guillaume and Diane were disqualified by Tilly as “borderline cases” right from the start. For Guillaume this strengthened his wish to find his place in the family, while Diane did everything to be perfect, even when this went against her nature. A duty to be loyal set in.

As for me, I didn't buy what Tilly had to say – but I wasn't heard. In fact I was to be demonised and vilified by certain members of the group. The paradox was that, in order not to be side-lined and separated from my family, I obeyed without being able to react.

And this is the way he gradually took over the whole family.

– **Functional paranoia:** Tilly made the most of our weaknesses, inducing functional paranoia on taking over the family. All dangers disappeared, everything seemed to make sense. With just a small dose of truth, he could make any lie become credible.

He knew everything in advance, for example making us believe that he was ‘in the know’ on the 9/11 bombing, getting Guillaume to take a New York-Paris ticket on 12 September. Events served to enhance his credibility. As parents, we were just as frightened as relieved.

– **Group paranoia:** easily established via the family history and its collective unconscious.

This involved inducing in each one of us the idea that it was a good idea to keep together and, as we were surrounded by enemies, to remain as a group for protection. Regular “closed door” operations were supposed to protect us against unwanted visits. We would spend several days holed up at home, with the result that a deleterious atmosphere set in, amplified by the closed doors and making us lose touch with time.

This group paranoia clearly explains why the younger generation did not revolt. The group had a very strong negative impact on us, and each time that one of us had doubts there was always someone else to reassure him and get him to toe the line. Tilly controlled the group remotely via the Internet and telephone, using Ghislaine as his local representative. The group was everything, an individual meant nothing.

– **The conspiracy theory,** welding the group together and isolating it. This allowed Tilly to assign a particular place to each of us, which we were not to leave for fear of endangering the rest of the group.

At that time, the media campaign reinforced this feeling of a conspiracy: “who are we to make the 8 p.m. headlines by PPDA² on TF1 on Christmas Eve!”

Within the group, Tilly intentionally arranged conflicts and tensions to prevent any rebellion and to cut us from reality.

The numerous lawsuits initiated by Tilly only served to fuel this paranoia.

– **An answer to everything:** he was never caught short: he had an answer to everything. In the rare cases when he did not the answer, he would knowingly say: “We'll speak about it tomorrow”. If the question was repeated, he would say “I can't speak to you about it now, but I'll get back to you. Just trust me.” In the long run, you got fed up and stopped asking questions, though also prompted by the fear of losing touch with the group. This systematic putting things off till tomorrow was a further factor helping us lose touch with time. When I started working in 2008, I didn't even know which year it was!

– **Suppression of all direct ties:** No member of the family could communicate with another member, even if the filial and emotional ties were close, without going through Tilly or Ghislaine. His one big strength was his ‘hyper-presence’ even when he was not there, via the Internet and the internal controls he had introduced.

We were separated from our children, not knowing either their addresses or their telephone numbers. Our role as parents was stolen from us without our knowledge.

– **The world according to Tilly:** this was one where people lost trust in their own experience. They totally lost their freedom of thought, their critical minds and their free will. They saw the world via Tilly's affirmations, leading them to do stupid or even dangerous harmful things.

– **Whether to break these ties or re-establish them:** Tilly dictated the day-to-day life of each family member, ordering them to move somewhere else, to go to this or that place, to lock themselves in, to take on an extra job, to get divorced.

Everything was done to break long-term ties to better subject family members to his will.

- **Breaking each member's narcissism.** “Your husband's deceiving you”, “your son is not your son”, “your mother assaulted you sexually” – everything seemed possible once one had lost one's freedom of thought and one's dignity, and everything the manipulator said seemed credible. Amaury used to say that “he got into our very sense of existence”.

– **Astrologist methods:** all he needed to do was to come up with a sufficiently broad-based prediction for anybody to find himself mirrored by it. And then there were the emotional factors which took precedence over intelligence, with events seeming to back up Tilly's omniscience.

– **The “hot/cold” method:** everyone was entitled to his period of disgrace or silence, followed by a period of recognition. This was a good way of ascertaining an individual's level of subjection without actually reaching breaking point, as was the case with me, ultimately provoking my “penny to drop” in March 2009.

– **The insinuation mechanism:** this consisted of insinuating thoughts, affirmations which the subject ended up self-appropriating; or the creation of false memories as was the case with Amaury and Diane.

All these mechanisms were used together or individually to subject the group and its individual members, something that got the experts calling out “Bravo!”

The way Tilly had contrived everything, though we might have all gone through the same experience, we all suffered different things. We will limit ourselves here to three noteworthy events (among many others) which my husband is going to speak about as an illustration of the force of manipulation.

1/ Our son Amaury was kept imprisoned for more than nine months, while we thought he was attending a good school in England.

Under the pretext of maintaining an office belonging to a humanitarian foundation, Tilly ordered him not to go out, to wash himself at night with cold water in the shared toilets so as not to come into contact with the neighbours. He ate just one meal a day, and slept on the carpet in a cheap sleeping bag.

He was supposed to gain insights into himself, spending all day writing down his thoughts on how he could correct his faults. This was equivalent to what the Nazis did during the war, tantamount to sensory deprivation. Our son was to tell us that he almost went mad.

As the doors were not locked, the police did not qualify this as imprisonment!!

However, the psychological keys to the door were more effective than real keys. Tilly had persuaded Amaury that if he went outside he would risk a bullet in his head as well as endangering the rest of the family.

It was only after he had made his statement to the investigating judge in 2010 that we learned of his ordeal.

2/ Finding oneself in court, in a foreign country with no adequate command of the language and against one's son is a painful, strange, unbearable and unreal situation.

At the bottom of my heart, I knew that my son had not done anything wrong and that I had no need of a court to resolve a possible problem. Despite all this, I did not put a stop to the charade organised by Tilly, taken in as I was by my own chronic paranoia and that of my family. Guillaume, constantly afraid of reprisals by Tilly who had kicked him out, found himself defending himself alone in the face of a hostile family - a situation obviously very difficult for him to cope with.

3/ The final example is in many ways the climax of our story. Although we had been in England for 18 months, Tilly ordered me in January 2008 to come and join him. On meeting him, I was very surprised to find that my sister and brother were both in Oxford. A solution had to be found to the problem of the VEDRINES estate. Although our parents had decided who was to inherit what a long time ago, nobody had done anything. Christine came up to stay with us on Tilly's instructions and we sat down to a 15-day meeting behind closed doors.

Locked up in the house, confined to a single room, we were not allowed to sleep. All that we got as food was tea and biscuits. Very quickly we lost our sense of time. Tilly was in the room next door where he had installed a bed. He came in every now and then to take stock, sometimes threatening us while at other times being more obliging. On some days he would get quite violent with Christine, saying that she was the one holding the solution. The closed-door meeting had its effect, and everyone ended up believing him without questioning the absurdity of the situation. Christine was made to stand up facing the wall to recall something. At the end she was not even allowed to go to the toilet. It's difficult to look back on this period where we were reduced to a sub-

human level. At the end of this period of detention, Christine was exhausted, her legs were bruised and she had difficulty walking (the experts were not to take these clinical facts into account in their reports of the twin hip replacements needed by Christine at the end of her ordeal).

After having blackmailed us into selling Martel, the family home in Monflanquin, Tilly ended this 15-day imprisonment after consultations with Gonzalez. He then triumphantly announced that Martel had been saved.

Although we had been reduced to zombies, he, acting as our advisor, accompanied us - the children and myself - to a London notary to sign the mortgage loan saving Martel.

Christine was held hostage in Oxford by my sister and brother.

At the end of the day, he had us sign documents which were to be used by somewhat blind notaries to carry out sales transactions, the existence of which I would only learn of after exiting my 'captivity'.

To extract oneself from the claws of such a predator, there are two possibilities:

Either the penny drops at a precise moment and the victim re-establishes contact with the real world. However, this often happens quite late, after the damage has been done and leaving the victim in a state of helplessness and distress when left unsupported.

Or exit counselling proceedings have to be initiated, as practised by Stephan HASSAN in the United States.

Christine had the courage and perspicacity to take up the first possibility, encouraged and aided by her employer, Robert POUGET de SAINT VICTOR. This played a crucial role in saving the whole family.

As for myself, I needed to resort to the second possibility, and I deem it important to describe what this involved and how it helped me.

Although Christine had spent three days trying - without success - to get me to open my eyes before departing, the exit counselling team set up by Maître PICOTIN took just thirty seconds to gently put me in touch with the reality of our situation. Reading the file on our liberation, I have been able to appreciate the considerable amount of work needed for such an operation to be a success.

Inquests, psychological testing of the victims with the help of friends and relatives, finding funding, studying the relevant laws and lots of other things all need to be done before such an operation can be started. These specialists respond to well-defined ethical rules respecting the freedom of individuals, and their aim is to get the victim to start looking at reality, without exercising any force. The idea is to **“find the right key for the right lock”**. This allows psychological deprogramming - always violent and difficult to live through - to be avoided.

Thanks to the tenacity of Christine and Maître PICOTIN and his team, we were among the first victims in Europe to benefit from this method, despite all the difficulties associated with the different legislations within the European Union.

Without the financial support from friends, Aquitaine politicians from all parties, and Edouard BRAYNE, French consul-general in London, there can be little doubt that these operations would not have been possible.

The Exit

Exiting from this 'captivity' brought a sensation of liberty but also one of great helplessness.

We were all very traumatised, and the pain was often even more than when we had been held in captivity. We were constantly gnawed by guilt, by incomprehension.

Dependent on a victim's age, the range of problems differ a lot. The consequences of such a catastrophe are not the same when you are over 50 as they are when you are 20. For 10 years, personal development came to a standstill, a situation greatly affecting the youngest of the group.

Within just a short period of time, the backlash appeared, taking the form of total fatigue, and a number of us needed several months before being able to start work again. One gradually became aware that one had been brainwashed, as witnessed by the fact that an awful lot of effort was needed just to remember things that had happened before captivity.

Supported by empathetic exit counselling, you really have to work on yourself to regain your resilience. You have to accept the fact that you have lost your home, your furniture, your memories. And you have to get over that feeling of individual and family 'mental rape'.

A calm dialogue with friends, neighbours and relatives is needed, allowing them to understand what we have been through, and also for us to understand what they went through all those years.

Financially and psychologically ruined, we were very lucky to be taken in by our friends and a large section of the family.

Christine's return triggered a chain of solidarity, continuing well after the whole family had returned. The loan of an apartment by friends has enabled our family unit to reconstruct itself, the gift of a car has extended our field of freedom, and the financial support received over a period of many months has helped us get back to our day-to-day routine.

The presence of family and friends during the court proceedings was also a great help. The severity of his deeds could have brought Tilly in front of a criminal court. However, given the complexity of the case, we preferred to accept downgrading the case and having it judged in a correctional court.

In the first instance, Tilly was sentenced to 8 years in prison and Gonzalez to 5 years.

Tilly appealed against his sentence and ended up being sentenced to 10 years. True to himself, he appealed to the Supreme Court - enjoying full legal aid!!

For the five of us, what still needs to be managed are the various lawsuits resulting from Tilly's destructive manoeuvres and which the criminal proceedings left unresolved.

Reconstruction is under way, though everyday life is not always easy. Work for some of us, studies for others, and reintegrating ourselves in family circles and circles of friends for all of us.

To protect future family generations against any false rumours, we felt the need to write a book describing what we went through. Its title is “**Nous n’étions pas armés**” and it is published by PLON.

Why did this “announced catastrophe” not come to an end sooner?

As early as 2001 one of our friends and certain family members not made captive attempted to alert the Lot and Garonne judicial authorities, sending letters to the Public Prosecutor, a report to the UNADFI, a Research in the interest of families, and many other interventions to the highest level of the State. More seriously, the interventions of Maître PICOTIN in his capacity as lawyer were not taken into account, all being rejected on account of the absence of a “crime of mental manipulation”. Indeed, it took the About-Picard Act of 12 June 2001 just to introduce the crime of “abuse of weakness and ignorance”. The difficulty here is that it is the victim himself who has to press charges, as Christine was to do in March 2009. This basically means that the victim first has to exit from his or her captivity. Moreover, families have no power at all when one of their members is being manipulated.

What needs to be done is to amend the About-Picard Act, perhaps introducing a provision enabling adults to be made wards of court, or allowing time to check whether informed consent has been given by people who suddenly withdraw from their surroundings, upturn their lives and seemingly act against their own interests.

Raising the awareness of and training police officers, lawyers and magistrates in the concepts of manipulation and mind control would seem indispensable.

Victims must stop being afraid to **press charges**.