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the school does not come close to suggesting the atmosphere that Alicia describes.

There is no classroom instruction except in Bible classes and wife training classes, Alicia says, and students have only limited access to reference materials like encyclopedias and dictionaries. Math and English lessons from prepared materials were adequate, says Alicia, whose most recent report card from Constantine High School shows four "A's", one "B" and a "C". But she says Science and Social Studies at Hephzibah House were strictly Bible-oriented. "We didn't learn anything about the world because the world was bad," Alicia says.

Staff members would paddle girls with a board for almost any reason, Alicia says, to the point of bruising and even bleeding. Alicia says she was paddled two to three times a week, for reasons ranging from undefined "disrespect" to asking questions.

"Being only twelve years old," she says, "I didn't know there were certain things I wasn't supposed to say. I asked questions, I wanted to know. 'Well, why do you believe this?' And most of the girls knew better. They knew if they said that, they'd be punished."

One belief Alicia struggled with is the notion that women are subservient to men. "God created woman second. They always reminded us of that," she recalls. "I just didn't want to be like that," she says, "I didn't want to be a man's slave...I wanted to be a regular person."

Alicia's description of Hephzibah House suggests there is little about the facility that would be considered regular in the life of teen girls. Girls could not wear pants, watch television or movies, wear any jewelry provided by a boyfriend, or leave the grounds unescorted. "We never had pizza," Alicia recalls.

But she says girls often were punished for minor transgressions by being forced to drink a mixture called protein drink in place of regular meals. And if a girl left food on her plate, the staff would serve those leftovers to that girl for her next meal.

"They deprive you," Alicia says. "Everything is privilege. You're so animalistic while you're there. All you think about is food."

According to Alicia, Hephzibah House tries to quash any criticism or questioning directed toward staff or policies. "Literature from the school warns parents against their daughters' critical comments, stating they are likely to be "slanted."

But the school trumpets complimentary letters from its students or former students in a newsletter called "Hephzibah Happenings." Alicia says the school published such a letter her stepfather forced her to write, but she disavows its contents.

Happy now at her grandmother's house, able to wear blue jeans and eat pizza, Alicia is trying to look ahead, not back. But she knows her experience at Hephzibah House will be with her for a long time.

"They have still got so much influence over me," she says. "Sometimes I don't realize it, but they do."